

**An Examination of Social Relationships and Experiences of African American Students at  
Predominantly White Institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Auburn University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn, Alabama  
December 14, 2013

African American, Predominantly White Institutions, Historically Black Colleges and  
Universities, Social Relationships

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## Abstract

African American college students have historically faced many forms of rejection and isolation at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), particularly during the early years of academic integration (Allen, 1992; Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis & Pietrzak, 2002). This study was conducted to determine if African American students who attend Predominantly White Institutions have different social experiences than their counterparts at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Participants were solicited for this study using online social networking sites. There were 81 usable surveys from 55 (66.9%) females and 26 (32.1%) males. Fifty-four (66.7%) of participants were from PWIs and 27 (33.3%) attended HBCUs. Results indicated that African American students who attended HBCUs reported greater satisfaction with life than their counterparts at PWIs ( $F(2, 76) = 3.345, p < .05$ ). Despite higher levels of satisfaction, students at HBCUs reported being more concerned about race-based rejection than African American students at PWIs ( $F(1, 81) = 1.80, p < .05$ ). African American males who attended HBCUs felt that rejection was more likely to occur when compared to African American females and African American males at PWIs. This study also found a positive correlation between the Satisfaction with Life Survey and the Sense of Belonging Inventory –A, and a negative correlation with the Sense of Belonging Inventory-B. There was no significant difference between African American students at PWIs and HBCUs regarding sense of belonging.

## Acknowledgments

First, I would like give thanks and praises to God for all the blessings He has bestowed upon me and my family. I am also grateful for the wonderful people who served on my dissertation committee. Thank you so much Dr. Suh for stepping in as chair of my dissertation committee late in this process, and guiding me to the end. I am grateful for your thorough, thoughtful, and timely feedback. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Chippewa Thomas for her long-term support, and for not giving up on me. I appreciate your ongoing assistance and encouragement. It has truly been a pleasure to meet Dr. James Witte, and have him on my committee. I would also like to thank Dr. Carey Andrzejewski for agreeing to serve as my outside reader. I appreciate your timely review and feedback. I want to acknowledge and thank Dr. John Dagley for serving as my advisor and chair of my dissertation committee prior to his retirement.

I thank God for my loving and supportive family. I am thankful that my mother Rutha, my grandmother Conelious, Aunt Ollie, and little sister Tameka have always been there for me no matter what challenges came my way. I am so blessed to have you all in my life, and I love you very much. I also want to acknowledge my long-term forever friends, Angelia, Penelope, Winnye, and Charmayne for all the laughs and good conversations over the years. The people who have had a positive impact on my life are too numerous to list. Just know that I am thankful for all of my family and friends.

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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The history of African American integration into Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) of higher education has been a long and arduous endeavor in the United States (Taylor & Olswang, 1997). Even in the relatively small number of northern universities which were admitting African Americans in the early 1900s, African American students were often segregated from White students (Ross, 2000). Many universities in the South did not integrate until the 1960s when civil rights legislation mandated desegregation (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991). In 1954 the U. S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* deemed that state sanctioned segregation was unconstitutional. As a result, many public segregated colleges and universities unwillingly began the process of admitting minorities.

In many states, the transition to integration did not go smoothly. There were many incidents of rioting, violence, and deaths as African Americans began to enroll and attend classes (Eagles, 2009). At the University of Georgia in 1961, the first two African American students faced death threats and isolation in their bid to integrate the university (Pratt, 2002). In 1962, twelve thousand National Guardsmen were sent to the University of Mississippi to escort the first African American student to classes, as those who opposed integration rioted and hurled racial slurs (Eagles, 2009). Incidents and experiences such as these left the unmistakable message that African Americans were not welcome on campus. These types of historical events, in addition to the societal bias and discrimination, set the foundation for the concerns of African Americans about being socially rejected at Predominantly White Institutions.



Most African American students who attended college in the early 1960s did so at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) (Kim, 2002; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). According to Thomas and Green (2001) African American students at HBCUs were provided with a safe, supportive, and nurturing educational environment as compared to experiences of those who attended PWIs. HBCUs have a long history of being the beacon of education for African American students dating back to 1837 when the first HBCU was founded. Cheyney University in Pennsylvania became the first HBCU after a Quaker named Richard Humphreys willed land and \$10,000 for the education of the descendants of slaves (Jackson, 2001). To be classified as an HBCU, universities had to be founded before 1964 with the primary purpose of educating African Americans (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Today, there are over 100 Historically Black Colleges and Universities across the United States (Jackson, 2001).

It is this great difference in the history of HBCUs and PWIs that lead researchers to continue to examine the experiences that African Americans encounter at each educational environment. Despite the vast options of HBCUs and the volatile history of integration at PWIs, African American students are enrolling at PWIs in ever increasing numbers (Jackson & Swan, 1991). Prior to 1954, approximately 90% of African American college students were enrolled at HBCUs (Kim, 2002; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). In 2002–2003 only 10% of African American students were attending HBCUs, while 39% attended PWIs. The other African American students attended universities that had a minority population of at least 25% (Li, 2007). In 2007, the percentage of African American students attending HBCUs increased to 12% (Planty et al., 2008).

In recent years, many PWIs have made efforts to increase minority enrollment and decrease attrition. However, Allen (1991) notes the difficulty many schools have encountered

trying to help students assimilate to the academic and campus environment. In 2007, 58% of African American students dropped out of college, compared to 40% of White students (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2009). Numerous studies have been conducted to examine how African American students perform at PWIs, and to determine factors that contribute to academic success.

Although the racial climate has vastly improved since the 1960s, Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis and Pietrzak (2002) suggest that individuals who are members of a previously stigmatized group may grow to expect rejection when placed in an environment with people who are not members of their stigmatized group. The studies on race-based rejection sensitivity outline the numerous academic and psychological consequences that are suffered by African American students who may not feel a connection with their campus environment. Interpersonal rejection sensitivity has been associated with depression and anxiety disorders (Butler, Doherty, & Potter, 2007; Mellin, 2008), and increased levels of stress (Greer & Brown, 2011). According to Mendoza-Denton, Pietrzak, and Downey (2008), sensitivity to race-based rejection also makes it more difficult for minority students to identify with an institution they perceive may be biased against members of their race. Therefore, they suggest that the greater the person's ethnic identification, the less likely they may identify with Predominantly White Institutions.

The desire to belong has been described as a basic human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Baumeister and Leary suggest that two conditions must be satisfied before feelings of belonging can occur. First they propose that people need frequent and pleasant interactions. In addition, they suggest that, "interactions must take place in the context of a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other's welfare"

(p. 497). Despite the importance of feeling included, Walton and Cohen (2007) determined that stigmatization can increase belonging uncertainty. They wrote, “In academic and professional settings, members of socially stigmatized groups are more uncertain of the quality of their social bonds and thus more sensitive to issues of social belonging” (p. 82). They further suggest that it is easier for African American students at PWIs have a tendency to experience greater belonging uncertainty due to history of rejection in higher education. Inzlicht and Good (2006) reported that when African American students are in an environment where they are grossly outnumbered, their perceived differences are magnified. This in turn can make them feel that they don’t belong. In addition to fears of rejection, Tinto (1987) suggests that feelings of isolation and lack of social outlets can serve as obstacles for students trying to assimilate into their new environment.

Research on the importance of social belonging and academic achievement notes the many academic (Walton & Cohen, 2011), emotional (Mellin, 2008), and health challenges students may experience due to lack of social connections (Hale, Hannum, & Espelage, 2005). According to Mendoza-Denton et al. (2008), African American students who attend PWIs often lack the social outlets that are available to their White counterparts. By contrast, African American students who attend HBCUs are said to have fewer challenges finding ways to fit in or form connections with others. This has prompted some to suggest that African American students benefit more from getting an education at a HBCU where race and ethnicity are not primary factors for socialization (Davis, 1991).

University students generally have numerous options for membership and participation in campus activities. However, many African American students at PWIs may have limited choices of activities they feel are consistent with their interests (Allen, 1992; Jay & D’Augelli, 1991).

Being away from family and community support systems, students may struggle with how to form new social networks when they may fear rejection from people in their new environment. Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) suggest that African American students should find organizations with people who share similar experiences. Given the rich history of Black Greek-letter organizations as systems of support, membership in these organizations will be used for this study to examine the effects of social support. African American students who attend HBCUs are thought to benefit more from their environment due to the increased options for social support and academic encouragement (Allen, 1992; Kim, 2002). Black Greek-letter organizations, on a smaller level, provide that type of connection for its members.

The history of African American Greek-letter organizations dates back to 1906 when Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity was founded on the campus of Cornell University (Bradley, 2008). This organization was founded based on a need for African American students to provide support for each other to help them cope with the racism and segregation they experienced on campus (Bradley, 2008). Eight other national African American fraternities and sororities have been chartered at PWIs and HBCUs across the United States (Ross, 2000). These organizations can be found at both PWIs and HBUCs. As noted by Adler (1929), having a system of social support helps people feel more included in their environment, and provides a sense of encouragement to cope with the challenges of life. Increasing social connections has been associated with greater satisfaction with life for college students. Research by Fife et al. (2011) found a significant relationship between social support and life satisfaction among African American students. They also found that social support was a greater indicator of satisfaction than race or gender. Billips' (2008) longitudinal study on life satisfaction among college students suggests that students are more likely to persist towards graduating when they are more satisfied with life.

### **Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study was to address five primary issues. First, this researcher examined if African American students who attended PWIs would report higher expectations of race-based rejection than students who attended HBCUs. The goal was to examine whether the history of rejection in higher education at PWIs continued to cause students to fear or expect rejection in a college setting based on race. Secondly, this researcher assessed if there was a relationship between choices of educational environment and sense of belonging. In addition, the role of social support (as measured by Greek-letter membership) was assessed to determine if membership minimized race-based rejection sensitivity and increased feeling of belonging. This study also sought to determine if there would be a difference in life satisfaction between students who attended HBCUs and PWIs. Lastly, the researcher examined whether there was a correlation between sense of belonging and satisfaction with life.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for several reasons. Despite the difficult challenges African American students have historically encountered transitioning to Predominantly White institutions, the rate of attendance continues to increase. Unfortunately, the increasing enrollment rates are often overshadowed by the disproportionate rate of attrition. Issues of isolation, lack of social support, increased stress (Greer & Brown, 2011), and sensitivity to rejection have been offered as some of the reasons why African Americans drop out of college (Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002).

This study sought to assess whether African American students at Predominantly White institutions continue to perceive that they will be rejected simply because of their race. This was accomplished by comparing levels of race-based rejection sensitivity between African American

students at Predominantly White Institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. This study is also significant because it provides another assessment of the effects of prior educational rejection presently experienced by African American students. As more schools embrace diversity and celebrate multiculturalism, how will this affect African Americans' comfort levels on campus? The goal of this study was to investigate whether educational environments differentially influences African American students' sense of belonging on campus. In addition, this study addressed whether there was a correlation between perceptions of race-based rejection, sense of belonging, and satisfaction with life.

There have been differing ideas of how African American students can feel more empowered and encouraged. Some studies indicate that African American students benefit more by attending college without the pressure of racial discrimination (Davis, 1991). By contrast, other studies maintain that minority students who have more meaningful interactions with the majority culture will experience less fears of race-based rejection (Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008). The present study may provide more insight into each assumption to determine if one environment is more beneficial in helping African American students minimize feelings of rejection and increase sense of belonging.

Given the vast amount of literature on the importance of social support, this study also sought to assess whether utilizing campus organizations would provide students with the social support needed to feel included in their environment. On many campuses, debates have ensued about the need or importance of certain campus organizations. For instance, some schools have placed fraternities and sororities under scrutiny due to the negative practices (e. g., hazing, increased alcohol use) outshining any detectable benefits (Pike, 2003). While students who attend HBCUs may have many opportunities for desired social interactions, African American

students who attend PWIs may depend more heavily on Greek-letter organizations to form close connections with other students. It has been suggested that many African American students benefit from the social aspect of Greek-letter membership (Severtis & Cristie-Mizell, 2007). This study sought to determine if the benefits also extend to helping students establish feelings of belonging, and increase satisfaction with life.

Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) suggest that learning more about the psychological and social needs of students can help strengthen retention efforts. The goal of this study is to add to the literature insight regarding possible issues that hamper the success of African American students in higher education. Understanding the impact of perceived race-based rejection can provide university support professionals with a means of determining appropriate intervention options. College counselors can be an effective tool for helping students adjust to their new social environment (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). In addition to assisting students with college transition, counselors can also be a resource for faculty and staff. Counselor initiated programs can provide training for faculty and staff on how to be more culturally inclusive, and sensitive of the needs of their diverse student population.

This study is also significant because it brings attention to the importance of helping students grow academically in an environment where they feel safe and welcome. Studies note the emotional impact that race-based fear and rejection have on educational attainment and overall life satisfaction (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002). This impact also has implications for ongoing development in areas of self-esteem, trust, and future interactions with others (Negga, Applewhite, & Livingston, 2007). The ability to identify students who may be vulnerable to isolation and rejection provides for a more proactive means of assisting students before they feel

the need to drop out of school. As resources are concerned, finding ways to provide support and encouragement may be inexpensive options for increasing academic success.

The retention and graduation of African Americans can affect families for many generations. The long term benefits of educational attainment are immeasurable. According to the United States Census report, in 2009, 25.8 % of African Americans were living below the poverty level as compared to 12.3 % for Caucasians. The United States Department of Labor (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012) reports that the unemployment rate for African Americans for February 2012 was 14.1%. The national average for the same month was 8.3%. Increasing educational opportunities can help alleviate the disproportionate number of African Americans living below the poverty level. Degree attainment can increase the probability of higher paying jobs, and provide more career opportunities. In addition, increasing financial resources can also influence the quality of their children's education.

According to Planty et al. (2008), children in impoverished communities are less likely to have the educational resources and support as children reared in upper socioeconomic neighborhoods. In 2009, over 35% of African American children were living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Further, children attending school in impoverished environments are more likely to encounter wide spread violence in the school, and increased drop-out rates among peers (Dupper & Poertner, 1997). Families with financial resources are better able to provide children with developmental and social advantages through activities like band, sports, and foreign language clubs.

Several studies have suggested a relationship between family education and degree attainment by the children. Taylor and Olswang (1997) found that for African American students in their study, there was a positive correlation between father's highest degree and



students' grade point average. Having parents who have obtained college degrees not only increases probability of financial capital, but also increases knowledgeable assistance to help their children regarding educational decisions. Just as the lack of education and employment can set in motion consequences such as impoverished neighborhoods and increased incarceration rates, increasing educational opportunities can provide immeasurable benefits to those who have previously been underserved by the educational system. As noted by Thomas and Green (2001), "A college degree is arguably the African American's single best weapon in the fight against poverty, inequality, and discrimination" (p. 259).

Another area of significance is the attention given to the comparison of experiences of students who attend HBCUs and PWIs. As colleges and universities try to create environments that are inclusive for all students, it is important to highlight any barriers that may exist in helping students have comparable experiences and opportunities to excel. The debate regarding what type of school is best for African American students may not subside until those differences are minimized regarding attrition rates, racial harmony, level of satisfaction, and sense of belonging.

### **Research Questions**

1. Will there be a significant difference in race-based rejection sensitivity between African American students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and African American students who attend Predominantly White Institutions?
2. Will there be a significant difference in perceptions of race-based rejection between African American male and female students?
3. Will there be a difference in satisfaction with life between African American students who attend PWIs and HBCUs?

4. Will there be a difference in sense of belonging between African American students who attend HBCUs and PWIs?
5. Will there be a correlation between sense of belonging and satisfaction with life for African American students who attend PWIs and HBCUs?
6. Will there be a significant difference in sense of belonging between African American students who are members of Greek-letter organizations and students who are not affiliated with Greek-letter organizations?

### **Hypotheses**

1. There will be a significant difference in race-based rejection sensitivity between African American students at HBUCs and PWIs.
2. African American male students will report higher levels of race-based rejection sensitivity compared to African American female students at both HBCUs and PWIs.
3. African American students at HBCUs will report higher life satisfaction than African American students at PWIs.
4. African American students who attend HBCUs will report greater sense of belonging than African American students who attend PWIs.
5. There will be a positive correlation between the sense of belonging and life satisfaction for African American students.
6. African American students who are members of Greek-letter organizations will report greater sense of belonging compared to students who are not members of Greek-letter organizations.

## **Definition of Terms**

**Greek letter organizations (GLO)** – refers to college fraternities and sororities.

**Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)** – were founded before 1964 with the sole purpose of providing education for African American students. There are approximately 100 HBCUs throughout the United States (Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

**Life Satisfaction** – “a global cognitive judgment of one's life, whereas affect balance refers to the relative preponderance of pleasant compared with unpleasant emotional experience” (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998, p. 484).

**Microaggressions** – Subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed towards people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Soloranom, Ceja, & Yosso, 2002, p. 1).

**Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)** – Predominantly White Institutions

**Race-based rejection sensitivity** – Refers to the fears minorities have that they will be rejected by the dominant culture based simply on their race (Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002).

**Sense of Belonging** – “the experiences of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment” (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992, p. 173).

## CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the past 30 years, an ever increasing number of African American students have been enrolling in Predominantly White universities each year. Prior to 1954, approximately 90% of African American college students were enrolled at HBCUs (Kim, 2002; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). By 2007 the percentage of African American students attending HBCUs decreased to approximately 12 % (Planty et al., 2008). The increase in attendance at PWIs has occurred despite the long history of educational rejection, and difficulty transiting into many traditionally white universities. Much research and debate have occurred to better understand how the history of educational rejection and disparities for African American presently affects students. The continued focus on the interplay of race on college transition is warranted according to Allen (1992). The history of rejection in the educational system for African Americans dates back to the days of slavery.

African American slaves were often prohibited by law from learning to read and write (Jackson, 2001). Even after slavery was abolished, African Americans had to create their own system of education because they were not allowed to attend school with White students. During the mid-1800s, African Americans began establishing institutions of higher education, now referred to as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Since 1830, there have been over 100 institutions of higher education dedicated to providing a college education to students who were not allowed to freely attend most state and private universities (Jackson, 2001). In 1896, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy vs Ferguson* that

separate but equal systems of education was constitutional (Willie, 1988). State sanctioned segregation was then supported by the federal government legislation.

In the 1950s, due to increasing pressure from the civil rights movement and lawsuits on behalf of African American citizens, the court system had to reassess legal segregation. In 1954, the landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* mandated that separate but equal was no longer constitutional. Despite the legal implication, many universities continued to resist the process of integrating. As a result, African Americans and other minorities endured many forms of rejection in an effort to deter them from attending certain traditionally White institutions. These practices ranged from inappropriately rejecting applications to treating those who enrolled poorly (Eagles, 2009). Decades of poor treatment, alienation, discrimination, and in some cases aggression, continued to plague African American students at some PWIs. Allen (1992) describes the numerous incidents of racially motivated activities on college campuses that forced many universities to reexamine their policies and commitment to inclusion.

### **Students Experiences at HBCUs and PWIs**

The literature on college transition appears fairly consistent regarding the treatment that African American students experienced at HBCUs and PWIs. The literature portrays stark differences in social atmosphere at each type of university that contributes to feelings about their educational experience and level of persistence. According to Davis (1991), in addition to increased social options African American students at HBCUs are able to navigate through classes and activities without having to worry about the race component. Relationships with other students and staff help to bolster self-esteem and encouragement (Davis, 1991). As evidence of this, Wenglinsky (1999) points out that although more African Americans attend PWIs, more African American students from HBCUs actually go on to receive doctoral degrees.

He suggests that it is the supportive environment of HBCUs that helps students feel encouraged and motivated. In addition, Thomas and Green (2001) state that African Americans at HBCUs have more opportunities to engage in leadership positions on campus which further improves self-esteem and confidence.

Despite the reported positive attributes of HBCUs, more African American students are finding their way to PWIs. Love (2008) suggests that although more African American students are attending PWIs, there is still work to be done to ensure that their experiences are equitable to those of White students. Love also notes that issues of campus climate, racial stereotypes, and faculty relationships continue present problems for students of color. Comparisons of HBCUs and PWIs in the literature often highlight differences in historical context, as well as student experiences (Kim & Conrad, 2006). Literature that examines students' experiences at PWIs not only includes comparisons between African American students at PWIs and HBCUs, but also between African American students and White students at PWIs.

Davis et al. (2004) used the process of phenomenological interviewing to examine the experiences of 11 African American students who had successfully completed their degree programs at PWIs. Their goal was to examine their experiences by allowing open ended responses, and documenting the consistent themes that emerged. Through their interviewing, they found several issues that appeared to be consistent among the interviewees. As part of the participants' academic experiences, they noted isolation and lack of connection as their primary concerns. In addition, they noted that students felt that they had to prove their worthiness to be at the university. Results of the phenomenological interviewing also brought out themes of feeling invisible at times, while feeling super invisible at others. Students also reported that they felt like they were being treated in an unfair or condescending manner. In addition, this study

highlighted the students' awareness that they were the ones who were different and unlike other students.

### **Race-Based Rejection Sensitivity**

African Americans at PWIs are said to have a different impressions and experiences of campus than their White counterparts. According to Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, and Hart (2008), minorities who attend PWIs often experience feeling of isolation and loneliness. Lack of social networks and fears of being judged due to race can contribute to students becoming more distant and withdrawn. African Americans may fear being treated differently due to the historically poor treatment that members of their group have received in the past (Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis & Pietrzak, 2002). Mendoza-Denton et al. described the effects of status-based rejection as “experiences of rejection based on membership in a devalued group can lead people to anxiously expect, readily perceive, and intensely react to status based rejection” (p. 1).

According to Abrams, Hogg, and Marques (2005), feelings of isolation and rejection can have numerous undesirable consequences. Their research suggests that being socially excluded can cause low self-esteem, anger, frustration, denial, and cognitive impairment. Also, higher levels of depression and negative affect have also been associated with fear of rejection (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002). In addition, students can become frustrated when they view an environment in one manner and others perceive it differently. Part of the frustration that can arise is lack of understanding about why minority students may fear race-based rejection when attending PWIs. People who are not subjected to repeatedly being judged due to their race may not be sensitive to the types of experience minorities may perceive as insulting or threatening. Perceptions of racial climate can be misleading if there are no obvious overt racial incidents

(Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Factors that influence a person's perception of rejection can be experiences in the subtle ways people interact with each other.

A psychologist named Chester Pierce coined the term microaggression to describe ways people communicate bias or racism (Solorzano et al., 2000). Solorzano et al. define microaggression as "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed towards people of color, often automatically or unconsciously" (p. 1). The authors contend that microaggression can occur in academic and social campus environments. They suggest that African Americans can feel rejection in slight gestures, such as how people look at them. In addition, these gestures can be more pronounced, like being excluded from study groups or student activities. Solorzano et al. provided an anecdotal account of how classroom experiences can become uncomfortable. They noted how some African American students reported feeling uneasy when the class would turn to look directly at them any time racial issues were discussed. These experiences continue to remind the individual that they are not perceived the same as others or judged as individual. The accumulation of these types of experiences can lead a person to feel overwhelmed, rejected and isolated. In addition, these feelings can create heightened sensitivity to expectations of rejection in daily experiences.

In an academic setting it is important to note that not all African American students respond to their environment in the same manner. Major and Eccleston's (2005) description of reactions to stigma-based rejection and exclusion mirrors how many students respond to academic stressors. They suggest that some people who experience exclusion may either work harder to be included, find alternative forms of inclusion, or withdraw. For instance, some minority students may seem more acculturated in a sense that they accept or are more easily accepted by the majority culture. In other cases, students may engage in other activities where



they feel more welcome or comfortable. Some students who don't feel comfortable in their environment may emotionally withdraw from the majority culture, or leave the institution.

According to Mendoza-Denton et al. (2002), even in the absence of rejection, simply fearing that it will occur can increase perceived incidents. They found that students who entered college with higher anxiety regarding race-based rejection reported more frequent perceived incidents during their transition to college. In addition, this increased perception of rejection increased the tendency for social isolation or withdrawal. Eccleston and Major (2005) contend that even when individuals experience exclusion or rejection, it may not be as impactful if they have the coping strategies and social support needed to deal with excessive stressors.

### **Life Satisfaction**

Life satisfaction has been researched with various African American groups to determine the effects of rejection and/or racism on feelings of well-being (Postmes & Branscombe, 2002; Yap, Settles, & Pratt-Hyatt, 2011). Diener and Diener (1995) viewed life satisfaction as part of the overall perspective of subjective wellbeing. They described subjective well-being as consisting of a combination of cognitive evaluation of life satisfaction and the affective/emotional reaction to life. Although the concept of life satisfaction may be influenced by multiple factors, one of the more widely used assessments for satisfaction utilizes five basic responses to determine overall satisfaction (Diener, Emmons, & Griffin, 1985). Their assessment (Satisfaction with Life Scale) assesses a person's perception of how their life meets their own expectations and goals.

The ongoing debate regarding the best college environment for African American students also include the discussion on which group of students experience the greater sense of well-being (Spurgeon, 2009). These debates are argued based on the characteristics each type of

environment has to offer students. For example, HBCUs are often characterized as providing supportive relationships where students do not have to cope with the stressors of rejection and discrimination based on race (Davis, 1991). According to Wilson, Moore, Boyd, Easley and Russell (2008) African American students tend to report greater sense of well-being when they possess what they called the core value of connectedness. Other studies focus on the values and characteristics of the individuals as primary determinant of satisfaction as opposed to characteristics of the institution. Yap et al. (2011) found that African American students reported higher sense of well-being when they had a greater sense of racial identity and more positive perceptions of their racial group. A study by Barnes and Lightsey (2005) found that perceived discrimination was not directly related to lower satisfaction. Therefore, being in an environment where students are in the minority does not necessarily mean they will be less satisfied than African American students who attend schools where they are in the majority.

Contrary to the research that suggests that minorities perform better when they have a same race support system, Page-Goule, Mendoza-Denton, and Tropp (2008) suggest that minorities would benefit more from building friendships with individuals of the majority group. They report that those types of relationships would help minimize anxiety and rejection sensitivity by ridding people of their irrational fears of rejection. Strayhorn (2008b) supports this contention based on the results of his study with African American males from four-year PWIs. His goal was to explore the effects of engaging in racially diverse interactions. He found that African American men who reported more racially diverse interactions reported a greater their sense of belonging and connection with their university.

### **Sense of Belonging**

The concept of sense of belonging has received increasing attention regarding college student transition (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Belonging has been defined as “the experiences of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment” (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992, p. 173). Hausmann, Ye, Schofield and Wood’s (2009) definition of belong specifically pertained to college students. They defined student belonging as “psychological sense of identification and affiliation with the campus community” (p. 650). They suggested that many theories that address college transition don’t account for the importance belonging has on retention and the general happiness of the student. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), for people to have a sense of belonging, their experiences within the context of the group must be frequent and pleasant. In addition, it must be accompanied by a genuine sense that people are concerned about each other’s welfare.

The concept of belonging has been studied from a number of perspectives. Maslow (1954) described belonging as a basic human need. Hagerty et al. (1992) described the factors that must be present for feelings of belonging to occur. They called these incidents antecedents. They suggested that a person must have the energy for involvement, as well as the desire to engage in meaningful interactions. In addition, belonging can occur if the person has the potential for shared characteristics. Their model also describes the consequences of belonging which consists of three primary factors. These factors include the impact belonging has on a person’s social, psychological, spiritual, and physical being, and attribution of meaningfulness. In addition, they suggest that it creates a foundation for emotional and behavioral responses.

For African American students who are in the minority in their campus environment, establishing the antecedents for belonging may be a challenge. While many minority students

may present to college with the desire and energy for involvement, they may not immediately sense the potential for shared or complimentary characteristic with others in their environment. As noted in the model by Hagerty et al. (1992) lack of belonging may affect students' social, psychological, and physical wellbeing, and influence emotional and behavioral responses. Morrow and Ackermann (2012) conducted a study to determine if motivation and belonging influenced a student's intention to persist in college. While they did not find that the overall Sense of Belonging Scale (SBS) was significantly related to persistence, they did report that some of the subscales of the assessment were significant. Their study revealed that the students who reported greater faculty support were more likely to report intention to persist to graduation. In addition, students who reported greater peer support during their first year were more likely to return for their sophomore year.

Despite the importance of feelings of belonging on a college campus, research suggests that some students may have difficulty finding that connection in their educational environment. Gallien (2007) notes that African American students may have a difficult time identifying with the university when there is a culture clash. At some universities, culture clash goes beyond having interests that differ from the majority population. Instead, Gallien (2007) discusses institutionally-sanctioned symbols that may cause minorities to feel uncomfortable. He used as examples the University of Mississippi and the University of Georgia where they continue to sanction events or symbols that are representative of the confederacy or "old south". For some students, such events may represent symbols of previous oppression and discrimination.

Inzilcht and Good (2006) suggest that African Americans may not perform as well when they are in a threatening environment. They describe a threatening environment as one where a person is aware of their minority status in a group, and may experience a heightened sense of

stereotype treatment. In addition, they also sought to show how threatening environments affect intellectual performance, self-concept, and sense of belonging. Inzilcht and Good (2006) studied the academic performance of students based on the environmental factors that existed when being administered an exam. They compared the academic performance of African American students who completed exams with only white students in the room to those who took the exam in a racially mixed group. Results indicate that African American students who completed the exam in a mixed group consistently performed better than those taking the exam as the only African American in the group. To explain this difference, Inzilcht and Good stated that “being outnumbered can increase the distinctiveness of one’s social identity, activate negative stereotypes, and then increase arousal” (p. 7). They also found that the same results based on other characteristics such as gender.

To determine the effects of sense of belonging, Goodenow (1992) conducted a study with junior high students in an urban area. They selected 207 students from two schools. Goodenow used the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale and General School Motivation to assess students’ school motivation, sense of belonging and level of persistence. Based on the results of the study, she found that as children felt more connected to their school, they were willing to put forth more effort. As noted by Worthington, Navarro, Loewy and Hart (2008), most predominantly White universities have been making efforts to increase racial tolerance and cultural competences. They conducted a study with 144 racially diverse undergraduate and professional students to examine racial attitudes on a college campus. Using the Assessment of Campus Climate for Underrepresented Groups, the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS), and Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDS), they sought to determine if there was a difference in how majority and minority students perceived the climate of their university

for racial-ethnic minorities. Consistent with their hypothesis, they found that White students showed greater unawareness of racial issues and institutional discrimination. They also had a more positive perception of the general campus climate, felt the campus climate was positive for racial minorities.

Taylor and Olswang (1997) studied African American students at a large urban university to determine what demographic factors and personal attributes would increase the likelihood of success at a predominantly White campus. At the university where they collected data, African American students represented about 3% of the student body. Out of the 525 possible respondents, 237 completed the assessment package. Taylor and Olswang found that the personal characteristics students felt were most important in college transition included confidence, cultural pride, and determination. They also reported that “56% did not participate in student organizations and 56% did not feel they were a part of the campus. Most (69.8) reported being overall happy with their decision to attend this university, but only 35% reports a sense of commitment to the institution” (p. 14).

For African American students who attend PWIs, feelings of belonging may be difficult to achieve if they are fearful of not being accepted based on race or ethnicity. Abrams et al. (2005) suggest that one ramification of exclusion is the increased likelihood that those who are stigmatized or excluded may develop feeling of mistrust. They further stated that conflict can also be born out of the hostility that exclusion causes. In that instance, rejection and exclusion seem to move the person away from the desired goals of trust and acceptance of self and others.

According to Mendoza-Denton, Pietrzak and Downey (2008), some African American students are able to forgo feelings of belonging to a university with the ultimate goal of attaining a degree. Their study sought to examine the relationship between ethnic identity, academic goal

pursuit and race-based rejection sensitivity. They found that as students' level of ethnic identification and race-based rejection sensitivity increased, they were less likely to identify with the institution. As students' expectation of race-based rejection decreased, they were more likely to have a stronger identification with the university. They did not find that students' grades or propensity to remain in school were affected by lack of identification with university.

Other studies have noted similar tendencies of African Americans feeling the need to separate their social needs from academic endeavors. Jenkins (2001) compared African American students from PWIs and HBCUs to better understand students' experiences at both types of universities. She surveyed participants who had already graduated and obtained their bachelor's degree. Her goal was examining how each group of graduates viewed their school in areas of skill attainment, satisfaction with administration, campus issues, and student services. She found that students from HBCUs tended to express greater overall satisfaction, while students from PWIs were happier with courses and the esthetics of the university. Students from PWIs were able to see the value in the academic portion of their experiences, but did not feel as positive about other areas of the survey.

Greer and Brown (2011) conducted a study to determine the relationship between minority status stress and coping process of African American students at PWIs and HBUCs. Their results indicated a significant and positive relationship between minority status stress and overall perceived stress. They also suggested that as students' level of stress increased, their coping strategies became more avoidant or passive. In addition, as avoidant or passive coping skills increased, it adversely affected their grades. Although they did not find a significant difference between overall perceived stress between students at HBCUs and PWI, they noted that students at PWIs experienced more minority related stressors. Their study suggests that as

students are able to disengage from the stress by downplaying incidents, they experienced less overall perceived stress.

### **Social Support and Group Membership**

Jay and D'Augelli (1991) conducted a study to determine if there were differences between African American students and White students at a predominantly White institutions in areas of social support, academic and psychological adjustment, and predictors of college adjustments. They found that African American students reported less social supports than White students, but they did not perceive their support as less adequate. Students were able to utilize the support available to them to form the connections they needed. In addition, Jay and D'Augelli (1991) did not find a correlation between social support and academic success. In their study, student success was not necessarily dependent upon their social options.

Davis (1991) suggested that social support systems can affect students in areas of stress management, self-esteem, life satisfaction, social competency and environmental mastery. In a study he conducted to examine African American students' adjustment to college environments, he found that African American students at HBCUs were more interested in participating in extracurricular activities. He felt the students were more likely to perceive activities as more reflective of their interests. He found their overall satisfaction with the college experience was perceived as more positive due to the greater sense of belonging they experienced. Fleming (1984) suggested that African American students who attend HBCUs are thought to be better adjusted intellectually due the increased social activity with peers, and closer relationships with faculty.

In an effort to determine correlation between social interest, and hope and optimism, Barlow, Tobin, and Schmidt (2009) conducted a study using the Life Orientation Test, Adult



Trait Hope Scale, and the Social Interest Index. Results indicate that the Social Index Scale scores were positively correlated with hope and optimism. They cautioned that there were limitations of the study due to lack of diversity among graduate psychology student participants.

Gallien and Petterson (2004) noted several issues they considered barriers of academic progress. They include campus culture, classroom dissonance, patterns of miscommunication between Black students and peers, and lack of mentoring. Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) described three areas they felt were essential to helping African American students transition in a university where they are the minority. They first described the importance of students forging a good relationship with faculty and staff. Their studies suggest that African American students may be hesitant to do so due to fear of faculty being culturally insensitive. In addition, students also may not view White faculty as realistic role models. They also supported that idea that students need financial support and emotional encouragement from family and friends. In addition, they further suggested that African American students seek support from campus organizations where they may experience a sense of connection, support and belonging.

### **Greek Letter Organizations**

Membership into Greek-letter organizations has been touted as a good way for African American students to form close supportive social relationships on campus. In fact, the first African American fraternity was founded on a predominantly White campus by African American students who felt the need to band together under the pressures of abject racism and isolation (Ross, 2000). In the early 1900s, Cornell University admitted African American students. However, the students were segregated and not allowed to mingle with White students. As a result of the poor living conditions and racial discrimination, many African American students dropped out before completing the program. Concerned about the high attrition rate

among an already small number of African American students, seven men banded together to form an organization they referred to as a brotherhood (Bradley, 2008). Their primary purpose was to provide support to members to help minimize feelings of isolation, and provide encouragement to each other. In addition, they felt the organization needed a sense of purpose outside of the campus environment to deal with the social issues of the era (Ross, 2000). In 1906 Alpha Phi Alpha became the first African American fraternity.

Since then, there have been eight other national African American fraternities and sororities founded and chartered on Predominantly White and Historically Black campuses across the United States. The organizations Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, Kappa Alpha Psi, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, and Sigma Gamma Rho join Alpha Phi Alpha in what is referred to as the “Divine Nine” among African American Greek-Letter organizations (Ross, 2000; Torbenson, 2005). These are the only African American fraternities and sororities recognized and governed by the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) (Ross, 2000). The National Pan-Hellenic Council’s mission is to “serve as the official coordinating agent of the nine (9) constituent member Greek letter fraternities and sororities in the furtherance of their program unity on college and university campuses” (p. 423).

As most of the Black Greek-letter organizations were founded in the early 1900s, their missions often reflected the social challenges of their time. In addition to being a support system to their members on campus, many of the organizations were instrumental in community efforts for the advancement of African American rights (Gasman, 2011). Today, sororities and fraternities are viewed as purely social organizations for campus activities. Mauk (2006) notes that many of these organizations may have deviated from or abandoned their original missions. One aspect that remains is the dedication among members to forge friendships and social

support. The bonding process of Greek-letter organizations is quite unique, and distinguishes them from other types of campus groups. Students often adopt a sense of shared identity and common interests reflective of the fraternity or sorority. Relationships are ingrained to last beyond the college years. Activities such as wearing their Greek-letter paraphernalia and hosting social activities help to identify them as belonging to a particular group. African American Greek-letter organizations also provide a cultural outlet that may be quite different from what they would experience by joining Predominantly White organizations. Activities such as Greek step competitions and probate shows provide unique experiences that are different from other campus Greek-letter organizations (Ross, 2000).

Despite the reported positive aspects of Greek-letter organizations, negative activities often overshadow the conversations about fraternities and sororities (Mauk, 2006). Dangerous and deadly episodes of hazing (Gasman, 2011; Severtis & Christie-Mizell, 1997) and increased alcohol consumption (Capone, Wood, Borsari, & Laird, 2007; Pike, 2003) have caused some universities to scrutinize the need for these organizations on campus (Pike, 2003). Severtis and Christie-Mizell's (2007) survey of the literature found conflicting results regarding the benefits of students joining Greek-letter organizations. However, their own study supports the contention that African Americans benefit from membership in campus fraternities or sororities. From their sample, they found that graduation rates increased from 25% for African Americans to 90% if students were members of Greek-letter organizations. They also found that membership also boosted the graduation rates for White students from 50% to 80%. Based on their results, they concluded that African American students benefit more from membership because of their limited options for other social outlets. They suggested that White students did not benefit as heavily because they had more options for social interactions.

Pike (2003) also investigated whether students benefited socially and academically from participation in fraternities and sororities. The 3,390 selected freshman and seniors were compared in areas of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student interaction with faculty members, and supportive campus environment. He did not find a significant difference among freshman in areas of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, and interactions with faculty. Among this group, the only significant difference was that Greek-letter members viewed the campus in a more favorable light. Seniors, however, showed significant differences between members and non-members in all categories. Greek-letter seniors viewed the campus in a more favorable light, and had increased interactions and campus participation.

Floyd (2009) studied African American sorority members to determine their experiences before and after pledging a sorority. In this qualitative study, she conducted interviews with fifteen women who were not members of sororities at that time. The consistent themes she was able to document about their experiences were that they felt the race issue overshadowed everything else in their life, and they perceived themselves as living in a racist environment. Another assessment of the women after they became members of a sorority revealed other dominant factors. These women now felt that they had a place of their own, and they felt like they were more connected to their campus. They also noted benefits in academic achievement and community leadership.

### **Gender Differences**

As much as the comparisons have been made between African American students at HBCUs and PWIs, there is no greater difference as those based on race and gender. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2001), from 1998 to 1999, over 102,214

African Americans received bachelor's degrees. The number increased to 156,615 from 2008–2009. For both time periods, 65.9% of those degrees were earned by African American women. The gap widens when masters degrees are considered. Of the 70,010 masters degrees earned by African Americans from 2008–2009, women represented 71.8% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

Since many African American students share similar environmental factors, it appears that males and females are affected differently by their experiences. Does society view African American males differently, thus treating them differently? Strayhorn (2008a) suggests that the answer is yes: African American males are often treated differently. Strayhorn (2008a) points to the additional stereotypes that African American males have to overcome such as being perceived as dangerous or lazy. He suggests that these feelings are often internalized and damages self-esteem. Although literature regarding African American males' difficulties transitioning into the college environment primarily focus on students at PWIs, African American males at HBCUs are still outnumbered by women at a rate of 2 to 1 (Provasnic & Shafner, 2004). These results suggest that the difficulties African American males experience may begin long before college admissions. In fact, Strayhorn (2008b) reports that African American males at the junior high and high school levels are not always directed towards educational precollege activities.

Women are outpacing men in all aspects of degree attainment. This may suggest that African American males may differ not only in their perception of how they are viewed by others, but also in the type of encouragement that motivates them towards achievement. Several studies have noted differences that fall along gender lines. The primary focus of Jenkins' (2001) study was to compare African American student experiences between HBCUs and PWIs. Her

most surprising finding was the significant difference between males and females in her sample regarding the importance of skill attainment. She found that the women tended to rate skill attainment as important more often than males reported it as important.

## CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine the social relationships between African American students at HBCUs and PWIs to determine if there were differences in sense of belonging, satisfaction with life, and race-based rejection sensitivity. This chapter will provide a review of the research design used to assess research questions. In addition, this chapter will provide an overview of participants, methods of data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis.

This study examined the following research questions:

1. Will there be a significant difference in race-based rejection sensitivity between African American students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and African American students who attend Predominantly White Institutions?
2. Will there be a significant difference in perceptions of race-based rejection between African American male and female students?
3. Will there be a difference in satisfaction with life between African American students who attend PWIs and HBCUs?
4. Will there be a difference in sense of belonging between African American students who attend HBCUs and PWIs?
5. Will there be a correlation between sense of belonging and satisfaction with life for African American students who attend PWIs and HBCUs?

6. Will there be a significant difference in sense of belonging between African American students who are members of Greek-letter organizations and students who are not affiliated with Greek-letter organizations?

## **Research Design**

### **Participants**

Participants were solicited from the student population of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Predominantly White Institutions throughout the United States. The survey was limited to African American students who were of legal age of consent in their state, and enrolled at an HBCU or PWI. Students from all classifications were encouraged to participate.

### **Data Collection**

Several options for data collection were used to ensure maximum number of participants. First, researcher utilized the online social networking site Facebook to reach the general population. Secondly, national and local chapters of African American fraternities and sororities were contacted to determine if they would be willing to forward a link to the survey to their members. Two chapters of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority and two chapters of Alpha Kappa Alpha responded via FaceBook that they would distribute the surveys to their members. Responses were also received from one chapter of Phi Beta Sigma and one chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternities.

A computerized version of the research packet was developed on Qualtrics.com. The link to this site which contained the survey was imbedded into documents used to solicit participants. The researcher created a Facebook page dedicated solely for solicitation of participants. The Facebook page contained information about the researcher, as well as the request for participation letter that was approved by the IRB for distribution. The request



contained information about the study, and clearly identified the targeted participants. A week before the requested deadline for submission, researcher posted follow up messages via social networking sites to remind or encourage students to complete and submit the survey.

Students who were interested in learning more about the study were able to click on a link that redirected them to the website that contained the survey. Potential participants were able to read the IRB approved information letter to determine if they were interested in completing the survey. They were able to indicate their consent to the survey by clicking yes on the consent item, and they were then redirected to the beginning of the survey.

## **Instrumentation**

### **Demographics Questionnaire**

The first assessment was the demographics questionnaire. Participants were asked to provide information regarding the type of school they attended (PWI or HBCU), and their current year of study. The demographics questionnaire also collected information regarding ethnicity, age, marital status, gender, and Greek-letter membership status.

### **Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire-Race (RSQ-Race)**

This is a 12-item assessment designed to assess African Americans' perception of race-based rejection based on specific scenarios. Each question requires two responses. The first response to each question assesses the participant's concern or anxiety about being rejected. The second response assesses how likely they feel they would be rejected in each scenario. This assessment addresses scenarios that might occur on a college campus, such as item number 1: "Imagine that you are in class one day, and the professor asks a particular question. A few people, including yourself, raise their hands to answer the question." Participants are asked, "How concerned/anxious would you be that the professor might not choose you because of your

race and ethnicity?” Other questions pertain to experiences that occur outside of the campus environment. For example, “Imagine you’re driving down the street, and there is a police barricade just ahead. The police officers are randomly pulling over to check drivers’ licenses and registration.” Respondents are asked to rate, “How concerned/anxious would you be that an officer might pull you over because of your race/ethnicity?” Responses are recorded by making selections on a 6-point scale ranging from (1) very unconcerned or very unlikely to (6) very concerned or very likely.

This assessment was derived from the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire-Personal (RSQ). The RSQ is an 18 item assessment that measures anxious expectations of rejections regarding interpersonal interactions (Downey & Feldman, 1996). This assessment was modified to address rejection sensitivity based on race (RSQ-R) and gender (Gender Rejection Sensitivity). The RSQ has been used to assess rejection sensitivity and rejection hostility in romantic relationships (Romero-Canyas, Downey, Berenson, Ayduk, & Kang, 2010). London, Downey, Bonica, and Palitin (2007) used the RSQ to study social causes and consequences of rejection sensitivity.

The Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire-Race has been used primarily with the African American college student populations. Mendoza-Denton et al. (2008) noted that African American students at PWIs were a prime group to study due to the historical experiences with exclusion and rejection that members of their group have encountered at PWIs. More specifically, they used the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire-Race to assess the relationship between race-based rejection, ethnic identification, and institutional identification at a predominantly White university setting. In addition, Anderson (2011) studied the influence of race-based rejection on African American and Hispanic freshmen students’ transition to college.

This study used the RSQ-R in a manner consistent with the previous uses. The assessment's reliability is listed as good with Cronbach's alpha of .90, and test-retest reliability (2 to 3 weeks) of .80 (Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002).

### **Sense of Belonging Instrument**

This is a 27-item instrument that is divided into two separate assessments. The first part of the assessment is the SOBI-A, and it assesses antecedents of sense of belonging. The second part, the SOBI-P, measures psychological sense of belonging. Antecedents pertain to a person's desire and ability to develop sense of belonging (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996). In addition, Hagerty et al. (1996) suggests that antecedents describe a person's potential for shared characteristics.

Responses are made by selecting an option from a four item Likert-style scale ranging from (1) strongly disagrees to (4) strongly agree. Three subject groups were used to assess internal consistency reliability. Assessment was reliable for all three groups, with SOBI-P coefficient alphas as follows: College students (.93), depressed patients (.93), and Catholic nuns (.91). SOBI-A results are .72, .63 and .76 respectively. Only the student subgroup was used to for test-retest reliability with correlation of .84 for the SOBI-P and .66 for SOBI-A (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995, as cited in Hagerty et al., 1996). The three methods that were used to examine construct validity included comparing items with other measures, factor analysis, and contrast groups. A comparison of means between sample groups revealed that the Catholic nuns scored higher on both scales, followed by college students (Hagerty et al., 1996).

The Sense of Belonging Instrument has been used to assess the effects of belong on various aspects of psychological and social functioning. Choenarom, Williams, and Hagerty

(2005) used the SOBI to assess the role of belonging and social support on depression. The assessment has been used with diverse populations.

### **Satisfaction with Life Scale**

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was constructed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) to assess a person's global satisfaction with life. This survey was developed based on the notion that satisfaction is a cognitive process that is prompted by internal judgment and not external cues (Diener et al., 1985).

The SWLS is comprised of the following five statements: In most ways my life is close to my ideal; The conditions of my life are excellent; I am satisfied with my life; So far I have gotten the important things I want in life; and If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing. Questions are answered by selecting a response on a 7 point Likert type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Higher scores indicate higher level of satisfaction. Scores are calculated by totaling the numbers selected for each question. Scores are grouped together with a designation of the level of satisfaction that each grouping represents. For example, scores between 30 and 35 indicate that the respondent has a very high score and is "highly satisfied". This assessment has a test-retest correlation coefficient of .82 and alpha coefficient of .87 (Diener, Emons, Larson, & Griffin, 1985).

Because of the high reliability and validity of this assessment, it has been widely used with diverse populations. Fife, Adegoke, McCoy, and Brewer (2011) used the SWLS to assess social support, satisfaction with life, and religious commitment among African American and White students. Yap, Settles, and Pratt-Hyatt (2011) studied racial identity and life satisfaction among for African American adults to determine if the identify functions of belongingness and

discrimination affected racial identity and satisfaction. This assessment has been used with populations consistent with respondents in this study (college students, African Americans).

### **Data Analyses**

This is a quantitative study that utilized the SPSS computer program to run statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate percentage of male and female participants, number of students per classification, and percentage of students from each type of university. Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were performed to determine if there was a significant difference in rejection sensitivity between students at HBCUs and PWIs. In addition, ANOVAs were conducted to assess significant difference in sense of belonging and satisfaction with life between students from each type of school. Multivariate Analyses were used to determine if gender and educational environment yielded any significant differences regarding satisfaction with life, rejection sensitivity, and sense of belonging. Bivariate correlation analysis was used to determine if there was a correlation between the sense of belonging and the satisfaction with life.

## CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the social relationships and experiences of African American students who attend Predominantly White Institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. More specifically, this study sought to determine if the quality of social relationships differed for African American students based on educational environment in areas of rejection sensitivity, sense of belonging, and satisfaction with life. This chapter will examine the research hypotheses and provide a summary of the results.

The following hypotheses were tested:

- Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant difference in race-based rejection sensitivity between African American students at HBUCs and PWIs.
- Hypothesis 2: African American male students will report higher levels of race-based rejection sensitivity compared to African American female students at both HBCUs and PWIs.
- Hypothesis 3: African American students at HBCUs will report higher life satisfaction than African American students at PWIs.
- Hypothesis 4: African American students who attend HBCUs will report greater sense of belonging than African American students who attend PWIs.
- Hypothesis 5: There will be a positive correlation between the sense of belonging and life satisfaction for African American students.

Hypothesis 6: African American students who are members of Greek-letter organizations will report greater sense of belonging compared to students who are not members of Greek-letter organizations.

### **Demographics**

There were 101 total surveys, but only 81 were complete or useable. The usable sample included 27 (33.3%) students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities and 54 (66.7%) students who attended Predominantly White Institutions (see Table 1). There were 55 (67.9%) females and 26 (32.1%) males. Eighteen female participants were members of a sorority, while 8 males were members of a fraternity. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 52 with a mean age of 24.

Table 1

*Type of Institution*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Predominantly White Institution (PWI)	54	66.7	66.7	66.7
Historically Black College and University (HBCU)	27	33.3	33.3	100.0
Total	81	100.0	100.0	

There were 11 (13.6%) freshmen, 13 (16%) sophomores, 13 (16%) juniors, 21 (25.9%) seniors, and 19 (23.5%) graduate students. Four students (4.8%) listed their classification as “Other”. Seventy-two (86.7%) participants reported that they were single, while 9 (10.8%) were married, and 2 (2.4%) were divorced.

## Analysis of Hypotheses

**Research Question 1:** Will there be a significant difference in race-based rejection sensitivity between African American students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and African American students who attend Predominantly White Institutions?

**Hypothesis 1:** There will be a significant difference in race-based rejection between African American students at HBCUs and PWIs.

The Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire-Race is divided into two categories. One set of questions assessed how likely participants felt they would be rejected based on race. The other set of questions assessed how concerned they were about being rejected based on race. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) revealed no significant difference in “rejection likely” between the two groups of students based solely on educational environment. Students at PWIs did not feel that rejection was any more likely than students who attended HBCUs. However, there was a significant difference in scores regarding “concern about rejection” between African American students at PWIs and HBCUs. Students at HBCUs were more likely to be concerned about race-based rejection  $F(1, 81) = 1.80, P < .05$ . (see Table 3). The observed power of .605 indicates moderate generalizability to other African American student.

Table 2

*Mean and Standard Deviation Regarding Concern about Rejection*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predominantly White Institution (PWI)	31.8704	11.69591	54
Historically Black College and University (HBCU)	39.2963	14.19321	27
Total	34.3457	12.98091	81



Table 3

*Tests of Between-Subject effects: Concern about Rejection*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power <sup>b</sup>
Corrected Model	774.079 <sup>a</sup>	1	774.079	5.082	.027	.059	5.082	.605
Intercept	93639.621	1	93639.621	614.722	.000	.884	614.722	1.000
School	774.079	1	774.079	5.082	.027	.059	5.082	.605
Error	12338.595	81	152.328					
Total	111731.000	83						
Corrected Total	13112.675	82						

<sup>a</sup> R Squared = .059 (Adjusted R Squared = .047)

<sup>b</sup> Computed using alpha = .05

**Research Question 2:** Will there be a significant difference in perceptions of race-based rejection between African American male and female students?

**Hypothesis 2:** African American male students will report higher levels of race-based rejection sensitivity compared to African American female students at both HBCUs and PWIs.

When accounting for gender, there was a significant difference in “rejection likely”. Males collectively (HBUCs and PWIs) felt that rejection was more likely as compared to female participants  $F(1, 78) = 4.632, p < .05$ . When accounting for gender and educational environment, Analysis of Variance revealed that males at HBCUs scored significantly higher on “rejection likely” than the other three groups (AA males at PWI, AA females at PWI, and AA females at HBUCs)  $F(1, 76) = 6.293, p < .05$  (see Table #4). African American males at HBCUs were significantly more likely to believe that they would be rejected based on race.

Table 4

*Test of Between-Subjects effects: rejection likely*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power <sup>b</sup>
Corrected Model	1580.798 <sup>a</sup>	3	526.933	4.530	.006	.148	13.590	.869
Intercept	75625.000	1	75625.000	650.128	.000	.893	650.128	1.000
HBCU/PWI	405.735	1	405.735	3.488	.066	.043	3.488	.454
Gender	503.041	1	503.041	4.325	.041	.053	4.325	.537
HBCU/PWI *	857.653	1	857.653	7.373	.008	.086	7.373	.765
Gender								
Error	9073.214	78	116.323					
Total	104835.000	82						
Corrected Total	10654.012	81						

<sup>a</sup> R Squared = .148 (Adjusted R Squared = .116)

<sup>b</sup> Computed using alpha = .05

**Research Question 3:** Will there be a difference in satisfaction with life between African American students who attend PWIs and HBCUs?

**Hypothesis 3:** African American students who attend HBCUs will report higher satisfaction with life than African American students who attend PWIs.

As hypothesized, African American students who attended HBCUs ( $M = 26$ ) reported significantly higher scores on the Satisfaction with Life Scale compared to African American students from PWIs ( $M = 24$ ),  $F(2, 76) = 3.345$ ,  $p < .05$  (see Table 6).

Table 5

*Mean: Satisfaction with Life*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predominantly White Institution (PWI)	23.2500	5.82717	52
Historically Black College and University (HBCU)	26.9259	4.42828	27
Total	24.5063	5.64068	79

Table 6

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects: Satisfaction*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power <sup>b</sup>
Corrected Model	240.145 <sup>a</sup>	1	240.145	8.249	.005	.097	8.249	.810
Intercept	44743.588	1	44743.588	1536.962	.000	.952	1536.962	1.000
SCHOOL	240.145	1	240.145	8.249	.005	.097	8.249	.810
Error	2241.602	77	29.112					
Total	49926.000	79						
Corrected Total	2481.747	78						

<sup>a</sup> R Squared = .097 (Adjusted R Squared = .085)

<sup>b</sup> Computed using alpha = .05

**Research Question 4:** Will there be a difference in sense of belonging between African American students who attend HBCUs and PWIs?

**Hypothesis 4:** African American students who attend HBCUs will report greater sense of belonging than African American students who attend PWIs.

The Sense of Belonging survey is divided into two sections. The first part is the SOBI-A, and it assessed antecedents of sense of belonging. The second part (SOBI-P) assessed psychological functioning. The scores on the SOBI-P are negatively scored, with low scores representing higher sense of belonging. Analysis of Variance revealed no significant difference in sense of belonging between students from PWIs and HBCUs for SOBI-A,  $F(1,79) = 3.51, p > .05$ . There was also no significant difference in SOBI-P,  $F(1, 77) = 4.85, p > .05$ . An observed power of .442 suggests moderate generalizability (see Table 7).

Table 7

*Tests of Between-Subjects effects: SOBI-A*

Source	Type III Sum		Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial		
	of Squares	df				Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power <sup>b</sup>
Corrected Model	69.358 <sup>a</sup>	1	69.358	3.376	.070	.041	3.376	.442
Intercept	115093.358	1	115093.358	5602.331	.000	.986	5602.331	1.000
SCHOOL	69.358	1	69.358	3.376	.070	.041	3.376	.442
Error	1622.963	79	20.544					
Total	129062.000	81						
Corrected Total	1692.321	80						

<sup>a</sup> R Squared = .041 (Adjusted R Squared = .029)

<sup>b</sup> Computed using alpha = .05

**Research Question 5:** Will there be a correlation between the sense of belonging and life satisfaction for African American students.

**Hypothesis 5:** There will be a correlation between sense of belonging and satisfaction with life for African American students.

Bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to determine if there was a correlation between the level of satisfaction with life and the sense of belonging. For the sense of belonging the two subcategories, SOBI-A and SOBI-P, were analyzed independently. There was a moderate positive correlation between the Satisfaction with Life and Sense of Belonging A (SOBI-A),  $r = .309$ ,  $n = 74$ ,  $p = .001$  (Pearson Correlation = .356). In addition there was a moderate negative correlation between the Satisfaction with Life and the Sense of Belonging P (SOBI-P),  $r = -.463$ ,  $n = 74$ ,  $p = .000$  (Pearson Correlation = -.433).

Table 8

*Bivariate Analysis: Sense of Belonging and Satisfaction with Life*

		Satisfaction	SOBI-P	SOBI-A
	Pearson Correlation	1	-.433**	.356**
Satisfaction	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.001
	N	79	77	79
	Pearson Correlation	-.433**	1	-.006
SOBI-P	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.957
	N	77	79	79
	Pearson Correlation	.356**	-.006	1
SOBI-A	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.957	
	N	79	79	81

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Research Question 6:** Will there be a significant difference in sense of belonging between African American students who are members of Greek-letter organizations and students who are not affiliated with Greek-letter organizations?

**Hypothesis 6:** African American students who are members of Greek-letter organizations will report greater sense of belonging compared to students who are not members of Greek-letter organizations.

Data were collected to assess the hypothesis that students who were members of Greek-Letter organizations would report greater sense of belonging compared to students who were not members of Greek-letter organizations. This study collected surveys from 18 females who reported being members of a sorority, and 8 males who identified as fraternity members. The sample collected was too small to achieve adequate observed power. This study was unable to determine if Greek-letter membership affected sense of belonging in students at PWIs or HBCUs.

## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if African American students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Predominantly White Institutions expressed differences in social experiences depending on the type of school they attend. It was hypothesized, based on review of the literature, that African American students who attended HBCUs would report greater sense of belonging and score higher on the Satisfaction with Life Scale. In addition, it was reasoned that African American students from PWIs would report greater sensitivity to race-based rejection sensitivity due to their minority status on campus. The differences in the history of HBCUs and PWIs for African American students have been well researched from various perspectives. Given the history of rejection and discrimination in early years of integration of PWIs, the question was whether African American students continued to fear they would be rejected based on race. HBCUs have been recognized for their history of educating African American students in safe and nurturing environments (Thomas & Green, 2001). In many ways, assessing African American students at PWIs to determine their fears of race-based rejection speaks to their perceptions of race relations on campus. If students at PWIs don't perceive faculty, staff, and peers as being biased against them, they may not expect or be concerned about rejection.

Data were also collected to determine if membership in Greek-letter organizations created a stronger sense of belonging for students who joined. Black Greek-letter organizations have been around since the early 1900's to serve as a system of support for African Americans in

college. These organizations promote a sense of brother or sister hood among members with visible signs of belonging, such as wearing paraphernalia with the group's Greek letters. This study sought to examine whether that type of support translated to feelings of belonging overall, and/or increased a student's satisfaction with life.

This study also assessed whether there were gender differences among African American students regarding perceptions of race-based rejection. The literature has been fairly consistent regarding the different ways in which African American males and females are treated in society, and often on college campuses (Strayhorn, 2008a). According to Strayhorn, African American males are not only underrepresented at PWIs, but HBCUs as well. The study examined how gender influenced perceptions of social interactions as it related to acceptance and belonging.

### **Race-Based Rejection Sensitivity**

Results of the analysis of data indicated a significant difference based on educational environment regarding "rejection concern" when comparing African American students at Predominantly White Institutions with African American students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Although this study hypothesized that there would be a difference based on educational environment, it was unexpected to find that the African American students who attended HBCUs were more concerned about race-based rejection. A review of the literature suggested that those who are in the minority in their environment would be more concerned or sensitive about the possibility of being rejected (Mendoza et al., 2008). However, in this study students at HBCUs were more likely to report their concern about rejection. The experience of students attending college where the majority of students are African American did not seem to insulate these students from concerns about race-based issues.



In an effort to explain why students at HBCUs would be more concerned about rejection, several possible conclusions were explored. First, the questions from the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire-Race not only include questions regarding the college environment, but general society as well. For example, questions on the assessments included scenarios about being stopped by police, and followed by sales clerks when shopping. These are issues that many African Americans face at some point in their lives. So despite the type of college they attend, racism and discrimination are issues that are essentially unavoidable for most people of color. One potential difference is that students who attend HBCUs may not have as many opportunities to interact with peers and faculty of other races. Their negative experiences are not as easily balanced by more positive interactions. Therefore, the negative impressions are what may remain when opportunities for interaction with White faculty and students are limited.

Most of the studies on race relations and college transition focus primarily on students at PWIs because they are viewed as more vulnerable to these issues. Due to this, the focus is not often enough placed on HBCU students to assess and address adjustment regarding racial rejection in higher education. When HBCU student groups are studied regarding rejection in higher education, they generally serve as a comparison group for those at PWIs (Harper, Carini, Bridge, & Hayek, 2004). Although the concerns of students at PWIs and HBUCs are often perceived as different, they face many of the same experiences and obstacles in life. However, the expectation is that African American students who attend HBUCs are somehow insulated or sheltered from concerns of race-based rejection.

Mendoza-Denton et al. (2002) suggest that there are consequences to rejection sensitivity that are often seen in the nature of the relationships between those who fear stigma-based rejection and the people who are seen as the “rejecters”. They further suggest that those

consequences can include creating a sense of hyper-vigilance when in the presence of people who are subject to reject or exclude. In addition, sense of belonging may be affected, as well as the person's ability to engage academically. For students at HBUCs, this hypervigilance may not be experienced in their academic environment; however they may continue to be concerned about rejection based on their interactions in society in general.

Despite the significant difference in concern about rejection, there was no significant difference in "likelihood of rejection" based on type of school. Participants at HBCUs did not report any greater expectation of likelihood of rejection than students at PWIs even though they reported being more concerned about race-based rejection. Although students at PWIs have more exposure to faculty and students of other races and ethnicities, they did not report being any more concerned that they were going to face rejection from others based on their race.

These results may seem counter intuitive and inconsistent with much of the research conducted on minority transition to PWIs. Many of the studies on PWI transition paint the picture of racially motivated bias and obstacles that African Americans have to maneuver to graduate from college. In addition, some research suggests that many African American students at PWIs are more likely to experience additional emotional complications such as depression and anxiety as a result of coping with discrimination and rejection (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002). The current study suggests that students at PWIs were less likely to be concerned, and were not more likely to expect that faculty and other students were going to reject them.

There is a body of research that is consistent with the results of this study. Page-Gould et al. (2008) suggest that minority students who have more cross-race friends and interactions are less likely to fear being rejected based on race. Page-Gould et al. (2008) also reported that significant relationships with other races, particularly Whites, can make the transition to

primarily white environments easier for minorities. They further suggest that being in an environment with majority white students or having substantial relationships with them, helps disabuse minorities of their irrational fears and concerns.

### **Gender Differences**

The comparisons of HBCUs and PWIs did not yield significant differences in “rejection likely”. However, it is only when analysis included gender and educational environment that a significant difference regarding “rejection likely” emerged. There was a significant difference in ‘rejection likely’ between African American males at HBCUs and the three other groups (AA women at HBCUs, AA males and females at PWIs). By far, African American males who attended HBCUs in this sample had greater expectation that race-based rejection was likely as measured by the scenarios provided in the assessment.

Although scores for African American males at HBCUs were significantly higher than those of males at PWIs, both groups were higher than scores for women. Therefore, men were more likely to expect that rejection was likely than their female counterparts. African American males in particular have consistently struggled with issues of discrimination and negative stereotypes that brand them as criminals or dangerous figures (Strayhorn, 2008a). Due to this perception, it is thought that society treats them differently. African American males who attend college often carry the baggage of these negative stereotypes. African American males in this society receive more attention for ongoing drug and gang violence, criminal behavior, and increasing incarceration rates. In addition, Strayhorn (2008a) further notes that descriptions such as being lazy and unintelligent not only affects a person’s perceptions of their place in society, but may also affect self-esteem as well. Despite attending college, many African American males are treated based on the stereotypes that others have of them. Based on results of this

study it appears that African American males are cognizant of this difference in treatment, and they readily expect that rejection is likely to occur.

Romero-Canyas and Downey (2005) also discussed how African American students can become hyper-vigilant and over assessing interactions with the majority culture for signs of discrimination and rejection. This hyper-vigilance and expectation of rejection is especially concerning given the desperate plight of African American males in higher education. There are already many noted difficulties that prevent more African American males from attending or graduating from college. According to Strayhorn (2010), the percentage of students who are African American males in college has not increased since the 1970s. He suggests that African American males make up only 5% of undergraduate college students. African American women outnumber males by 2 to 1 in higher education (Provasnic & Shafner, 2004). Even when attending HBUCs, males have been greatly underrepresented on campus.

An explanation regarding why African American males at PWIs were less likely to be concerned about rejection (despite historical challenges academic integration) can partially be explained by the research by Page-Gould et al. (2008). They suggest that African American students who attend PWIs would be less likely to fear rejection due to their increased positive contacts and interactions with members of the majority population. So, even if they had an incident that they felt was racially motivated, they have numerous other opportunities to see that not all White people will treat them poorly. Graham, Baker, and Wapner (1985) further asserted that students who have exposure to diverse or predominantly White interaction prior to college will be better able to adjust to PWIs as well. More frequent interactions create opportunities to see commonalities with people from diverse backgrounds instead of focusing primarily on differences. Cole and Yip (2008) studied what they called “outgroup comfort” to determine how

it affected African American college students' experiences. They described "outgroup comfort" as a person's level of comfort interacting with people outside of their racial group. They found that African American students who were high in "outgroup comfort" reported higher contact with members of the majority culture.

It is difficult to change student's perceptions and fears of rejection when their experiences remain the same. In some instances, students are exposed to people who are biased and treat them poorly simply because of their race or ethnicity. Even if this treatment does not occur in an educational environment, those feelings and fears are probably carried to that environment as well. The questions on the rejection sensitivity assessment measures a person's perceptions and concern about rejection as opposed to their actual prior experiences. However, it is reasonable that many of the fears and concerns a person has may be rooted not only in their experiences, but from observations of others as well. In addition, many students are aware of the history poor treatment of African Americans in higher education. It is important to note that just because person feels comfortable with members of other races and cultures, does not mean that they will not be victims of bias and discrimination. African American students present to college with varying backgrounds and experiences. Much of their perspective of race, racial and personal identity, and perceptions of others can be greatly shaped by their socioeconomic status, academic preparation, and personal experiences with discrimination (Graham et al., 1985).

### **Sense of Belonging**

This paper has addressed the difficulties African American students have historically encountered while attending PWIs. Decades of racism, discrimination, and social isolation have prompted notable differences in experiences between African American students who attend HBCUs and PWIs. Many African Americans experienced overt forms of rejection during the

early years of educational integration (Eagles, 2009; Pratt, 2002). As a result, sense of belonging has been a major issue for many students who are the minority in their educational environment. Although the racial climate has been moving in a more racially inclusive manner since the 1960s, there are still concerns about the discrimination and inequality.

Despite this history, results of this study indicated that there was no significant difference between African American students from PWIs and HBCUs regarding sense of belonging. Contrary to the research suggesting that African American students who attend PWIs will have greater difficulty adjusting to campus environment, responses in this sample did not result in a statistical difference. This study suggests that students at PWIs are no less likely to feel they belonged than students attending a college where they are in the majority. As a possible explanation for these, consideration has to be given to changes at PWIs. As Allen (1992) notes, many institutions of higher education have made a concerted effort to address changes in multicultural inclusion and acceptance. Based on this study, students appear to be transitioning into PWIs without as many concerns about rejection and racism. Without the fear or concern about being rejected, students are able to feel more like they belong. This study suggests that students can attend a PWI or HBCU and still have a reasonable expectation of fitting in and feeling like they belong. If other variables are in place, students can thrive in diverse educational environments.

Jay and D'Augelli (1991) noted in their study that even when African American students at PWIs reported that they didn't have as many social supports as their white counterparts, they didn't consider their support as inadequate. They were able to make the best of the support that was available. It appears that this may be the case for many students who attend PWIs. They are able to find other students, groups, and activities to immerse themselves in their environment to

help them feel connected. These students may rely on each other much more than students at HBCUs. The majority of the activities at HBCUs are geared towards African American students, and students may not feel as great a need to band together to get through the college experience. African American students at PWIs may form closer bonds because of the stronger need to rely on others for social support and assistance. Despite being in the minority, these close social relationships may help instill that sense of companionship and belonging. These social relationships may bolster their ability to cope with challenges.

For students who attend PWIs, there may be some recognition from the start that their experiences may differ from their White counterparts. They may become immediately aware that there are not many other African American students or faculty on campus. Their level of discomfort or fear may influence the degree or urgency that they seek supportive interactions with others. Those interactions may include building friendships, joining groups, or other social outlets to help increase feelings of comfort. Perhaps, going into an environment where they know they will be in the minority, students may prepare by moderating their expectations. Mendoza-Denton et al. (2008) reported in their study that African American students at PWIs are often able to forgo pursuit of belonging for the purpose of achieving their ultimate goal of graduating from college. In addition, they may make better use of the support that is available to them through their bonds with other minority students and social activities.

Modern technological conveniences also give students opportunities to stay connected with others, which may increase feelings of belonging where ever they go. Students often utilize sites such as Facebook and Twitter to communicate feelings, thoughts, actions (via pictures) with family and friends regardless of where they reside. Easy access to personal cell phones and text messages places family and friends simply a call or text away. Students also have access to sites

such as Skype that allows for visual and verbal interactions with others. Like no other generation before them, students today have a chance to essentially bring their social support and networks to college with them through easy access to social networking. In addition to using social networking to communicate with family and friends from home, Tynes, Rose, and Markoe (2013) suggest that students may use these sites to enhance their interactions with individuals and groups on their campus. They also caution that just as students can encounter rejection and discrimination on campus, the same type of challenges may also apply to social media as well.

One potential difference in this research may be the difference in age of the participants. Many studies included primarily traditional age undergraduate students. However, participants in this study ranged in age from 19 to 52, with over 23% from graduate school programs. Studies have shown (including this one) that graduate level students report different experiences regarding life satisfaction and sense of belonging. The results regarding sense of belonging may be more representative of more life experiences and maturity than other studies that reveal difference in sense of belonging between students based on schools.

### **Satisfaction with Life**

Satisfaction with life has been widely associated with other variables such as high self-esteem and optimism (Paolini, Yanez, & Kelly, 2006). Perceptions of social support have been said to have a great impact on a person's satisfaction with life. In this study, students from HBCUs reported greater satisfaction with life than African American students at PWIs. Despite the indication that students at HBCUs reported greater concerns about rejection and males having greater expectations of rejection as well, their level of satisfaction remain higher than African American students at PWIs. Attending a university where they are in the majority did not insulate HBCU students from issues of race and discrimination. However, it appears to



provide an atmosphere of support in a manner that influences their level of satisfaction. These results are very much consistent with the literature that reports that students at HBCUs will have more positive social experiences, thus creating a greater sense of satisfaction with their environment. Despite the body of research that supports the benefits of cross racial interactions for African American students, Clark and Antonio (2012) suggest that the research is conflicting. While some research advocates for cross racial interactions, some believe that African American students who attend school with same race students can bolster self-esteem and overall satisfaction with life.

Factors such as increased social interactions/options (Davis, 1991), increase opportunity for leadership roles, and closer relationships with faculty have been attributed to greater satisfaction for students at HBUC (Thomas & Green, 2001). Numerous other studies have weighed in regarding other reasons why students at HBUCs tend to be more satisfied with life. In particular, a study by Strayhorn (2008a) examined the relationship between supportive relationships, academic achievement and satisfaction. He found that for African American males in particular, having supportive relationships with others (faculty, peers, etc) was positively related to satisfaction. Fife et al. (2011) studied social support, satisfaction with life and religious commitment among African American and White students. For both groups, they found a significant relationship between social support and satisfaction with life.

Interestingly, although African American students at PWIs reported less concern regarding the likelihood of rejection, they did not report the same level of life satisfaction as their HBCU counterparts. In addition, African American students at PWIs have consistently reported less satisfaction than their HBCU counterparts as well as white students at PWIs (Worthington et al., 2008). Thus, it appears that the largest groups of African American college students (those

who attend PWIs) are seemingly the least satisfied student group. The statistical analysis comparing students from PWIs and HBCUs as to satisfaction with life yielded the highest power analysis (.810) of any of the other variables assessed in this study. This suggests a greater ability to generalize these results to other African American students who attend HBCUs and PWIs.

Although studies are needed to help understand and improve the experiences of African American students, many variables have to be taken into consideration before the results are fully understood. African Americans in general and students in particular, are not homogenous groups. There are many different factors and experiences they bring in with them that influence their ability to succeed and their level of satisfaction with life. Precollege experiences vary depending on factors such as family structure, socioeconomic status, precollege preparation, and multicultural relationships with others (Graham, Baker, & Wapner, 1984).

### **Greek-letter Membership**

This study also attempted to examine the role of campus membership in helping students feel more connected to the campus environment. There were not enough participants who were members of Greek-letter organizations to adequately assess what effects, if any, that membership would have in adjusting to the social environment. As already noted, students who are in an environment where they have more social support seem to report greater satisfaction. The initial purpose of African American fraternities and sororities was to provide a sense of social, emotional, and academic support during the early 1900s. More recently, these organizations continue to help students connect with others by engaging in social activities, and conducting group activities.

### **Satisfaction with Life and Sense of Belonging**

Bivariate correlation analysis revealed that the Satisfaction with Life Scale was moderately positively correlated with the Sense of Belonging Instrument-A (SOBI-A). This indicates that higher scores on questions regarding antecedents of belonging are more likely to be related to greater satisfaction with life. SOBI-A is assessed using statements such as, “In the past, I have felt valued and important to others”, and “I can make myself fit in anywhere” (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996). It suggests that students who are more likely to feel valued, and have meaningful connection with others were more likely to report greater satisfaction. The Satisfaction with Life Scale was moderately negatively correlated with SOBI-P. The SOBI-P questions assessed the psychological experiences, and includes questions such as, “I am troubled by feeling like I have no place in this world” (Hagerty et al., 1996) Questions for the SOBI-P are negatively stated, so those who score lower on the assessment would be reporting greater sense of belonging. Therefore the negative correlation suggests that students who scored lower were more likely to be satisfied with life.

### **Implications for Counselors and Psychologist**

The results of this study may have many implications for counselors and psychologists. Those who provide psychological services to college students can play an important role helping students transition to their new environment. Campus counseling centers can provide students with the individual and group services needed to help cope with issues of isolation, loneliness, depression, and anxiety (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). In addition, psychologist and counselors can help bridge the gap for students and faculty at PWIs by initiating programs educate them regarding issues related to inclusion and diversity. Although college transition issues may be consistent despite the type of college attended, PWIs and HBCUs may have some concerns that

are specific to their educational environment. Based on the results of this study, more attention should be directed to helping African American students on HBCU campuses deal with concerns about race-based rejection. Addressing these concerns while they are in college may help students in their transition from college to employment.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study initially hoped to determine if fraternity and sorority membership influenced students' sense of belonging and overall satisfaction with life. This research question was unable to be determined because there were not enough participants who indicated that they were members of a fraternity or sorority. Additional studies will be needed to determine if these types of membership helped students feel more connected to their environment or increased their level of satisfaction.

Another factor that, although positive in one aspect, may also be seen as a limitation in this study. Many other studies that assess student populations regarding sense of belonging and rejection sensitivity focused primarily on undergraduate students. For this study, graduate students represented 23% of respondents. By contrast, studies on sense of belonging by Morrow and Ackermann (2012), and Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, and Woods (2009) focused on first year students only. So, the results of this study may not be comparable to many of the other studies on the same topic, particularly those that focus on undergraduate student populations only. Results of this study indicated that graduate level students reported greater sense of belonging, and satisfaction with life than their undergraduate counterparts. Therefore, academic classification made a difference in regarding the results in these variables. Given the large percentage of graduate students in the study, results may not be representative of other studies conducted in undergraduate college settings. In addition to difference in classification, the ages

of participants in this study varied. Their ages ranged from 18 to 52, with a mean age of 23. Older students may have a very different perspective on life and belonging based on maturity and life experiences. Having a wide range of ages represented in this study was helpful because it was representative of range of students who were actually attending college. However, it may not be reasonable to generalize results to traditional aged undergraduate students.

Another limitation may be the small sample size yielded by the request for participants. Participants were solicited via internet social networking sites, and participation was limited. In addition, many of the respondents did not complete the survey, rendering them unusable. Due to the small sample size, several statistical analyses intended for this study were unable to be completed due to weak power analysis. Of the statistical analysis that were conducted, the comparison of sense of belonging between African American students at PWIs and HBCUs yielded only moderate power, possibly limiting generalizability.

There were several lessons learned during the collection of data for this study. First, using social media to solicit participants can be an unreliable way of obtaining the needed sample size to adequately run the data. Although this medium helps to reach more people than standard methods, it does not guarantee greater number of participants. People use social media to gather information, however it does not necessarily mean that they trust the information they receive. For example, many internet users may be leery about clicking on links they are not familiar with due to the frequency of internet viruses.

For future studies based on internet participation, care should be taken to research the success or failure that other researchers have encountered when using that internet medium for data collection. In addition, internet solicitations can be used in conjunction with other methods of collection to increase surveys instead of relying solely on the internet as a source of collection.

However, Weigold, Weigold, and Russell (2013) addressed several cautionary issues when using mixed collection procedures. They suggested that multiple methods (such as paper pencil vs internet) may inadvertently attract different types of participants, making it difficult to compare or place in one category.

There is one suggestion that may improve data collection and usable data when collecting on the internet. Although there were 101 surveys started in this study, only 81 were complete or usable. Some of the incomplete surveys appear as though the participants were curious and only completed the first few questions. However, the majority of the incomplete surveys were almost complete except for the last instrument or two. In hindsight, it may have been beneficial to add a meter that would alert participants as to how much of the survey they have completed, so they will know how close they are to finishing. It appears as if they got tired of answering questions, and exited the program. Perhaps if they knew they were 85% or 90% done, they would have continued to completion.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

This study was designed to determine if students who are in different educational environments have different social experiences or expectations based on race-based fears of rejection and sense of belonging. Given the difficult challenges African American students have historically encountered in higher education and society, it is important to continue to monitor the social climate that students experience. Continued assessments of African American students who attend PWIs (based on comparisons with students at HBCUs and White students at PWIs), can help determine when their experiences are comparable to or better than that of other students. Given the disparity of educational attendance and attrition between African American and White students, efforts should be made to understand the types of issues that hinder academic progress.

Another recommendation for future research is to assess the effects of Greek letter membership regarding factors relating to college transition and educational experiences. One of the original goals of this study was to examine how membership in Greek letter organizations affected students' sense of belonging and satisfaction with life. This study was unable to recruit enough participants who were members of fraternities and sororities to assess the effects of membership on the various variables. However, adding this type of research to the literature is important. Black Greek-letter membership has been an option for African American students dating back to the early 1900s. Future studies can determine if these organizations or other group memberships improve the college experiences for students who are in the minority on their campus.

Given the unique challenges that African American males face in higher education, more research is needed to determine what factors may be instrumental in increasing their feelings of acceptance and belonging. Research geared towards understanding the needs of African American males in higher education can potentially have profound effects on other societal issues. Not only does it impact the individual regarding personal feelings of accomplishments, but also reflects on African Americans as a group. Males often have to overcome societal stereotypes that often brand them as criminals or dangerous. Increasing the number of college graduates can serve to change the tide of impressions of African American males in a more positive direction.

Further research is also needed to address many of the theories and suggestions presented regarding the college transition of minority students. Dahlvig (2010) provided a synopsis of research on the use of mentoring to help African American students at PWIs. She suggested that providing students with options for faculty mentoring may benefit students academically and

emotionally. She further suggested that having cross race mentors would be as effective as same race mentors. It was acknowledged that possible problems that may occur with cross race mentoring if issues such as cultural bias are not properly examined. Further research can help assess the benefits of such mentoring, as well as how that would impact mentees relationships with students of other races who do not receive the same opportunities for mentoring.

Research duplicating this study would also be helpful, particularly when controlling for location of participants. This study used the internet to recruit participants. Therefore, the locations and regions of the participants' schools were identifiable. Research that actively selects the universities where participants will be solicited will allow for better comparisons regarding variables such as regions (southern schools vs. northern schools). Other useful information can include comparisons of experiences based on school size to assess whether larger universities differ from smaller schools. It would be interesting to study these variables in undergraduate students only, instead of including graduate students. The results of this study are reflective of some students who have considerable life experience, and may not be consistent with students who are leaving home for the first time to attend college.

Studies that highlight African American student transition seem to primarily focus on PWIs. Given that HBCU students in this study reported that they were more concerned about race-based rejection, more research is needed to better understand how HBCU students are able to address and cope with fears and concerns regarding rejection. In addition, it would be important to understand the impact of those concerns regarding their academic and employment transition. If African American students are benefited from their interaction with cross race faculty, staff and students, how would students at HBCUs begin to address these concerns in their academic environment? Research would be helpful to determine if concerns about rejection



seems to be a factor for African American high school students regarding the type of college they choose to attend.

Modern technology makes it possible for students to stay connected to family and friends in a manner that was not available to previous generations. Easy access to cellphones, social media, and programs that allow people to view one another on screen creates more opportunities to connect with others. More studies are needed regarding the impact of social technology on African American students to determine if social networking helps to bridge the gap between them and their support systems.

### **Summary**

African American students are taking advantage of all options available to them for higher education. Despite the historical problems African American students have encountered at PWIs, results of this study suggest that they are finding ways to transition into the campus environment. Previous research suggested that African American students at PWIs would be more concerned about rejection, and not feel the same sense of belonging as students who attend HBCUs. This study revealed that African American students who attend PWIs are finding ways to socially integrate without excessive fears of being rejected based on their race. Many studies suggest that minority students who have positive interactions with diverse cultures are better able to cope with the uncertainty in new situations where they are in the minority (Page-Gould et al., 2008; Strayhorn, 2008b). This appears to have some relevance for students in this study.

Despite the fact that HBCU students were more concerned about race-based rejection, they did not feel it was more likely to occur than students at PWIs. Downey and Feldman (1996) noted that studies of the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (the assessment the RSQ-Q was derived from), revealed that the “rejection likely” and “rejection concerned” sections did not co-

vary. Therefore it is not surprising that students who reported being concerned about rejection did not also feel that rejection was likely.

Students at PWIs are reporting experiences more comparable to those at HBCUs than previous research has indicated. There may be numerous plausible reasons why the gap is narrowing regarding these experiences. It may be partially attributed to the fact that the social and academic atmosphere is changing in a favorable manner at PWIs. In addition, younger generations (African American and White students) are further removed from the days of segregation and the civil rights movement. They may naturally be more inclined to engage in activities together, creating an environment of inclusion.

Despite the fact that both groups have similar experiences and concerns, HBCU students are more satisfied overall with life. Satisfaction with life has been associated with many positive variables that could be attributed to increasing the quality of life for African American students. Further research can help to identify ways to bridge the gap in life satisfaction between African American students at HBCUs and PWIs. Consistent with the literature, HBCUs continue to provide students with the type of support that appears to increase feelings of satisfaction. Although students at PWIs did not report the same level of satisfaction, it appears that progress has been made in helping students feel a stronger sense of belonging in general. That appears to be an important step towards increasing level of satisfaction for the PWI students.

This discussion does not intend to suggest that students at PWIs don't continue to experience rejection or discrimination on campus. The results do not indicate that they didn't have fears or concerns about rejection, only that they were not as great as those expressed by students at HBCUs in this study. Assisting students who experience fears and concerns about rejection and acceptance is only a part of the equation. When students continue to experience

racism and discrimination, it makes it difficult to overcome fears and cope with rejection. In addition to personal experiences, students are exposed to constant stories in the media that highlight the fact that racial disparity and discrimination continue to divide citizens in this country.

Part of the challenge of addressing the needs of African American students is to recognize that they are a diverse group with diverse needs. Regardless of the type of school they attend, the experiences that students encounter prior to college influences their confidence and ability to thrive in new situations. Many neighborhoods and communities across the United States are integrated. Some African American students attend high schools that are racially mixed, or where they are in the minority. Having these types of experiences prior to college may minimize some of the fear and anxiety when attending PWIs. However, in some cases it may heighten these fears depending on the type of experiences they encountered. Given the differences in life experiences and needs of students, it may be more ideal to have a method of identifying students who are having difficulty socially despite the type of school they attend. Since students at HBCUs reported greater concerns about race-based rejection, it shows the need to provide assistance to students at both educational environments.

It appears that the biggest difference noted between the students groups was in level of satisfaction with life. Students at HBCUs reported being significantly more satisfied with life. It may be that the social outlets, curriculum, and academic support are specifically tailored to address their interests and needs. In addition to structured activities, it may be the overall sense of culture, pride, acceptance, and freedom to live without conforming that improves their feeling of satisfaction. Students at HBCUs don't have to feel conflicted about totally embracing and supporting their school because it is more representative of them. While African American

students may feel a sense of belonging at the PWI they attend, they may be readily aware that much of the fitting in comes at the expense of them conforming to the culture and activities available on a campus. It may be difficult to totally embrace an environment where they know that culture is primarily tailored to the majority population.

In an ideal world, students' experiences and feelings of acceptance would not vary simply based on the type of school they decided to attend. However, ongoing inquiries and investigations are needed to continue to chart changes, improvements, and pursuit of equal educational experiences. These measures are important because they impact so many of the issues that are prevalent in our society. Issues that range from high attrition rates among African American college students to increased poverty levels in minority communities can be influenced by improving the college experience.

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APPENDIX A  
DEMOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT

1. What is your race/ethnicity?  
 African American  
 Other
2. Are you presently enrolled in a college or university?  
 Yes  
 No
3. Select the option that best describes the college or university you attend.  
 Predominantly White Institution (PWI)  
 Historically Black College or University (HBCU)
4. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is your current college classification?  
 Freshmen  
 Sophomore  
 Junior  
 Senior  
 Graduate Student  
 Other
6. What is your current marital status?  
 Single  
 Married  
 Separated  
 Divorced  
 Widowed
7. Are you a member of a campus fraternity or sorority?  
 No  
 Yes, Sorority  
 Yes, Fraternity
8. What is your Gender?  
 Female  
 Male

APPENDIX B

REJECTION SENSITIVITY QUESTIONNAIRE-RACE

**Each of the items below describes new situations that people encounter. Some people are concerned about these new situations and others are not. Please imagine yourself in each situation and circle the number that best indicates how you would feel.**

1. Imagine that you are in class one day, and the professor asks a particularly difficult question. A few people, including yourself, raise their hands to answer the question.

- |  |                             |                       |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) How <b>concerned/anxious</b> would you be that the professor might not choose you because of your race/ethnicity? | very unconcerned<br>1 2 3 4 | very concerned<br>5 6 |
| 2) I would expect that the professor might not choose me because of my race/ethnicity.                               | very unlikely<br>1 2 3 4    | very likely<br>5 6    |

2. Imagine that you are in a pharmacy, trying to pick out a few items. While you're looking at the different brands, you notice one of the store clerks glancing your way.

- |   |                             |                       |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) How <b>concerned/anxious</b> would you be that the clerk might be looking at you because of your race/ethnicity? | very unconcerned<br>1 2 3 4 | very concerned<br>5 6 |
| 2) I would expect that the clerk might continue to look at me because of my race/ethnicity.                         | very unlikely<br>1 2 3 4    | very likely<br>5 6    |

3. Imagine you have just completed a job interview over the telephone. You are in good spirits because the interviewer seemed enthusiastic about your application. Several days later you complete a second interview in person. Your interviewer informs you that they will let you know about their decision soon.

- |  |                             |                       |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) How <b>concerned/anxious</b> would you be that you might not be hired because of your race/ethnicity? | very unconcerned<br>1 2 3 4 | very concerned<br>5 6 |
| 2) I would expect that I might not be hired because of my race/ethnicity.                                | very unlikely<br>1 2 3 4    | very likely<br>5 6    |

4. It's late at night and you are driving down a country road you're not familiar with. Luckily, there is a 24-hour 7-11 just ahead, so you stop there and head up to the counter to ask the young woman for directions.

- |  |                             |                       |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) How <b>concerned/anxious</b> would you be that she might not help you because of your race/ethnicity? | very unconcerned<br>1 2 3 4 | very concerned<br>5 6 |
| 2) I would expect that the woman might not help me because of my race/ethnicity.                         | very unlikely<br>1 2 3 4    | very likely<br>5 6    |

5. Imagine that a new school counselor is selecting students for a summer scholarship fund that you really want. The counselor has only one scholarship left and you are one of several students that is eligible for this scholarship.

- |  |                             |                       |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) How <b>concerned/anxious</b> would you be that the counselor might not choose you because of your race/ethnicity? | very unconcerned<br>1 2 3 4 | very concerned<br>5 6 |
| 2) I would expect that he might not select me because of my race/ethnicity.  | very unlikely<br>1 2 3 4    | very likely<br>5 6    |

6. Imagine you have just finished shopping, and you are leaving the store carrying several bags. It's closing time, and several people are filing out of the store at once. Suddenly, the alarm begins to sound, and a security guard comes over to investigate.

- |  |                             |                       |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) How <b>concerned/anxious</b> would you be that the guard might stop you because of your race/ethnicity? | very unconcerned<br>1 2 3 4 | very concerned<br>5 6 |
| 2) I would expect that the guard might stop me because of my race/ethnicity.                               | very unlikely<br>1 2 3 4    | very likely<br>5 6    |

7. Imagine you are riding the bus one day. The bus is full except for two seats, one of which is next to you. As the bus comes to the next stop, you notice a woman getting on the bus.

1) How **concerned/anxious** would you be that she might avoid sitting next to you because of your race/ethnicity?      very unconcerned      very concerned  
1    2    3    4    5    6

2) I would expect that she might not sit next to me because of my race/ethnicity      very unlikely      very likely  
1    2    3    4    5    6

8. Imagine that you are in a restaurant, trying to get the attention of your waitress. A lot of other people are trying to get her attention as well.

1) How **concerned/anxious** would you be that she might not attend you right away because of your race/ethnicity?      very unconcerned      very concerned  
1    2    3    4    5    6

2) I would expect that she might not attend to me right away because of my race/ethnicity      very unlikely      very likely  
1    2    3    4    5    6

9. Imagine you're driving down the street, and there is a police barricade just ahead. The police officers are randomly pulling people over to check drivers' licenses and registrations.

1) How **concerned/anxious** would you be that an officer might pull you over because of your race/ethnicity?      very unconcerned      very concerned  
1    2    3    4    5    6

2) I would expect that the officers might stop me because of my race/ethnicity.      very unlikely      very likely  
1    2    3    4    5    6

10. Imagine that it's the second day of your new class. The teacher assigned a writing sample yesterday and today the teacher announces that she has finished correcting the papers. You wait for your paper to be returned.

1) How **concerned/anxious** would you be that you might receive a lower grade than others because of your race/ethnicity?      very unconcerned      very concerned  
1    2    3    4    5    6

2) I would expect to receive a lower grade than others because of my race/ethnicity.      very unlikely      very likely  
1    2    3    4    5    6

11. Imagine that you are standing in line for the ATM machine, and you notice the woman at the machine glances back while she's getting her money.

1) How **concerned/anxious** would you be that she might be suspicious of you because of your race/ethnicity?      very unconcerned      very concerned  
1    2    3    4    5    6

2) I would expect that she might be suspicious of me because of my race/ethnicity.      very unlikely      very likely  
1    2    3    4    5    6

12. Imagine you're at a pay phone on a street corner. You have to make a call, but you don't have change. You decide to go into a store and ask for change for your bill.

1) How **concerned/anxious** would you be that the cashier might not give you change because of your race/ethnicity?      very unconcerned      very concerned  
1    2    3    4    5    6

2) I would expect that the cashier might not give me change because of my race/ethnicity.      very unlikely      very likely  
1    2    3    4    5    6

APPENDIX C  
SENSE OF BELONGING INSTRUMENTS  
SOBI-A and SOBI-P



## SENSE OF BELONGING INSTRUMENT

### Antecedents SOBI-A

**Instructions:** Here are some statements with which you may or may not agree. Using the key listed below, circle the number that most closely reflects your feelings about each statement.

**KEY:**

1 = Strongly Disagree    2 = Disagree    3 = Agree    4 = Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. It is important to me that I am valued or accepted by others.	1	2	3	4
2. In the past, I have felt valued and important to others.	1	2	3	4
3. It is important to me that I fit somewhere in this world.	1	2	3	4
4. I have qualities that can be important to others.	1	2	3	4
5. I am working on fitting in better with those around me.	1	2	3	4
6. I want to be a part of things going on around me.	1	2	3	4
7. It is important to me that my thoughts and opinions are valued.	1	2	3	4
8. Generally, other people recognize my strengths and good points.	1	2	3	4
9. I can make myself fit in anywhere.	1	2	3	4
10. All of my life I have wanted to feel like I really belonged somewhere.	1	2	3	4
11. Fitting in with people around me matters a great deal.	1	2	3	4
12. I feel badly if others do not value or accept me.	1	2	3	4
13. Relationships take too much energy for me.	1	2	3	4
14. I just don't feel like getting involved with people.	1	2	3	4

**SENSE OF BELONGING INSTRUMENT**  
**Psychological Experience**  
**SOBI-P**

**Instructions:** Here are some statements with which you may or may not agree. Using the key listed below, circle the number that most closely reflects your feelings about each statement.

**KEY:**  
**1 = Strongly Disagree    2 = Disagree    3 = Agree    4 = Strongly Agree**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I often wonder if there is anyplace on earth where I really fit in.	1	2	3	4
2. I am just not sure if I fit in with my friends.	1	2	3	4
3. I would describe myself as a misfit in most social situations.	1	2	3	4
4. I generally feel that people accept me.	1	2	3	4
5. I feel like a piece of a jig-saw puzzle that doesn't fit into the puzzle.	1	2	3	4
6. I would like to make a difference to people or things around me, but I don't feel that what I have to offer is valued.	1	2	3	4
7. I feel like an outsider in most situations.	1	2	3	4
8. I am troubled by feeling like I have no place in this world.	1	2	3	4
9. I could disappear for days and it wouldn't matter to my family.	1	2	3	4
10. In general, I don't feel a part of the mainstream of society.	1	2	3	4
11. I feel like I observe life rather than participate in it.	1	2	3	4
12. If I died tomorrow, very few people would come to my funeral.	1	2	3	4
13. I feel like a square peg trying to fit into a round hole.	1	2	3	4
14. I don't feel that there is anyplace where I really fit in this world.	1	2	3	4
15. I am uncomfortable that my background and experiences are so different from those who are usually around me.	1	2	3	4
16. I could not see or call my friends for days and it wouldn't matter to them.	1	2	3	4
17. I feel left out of things.	1	2	3	4
18. I am not valued by or important to my friends.	1	2	3	4

## **SCORING FOR THE SENSE OF BELONGING INSTRUMENT, SCALES P AND A**

### **1. Sense of Belonging Instrument-Psychological Experience-(SOBI-P)**

This scale consists of 18 items scored on a 4-point scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree. Strongly agree is 1 point and strongly disagree is 4 points for every item EXCEPT #4, which is reverse scored.

### **2. Sense of Belonging Instrument-Antecedents (SOBI-A)**

This is a revised version of the original scale with one item deleted. In total, there are 14 items. Strongly Agree is scored as 4 points and Strongly Disagree is scored as 1 point in items # 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Strongly Agree is scored as 1 point and Strongly Disagree is scored as 4 points in items # 13, & 14.

APPENDIX D  
SATISFACTION WITH LIFE SCALE

## The Satisfaction with Life Scale

By Ed Diener, Ph.D.

**DIRECTIONS:** Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number in the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Slightly Disagree
- 4 = Neither Agree or Disagree
- 5 = Slightly Agree
- 6 = Agree
- 7 = Strongly Agree

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I am satisfied with life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

APPENDIX E

E-MAIL INVITATION FOR ONLINE SURVEY

## E-MAIL INVITATION FOR ONLINE SURVEY

Dear

I am Teresa Jones, a graduate student in the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling at Auburn University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to examine the social relationships and experiences of African American students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). You may participate if you are an African American student and of legal age in your state. You must also be presently enrolled at a PWI or HBCU.

If you decide to participate in the research study, you will be asked to complete an online survey. The estimated time to complete the survey is 15 to 20 minutes. There are no anticipated risks associated with this study. However, if you become uncomfortable answering questions, you can exit your browser and discontinue participation. There will be no direct benefit or compensation for completing the survey. However, the information you provide will add to the understanding of African American students' experiences in diverse educational environments.

If you would like more information about this study, an information letter can be obtained by clicking on the link below. If you decide to participate after reading the information letter, you can access the survey from the letter by clicking "yes" to proceed.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (334) 538-7748 ([jonestl@tigermail.auburn.edu](mailto:jonestl@tigermail.auburn.edu)) or my advisor, Dr. John Dagley at (334) 844-2978 ([daglejc@auburn.edu](mailto:daglejc@auburn.edu)).

Thank you for your consideration,

Teresa Jones

**PLEASE CLICK HERE TO READ INFORMATION LETTER AND ACCESS THE SURVEY**

APPENDIX F  
IRB APPROVAL FORM



**(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)**

**INFORMATION LETTER**

**for a Research Study entitled**

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from

8/31/12 to 8/30/13

Protocol # 12-284 EX 1208

**"An Examination of Social Relationships and Experiences of African American Students at Predominately White Institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities"**

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine the experiences of African American students who attend Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). This study is being conducted by Teresa Jones, Graduate Student, under the direction of Dr. John Dagley in the Auburn University Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling. You were selected as a possible participant because you are presently enrolled at a PWI or HBCU and are of legal age in your state.

What will be involved if you participate? Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire. Your total time commitment will be approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal, but may involve breach of confidentiality. To further minimize these risks, you will be allowed to complete the survey from a computer location of your choice. No identifiable information will be collected from you.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? There are no immediate benefits to participating in this study. However, the information you provide will add to the understanding of African American students' experiences in different educational environments.

There are no costs associated with this study, and no financial compensation will be provided.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time by closing your browser window. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Once you have submitted anonymous data, it cannot be withdrawn since it will be unidentifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling.

Any data obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous. We will protect your privacy and the data you provide by not collecting personal information that will compromise your identity. Information collected through your participation will be used to fulfill an educational requirement, and may be published in a professional journal.

If you have questions about this study, please contact Teresa Jones at (334) 538-7748 (jonestl@tigermail.auburn.edu) or her graduate advisor, Dr. John Dagley, at (334) 844-2978 (daglejc@auburn.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or e-mail at hsubjec@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

**HAVING READ THE INFORMATION ABOVE, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE CLICK "YES" BELOW.  
YOU MAY PRINT A COPY OF THIS LETTER TO KEEP.**

**Teresa L. Jones**  
Investigator

**9/10/12**  
Date

**The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from August 31, 2012 to August 30, 2013. Protocol #12-284 EX 1208.**

**Consent: Clicking Yes indicates your willingness to voluntarily participate, and that you are of legal age in your state.**

- Yes
- No



The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from  
8/31/12 to 8/30/13  
Protocol # 12-284 EX 1208