Predominantly white institution or historically black college/university: Racial composition of school environment and perceived racism on African American students’ college experiences

Taylor Garland

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Predominantly White Institution or Historically Black College/University: Racial Composition of School Environment and Perceived Racism on African American Students’ College Experiences

by

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Thesis

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Abstract

The current study explored perceived racism, mental health, and coping to see how those concepts might influence how African American students evaluate their college experiences. Additionally, this study explored how school environment (i.e., predominantly White institution [PWI] vs. historically Black college/university [HBCU]) impacted the hypotheses. All participants completed an online questionnaire. Findings for the key hypotheses of this study were mixed. For example, regardless if African American students attended a PWI or HBCU, they were both likely to report similar experiences of perceived racism and negative affect. Despite these and a few other relevant hypotheses not being supported, two significant findings were uncovered. Specifically, African American students at the HBCU were found to utilize more Africultural-based coping behaviors compared to African American students at the PWI. Also, contrary to my hypothesis, endorsement of public regard attitudes was higher at the HBCU compared to the PWI. Implications and future directions are discussed.

Keywords: racism, mental health, coping, PWI, HBCU
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Literature Review

Racism as Experienced by African American Communities

Racism is a system of advantage that privileges some social groups over others based upon arbitrary physical attributes (Wellman, 1993). In the United States of America, African Americans have long been the targets of institutional, interpersonal, and cultural racism. The roots of this type of treatment can be traced back to the times of chattel slavery in this country (Lewis, 1998) and the effects of this negative treatment on African Americans (Bynum, Burton, & Best, 2007; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000) are readily apparent even into the present day. Although racism’s effects are arguably always problematic, theorists are beginning to explore how different gradations of exposure to racism affect the lives of its targets. One line of research explores what is described as a more subtle form of racism called *racial microaggressions*. In general, microaggressions are those relatively inconspicuous, everyday actions directed at members of a marginalized group that cause a negative outcome for the target of such behavior (Donovan, Galban, Grace, Bennett, & Felicié, 2013; Sue et al., 2007). Examples of microaggressions might include (but are not limited to) the following:

1. When African Americans are told, “You don’t sound Black.”
2. When African American males are seen as being paranoid or overreacting when interacting with police officers.
3. Assuming that all African Americans enjoy rap music and sports.
4. Framing a person of color’s individual accomplishments in a manner that suggests that they are a credit to their racial group.
5. Crossing the street to avoid walking too closely to a person of color who happens to be approaching on the same side of the street.

Thus, African Americans are the target of two forms of discrimination: blatant discrimination and subtle, everyday discrimination. In combination, such experiences have been associated with significant negative outcomes in both psychological and physical areas of health. Understanding the impact of racism, particularly as it applies to African American college students, is imperative for this study.

**Mental Health in African American Communities**

In the current study, I aimed to assess African American college students’ experiences with mental health. However, to best understand their experience, let us first discuss the global experience of mental health in African Americans communities.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (2019), in 2017, 30.6% of African American adults with any mental illness (i.e., having any mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder) sought mental health services within the past year. Common mental health disorders experienced by African Americans are major depressive disorder (MDD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicide (National Alliance of Mental Illness, 2018). Although anyone can develop mental health issues, African Americans often experience more severe forms of disorders due to barriers in seeking treatment (e.g., social stigma related to having a mental illness, financial constraints such as poverty, failures in client-provider relationships) and/or lack of access to resources (e.g., an absence of quality mental health services within African American communities; National Alliance of Mental Illness, 2018).
According to a study conducted by Williams et al. (2007), lifetime diagnosis rates for chronic MDD are higher in African Americans (56.5%) compared to their White peers (38.6%). African Americans are also more likely to rate their depressive symptoms as severe or very severe and disabling compared to White peers. Additionally, only 45% of African Americans who met the criteria for MDD received therapy to treat it. There has been discussion about the underdiagnosis of ADHD in African American communities due to some African Americans’ unfamiliarity with symptoms. This could lead to a delay in receiving treatment or no treatment at all (Bailey & Owen, 2005). Furthermore, there has also been discussion of unduly high rates of misdiagnosing African American youth with ADHD by culturally insensitive therapists because these therapists are not assessing if the behavioral symptoms purportedly being displayed actually occur in multiple settings, or that the behavior is not better explained by other circumstances. According to Bailey and Owen (2005), it is a disservice to African American communities if proper information about ADHD symptoms and services are not made available.

PTSD is estimated to range from 9% to 12% in the general population. However, those figures underestimate the experiences that individuals who reside in urban neighborhoods might encounter (Schwartz, Bradley, Sexton, Sherry, & Ressler, 2005). Individuals who reside in urban neighborhoods may be economically disadvantaged, causing the population to be at a higher risk for exposure to traumatic events compared to the general population. Despite the potential for higher rates of PTSD in urban neighborhoods, trauma symptoms are not often recognized; thus, this condition is still being underdiagnosed (Schwartz et al., 2005). African Americans of all ages might encounter various situations that could lead to symptoms of PTSD. For instance, it could range from sexual assault to acts related to police brutality. A prevalent precursor to PTSD in African American communities is neighborhood violence (Cross, et al., 2018; Schwartz et al.,
2005) and/or experiencing more than one traumatic event (Schwartz et al., 2005). According to the study conducted by Schwartz and colleagues (2005), African Americans diagnosed with PTSD were more likely to attempt suicide and have a substance use disorder, compared to African Americans who were not diagnosed with PTSD.

In 2010, African Americans accounted for 13% of the U.S. population (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2013). In 2010, suicide was the 16th leading cause of death among African American communities, but it was the third leading cause of death among African American men ages 15-24. According to prevalence rates, African Americans die of suicide a decade earlier than their White peers. Some significant risk factors associated with suicide are previous suicide attempts, substance use, mood and anxiety disorders, and access to lethal resources (i.e., access to firearms; Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2013). Additionally, while this is not an exhaustive list, other risk factors could include severe medical illness, significant school problems (Osiezagha, Kaur, Barker, & Kennedy Bailey, 2009), marital problems, family conflicts, acculturation, racism and discrimination, and lack of access or use of mental health services (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2013). According to Osiezagha et al. (2009), African American communities might receive little attention for suicidal behavior because of the attributed belief that few African Americans believe in completing suicide or that religious beliefs prevent the action.

Although anxiety disorders were not noted as one of the most common mental health disorders experienced by African American communities according to the National Alliance of Mental Illness (2018), anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses in the United States (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2019; Bandelow & Michaelis, 2015). However, researchers who conducted a study assessing cross-ethnic comparison of lifetime
prevalence rates of anxiety found that generally people of color demonstrate fewer symptoms of most anxiety disorders compared to White Americans (Asnaani, Richey, Dimaite, Hinton, & Hofmann, 2010). Prevalence rates for social anxiety, generalized anxiety, and panic disorder ranged from 3.8% to 8.6% for African Americans compared to 5.1% and 12.6% for White Americans. Although the findings suggested African Americans report fewer symptoms for most anxiety disorders, the study did find that they had the highest rates of PTSD symptoms. Despite the fact that African American individuals experience a multitude of mental health disorders, for the purposes of the current study, I will focus this review on disorders that are most keenly related to the focus of this study (i.e., symptoms of depression and anxiety).

External factors to consider when assessing mental health in African American communities. African American individuals, especially those from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, experience comparatively higher rates of poverty, incarceration (Rehavi & Starr, 2014), excessive policing, and systematic disenfranchisement compared to their White and wealthier counterparts (Brunson, 2007; Desmond, Papachristos, & Kirk, 2016). Daily stressors can also be taxing; some examples of daily stressors that African American families encounter are environmental stress (e.g., overcrowded housing, deterioration of neighborhoods, neighborhood violence, pests), economic stress (e.g., homelessness, access to adequate resources, financial security, upward mobility in the workplace; Mayfield, 1972; McCallum, Arnold, & Bolland, 2002), relationship stress (e.g., conflict or dissatisfaction with spouse, friends, or family), and stress related to racism (McCallum, Arnold, & Bolland, 2002). Stressors such as those that were mentioned are risk factors for experiencing negative affect, which is important to appreciate when considering external factors while assessing marginalized

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1 Prior to the DSM-5, which was released in 2013, PTSD was recognized as an anxiety disorder.
populations. Many of those experiences are highly correlated with also experiencing sundry mental illnesses (Chow, Jaffee, & Snowden, 2003; Copeland, 2005; Mental Health America, 2019).

Additional considerations that should be made are specific gender differences within African American communities as they relate to the association of environmental pressures and mental health. African Americans, particularly African American men, are confronted with numerous institutional roadblocks to obtain success. African American men have the highest incarceration rates and high school dropout rates and are employed in more low-paying jobs than their White peers (Mayfield, 1972). A study by Chung et al. (2014) indicated that among the African American men in their sample, the two main sources of stress were (a) finances and (b) being the target of racism. When considering the lived experience of discrimination among African American women, it is best framed as intersectional. That is, not only do these women have to deal with similar levels of racial discrimination, but they also must simultaneously cope with being the targets of sexism (Shorter-Gooden, 2004). An example of this intersectional oppression is the fact that unique stereotypes exist for African American women. One such stereotype is that African American women are often perceived by the rest of society as indefatigable superwomen (i.e., a woman portraying multiple roles who is perceived as having the strength to handle all of the stressors in her life and the lives of her family, while rarely seeming vulnerable). This perception is thought to cause many African American women to feel pressured to live up to this impossible “ideal” (Woods-Giscombé, 2010). Research suggests that African American women report there are some perceived benefits (i.e., preservation of self, family, and community) from being a brave or resilient woman; however, there are equally perceived liabilities such as developing stress related-health behaviors (i.e., emotional eating,
poor sleep, postponement of self-care) and experiencing increased depression and health difficulties (Hamilton-Mason, Hall, & Everett, 2009; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). African American women are more likely to report experiencing anxiety in comparison to African American men (Banks et al., 2006), although men report more experiences with discrimination (Banks et al., 2006; Forman, Williams, Jackson, & Gardner, 1997; Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

**The Effects of Racism on Mental Health**

Research suggests that regardless of social class, African Americans report experiencing racist events so often that depression, tension, and rage are common presenting problems when members of this group seek psychotherapy (Barbee, 2002). Anxiety (Banks Kohn-Wood, & Spencer, 2006; Pieterse, Todd, Necille, & Carter, 2012), poor physical health (Banks Kohn-Wood, & Spencer, 2006), and lower levels of life satisfaction or happiness (Pieterse, Todd, Necille, & Carter, 2012) are also common problems experienced as a result of enduring racist events.

The effects of racism on the lives of African Americans are profoundly complex, with their deleterious repercussions persisting into modern times (Barbee, 2002; Hope, Hoggard, & Thomas, 2015; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). According to Harrell (2000), African Americans experience six types of race-related stressors. The first is *racism-related life events*. An example of this would be when a person of color is denied a mortgage by a bank due to their race, or when the police engage in systemic over-policing in communities of color. This stressor is initiated by a core social institution (e.g., banks, police departments) that all members of a society must utilize, but these institutions treat some racial groups better than others. *Vicarious racism* is the second category of racism. It is illustrated by situations wherein a person of color observes a member of their racial group being discriminated against, but they are not directly
targeted (e.g., when African Americans see multiple examples in the media of African American men being unjustly murdered by police officers who are more often than not acquitted of wrongdoing). Racist microstressors are the third category of racism (these are essentially the same as the microaggressions discussed earlier in this paper). The fourth type is chronic-contextual stress. This occurs when the aggregated effects of living in a racially biased culture compromise the health and quality of life for people of color. This can be exemplified by having an abundance of liquor stores in urban neighborhoods or out-of-date textbooks in urban public schools. The fifth type of stressor is collective experiences of racism, meaning that sociopolitical manifestations and cultural symbolic racism can be observed and felt by individuals in African American communities. An example would be the negative portrayal of African Americans in the media. The media often highlights negative or stereotypical images of members in African American communities. Thus, when individuals who do not identify as African American consume the information presented by the media, they can develop misconceptions about the ability and nature of African Americans. Lastly, the sixth type of stressor is transgenerational transmission of group traumas. This could be conceptualized as a historically contextualized version of vicarious racism. That is, this stressor results from a shared knowledge of the treatment of African Americans in U.S. history (e.g., enslavement of African people, Jim Crow laws, and racial segregation). Thus, even if it is no longer legal to deny goods and services to people because of their race, knowing that this is a part of our shared history (and that some of the people responsible for such laws are still members of the U.S. Congress) results in a form of ancestral stress and trauma that shapes the relationship that upcoming generations of African American communities have with society as a whole. The stress developed by perceived racism
might lead African Americans to perceive themselves as powerless and vulnerable, due to the frequent exposure to subtle and blatant racist actions (Harrell, 2000).

**Mental Health on College Campuses**

Similar to other populations, college students also experience mental illness; in fact, some research suggests that rates of mental illness in this population overall is on the rise (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Common conditions amongst undergraduate college students include suicidality (particularly male students; Silverman, Meyer, Sloane, Raffel, & Pratt, 1997), depression, and anxiety (particularly for female and low-income students; Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein, & Hefner, 2007). Other areas that commonly lead to poor mental health outcomes for undergraduates are relationship stressors (Blanco et al., 2008; Kisch, Leino, Silverman, 2005), a lack of social supports (Blanco et al., 2008; Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009), and experiencing sexual violence (Stepakoff, 1998). In 2008, a national survey of directors of campus psychological counseling centers was conducted. Ninety-five percent of respondents in this survey reported a significant increase over the years in the severity of psychological problems being treated within Counseling Centers (Gallagher, 2009). As dramatic as these findings may seem, they are merely correlational. Thus, we cannot know if such an increase is due to the increased help-seeking behavior amongst college students in general, or if this change represents an actual population-level intensification of symptoms of mental illness in this cohort of college students (or if both explanations are occurring).

Whatever the cause of this trend, most of these students will not receive appropriate mental health treatment. For example, a study conducted by Eisenberg, Golberstien, and Gollust (2007) found that fewer than half of their sample of college students who screened positive for depression or anxiety disorders had received mental health services within a year of that
screening. Without treatment, these students not only run the risk of experiencing a longer course of illness with more frequent relapses, but also their symptoms may compromise their overall academic performance and rates of completion. Psychological health is an important concept in this study. This research assesses the differences with regard to the endorsements of negative affect based on school environment (predominantly White institution vs. historically Black college/university).

**Institutional Racism and Educational Attainment in African American Communities**

**Segregation in primary and secondary schools.** Institutional racism occurs when key societal and cultural agencies (e.g., governments, churches, corporations) engage in various forms of discrimination against specific racial groups as part of their normal operating procedures (Bennett, 2015). Because enumerating all (or even most) of the past and present instances of institutional racism in this country is beyond the scope of this paper, I will focus upon one area of this topic: racial bias in the U.S. education system.

Perhaps one of the most iconic manifestations of this form of institutional racism in living memory was the legal (and now de facto) racial segregation of public schools in this country. The policies of racial segregation have resulted in disproportionate educational advantages for White students and longstanding institutionalized disadvantages for people of color (Bennett, 2015). Racial segregation in the educational systems of the United States has been a topic of debate for more than 100 years. In the 1954 Supreme Court case, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, the Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court arrived at the unanimous ruling that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional because it violated the 14th amendment (Collins & O’Brien, 2011). This amendment putatively guarantees all United States citizens equal protection under the law (Collins & O’Brien, 2011). This ruling was a watershed
moment for the Civil Rights Movement and established that “separate-but-equal” practices in education would no longer be legally sanctioned.

However, just because the law changed, this did not mean that the racial animus that fueled the creation of a dual educational system was extinguished. On the contrary, this ruling precipitated a backlash that required military intervention to quell. Specifically, when nine African American students enrolled at a formerly all-White high school in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957, Orval Faubas, the governor at the time, called the Arkansas National Guard to block these students from entering the school. The students were also met by a mob of White segregationists who engaged in verbal and physical abuse against these teens. This crisis found a resolution only after President Eisenhower ordered federal troops to Arkansas to facilitate, rather than impede, the integration of these schools by the first African American students who have since come to be known as The Little Rock Nine (Bridges, 2017).

A few years later, in 1960, six-year-old Ruby Bridges experienced similar public opposition when she became the first African American child to racially integrate an all-White elementary school in New Orleans, Louisiana. In this case, the school district attempted to enforce de facto segregation by creating an admission test that was intentionally designed to be more difficult for African American children than White children. The test creators reasoned that if no African American students could pass this test, this would provide the school with a socially acceptable justification for keeping their schools segregated. When this scheme was circumvented by an African American student actually passing this exam, a vocal portion of the community began to stridently protest the subsequent efforts to racially integrate this school. Segregationist parents of children at the school were so upset by the possibility of one African American child sharing a classroom with their children that they chose to protest outside of the
school by yelling at Ruby, bearing placards with racist messages, and using an African American
doll in a coffin to intimidate Ruby and her family (Michals, 2015). Ruby’s father lost his job, her
mother was denied service at the local grocery store, and her grandparents lost their jobs and
home when they were fired from their work as sharecroppers in response to Ruby’s efforts.
Despite these incredible challenges, Ruby had perfect attendance during her first year at her new
school.

The efforts of the Little Rock Nine and Ruby Bridges are only two examples that
highlight the pervasive racial bias in our nation’s educational policies; however, they clearly
illustrate two often ignored patterns in how systemic racism works in the United States. First,
changing laws do not change the behaviors of people overnight, or even after a number of
decades. Secondly, racism, much like a retrovirus, adapts itself to its changing environment in a
manner that oftentimes allows it to persist despite explicit social interventions attempting to
eliminate it. It is for those reasons that it is imperative to study the longstanding effects of
racism, particularly for oppressed populations, such as African Americans. This evolitional
dynamic will be further illustrated in the following historical ruling.

Notwithstanding the passage of new laws that required communities to end school
segregation in the nation, policies of segregation were so pervasive in the country that 20 years
after the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka ruling, segregation was still considered a
significant problem. To further complicate matters, in 1974 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in
Millken v. Bradley that segregation could be allowed in schools if it was not an explicit policy of
the school district. Further, it held that school districts were not responsible for desegregation
across district lines (Amaker, 1974; Nadworny & Turner, 2019). This ruling came in response to
White residents in the suburbs of Detroit, Michigan, filing suit to argue that busing African
American students from the city to surrounding schools in the suburbs ignored school district lines that the plaintiffs asserted were not created haphazardly and should not be altered or ignored (Nadworny & Turner, 2019). Further, they argued that school districts were not designed in a way to create intentional segregation due to discrimination, and thus, they should not be held responsible for such an outcome. This ruling is an example of how our history of race-based bias is so ingrained that even after something blatantly racist has been outlawed (e.g., slavery) our judicial system still allows key institutions to continue de facto versions of similarly oppressive policies (e.g., the Black Codes and racial segregation).

**Segregation at the postsecondary level.** America’s history of creating segregated schools was not limited to primary and secondary educational contexts. Such policies also filtered into segregation of colleges and universities and are why historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were founded. Prior to the Civil War (1861-1864), statutory provisions and public policies prohibited access to most forms of education for African Americans across the nation (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). Following the Civil War, the Second Morrill Act of 1890 was passed. This act required states with racially segregated public higher education systems to provide a land-grant institution for African American students whenever a racially restricted college or university was established for White students (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). This act was a gesture of support for the higher education of African American students and led to the founding of several HBCUs that saw their primary purpose as providing African American students an opportunity for advanced education. Additionally, it was believed to be vital for HBCUs to provide an environment that was representative of faculty and administration of color (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). Even though HBCUs are no longer exclusively African American (and African American students are not explicitly denied
access to previously all-White universities and colleges), African American students, especially in higher education, still encounter significant levels of institutional racial bias and other race-related barriers in the United States. The history of our educational system exemplifies the conflictual nature of our deeper cultural identity, an identity that both signifies systematic marginalization of people of color while contradictorily expressing an earnest desire to be guided by the principle that our government ought to treat all of its citizens “equally.” Although some strides have been made toward ensuring educational equality between the races in the United States, more work is needed. In the face of such a blatant backlog of educational inequality, one might wonder how this has affected the lives of African American students in the United States.

**The Impact of Racial Segregation on the Lives of African American Students**

One of the earliest studies to answer this question was conducted by Kenneth and Mamie Clark in the late 1930s. Their research focused on assessing the character and degree of marginalization felt by 253 African American children in nursery and public schools (n = 134, segregated nursery/public school; n = 119, desegregated nursery/public school). Specifically, these researchers were interested in how children’s self-concept and attitudes about what it means to be African American might be influenced by being the targets of racial marginalization (Clark & Clark, 1947). These experimenters presented children in their study with dolls that differed only in terms of their racial designation (e.g., a Black doll or a White doll was used). Participants were presented with one of these dolls and asked a series of questions—e.g., “Give me the doll that is nice,” “Give me the doll that looks bad,” “Give me the doll that is a nice color,” or “Give me the doll that looks like you” (Clark & Clark, 1947, p. 169). Their findings revealed that two thirds of participants had a preference for the White doll, rather than the Black one, when asked to indicate which doll they preferred to play with, and which doll was “nice.”
Further, 60% of participants described the White doll as having the nicer skin complexion (Clark & Clark, 1947). The researchers considered those findings important to facilitate an understanding of the origin and development of racial concepts and attitudes in African American children. Additionally, the study revealed that African American students in both desegregated and segregated schools appeared to demonstrate stronger positive preferences for the White doll compared to the Black doll.

According to Cross (1991), the doll study was indicative of broad themes such as internalized racism, low self-esteem, and racial self-hatred. However, he also believed that more research needed to be conducted to more fully understand these effects. He alluded to the idea that color preference is not a strong or reliable indicator of racial self-hatred. He further argued that this common interpretation of the doll study findings does not sufficiently account for the possibility that children’s racial group identity attitudes might differentially predict their overall personal identity attitudes.

To assess if the findings from the original doll study might still have relevance in modern times, a team of reporters headed by Anderson Cooper and Soledad O’Brien on CNN collaborated with an expert researcher to replicate this work. The reporters consulted Margaret Beale Spencer, a leading researcher in child development, during the pilot of their experimental study (Billante & Hadad, 2010). Spencer (2008) argued the original doll study did not assess for racial differences and did not account for the fact that the students were diverse human beings engaged in normal developmental tasks under what she considered difficult conditions (e.g., participants were living at a time in our history when racial segregation was the explicit law, and this was probably very stressful for everyone involved in their work). She stated that context is crucial, especially when considering human growth and psychological processes. Spencer
proposed that Americans are not colorblind, and that children’s beliefs vary by ethnicity, gender, family structure, and skin color preferences. The findings from the CNN study suggested that White children perceive lighter complexioned dolls and human drawings more positively than darker complexioned equivalents (Billante & Hadad, 2010). However, African American children were far less likely to have such biases. This suggests that White children likely hold more stereotyped ideas regarding race than African American children. If this pattern of bias holds for African American and White students enrolled at universities, it implicitly suggests that African American students attending a predominantly White institution (PWI) may be more likely to experience racial bias from White students than they might experience if they attended an HBCU.

In examining the impact of segregation on people of color, Schwartz (2010) found that segregation in schools appears to negatively impact educational achievement for people of color. Although segregation has been found to be associated with lower high school graduation and college completion rates for African American students, no such detrimental effects have been found for their White peers (Quillian, 2014). It appears that racial (Reardon, 2016) and socioeconomic residential segregation (i.e., neighborhoods wherein there is physical separation of two or more groups based upon race and/or socioeconomic status) is also predictive of lower educational attainment for non-White students as well as those who live in poverty (Quillian, 2014).

Yet another layer of systemic segregation can be seen within putatively integrated schools. Specifically, Walsemann and Bell (2010) conducted a study that examined how within-school segregation across the different levels of high school English curricula (e.g., advanced placement, international baccalaureate, honors, general, remedial, or no English class) was
associated with students’ educational aspirations. Findings revealed that African American boys who were placed in low-level curricula disproportionately reported that their subsequent educational aspirations were “dampened” as a consequence of such tracking. Further, such experiences can leave students feeling unchallenged, discouraged, and underprepared for college.

Although most of the literature that discusses the effects of attending a racially segregated school focuses upon how this process disadvantages African American students, a subset of this research also explores some of the benefits African American students experience in segregated schools. For instance, Walsemann and Bell (2010) found that schools with higher within-school segregation provided some level of protection against engaging in risky behaviors (e.g., use of drugs) for African American female students, compared to their White female peers.

With regard to segregation at the university level, a growing body of literature seems to focus upon the positive experiences of African American students attending HBCUs. According to DeSousa and Kuh (1996), African American students enrolled at HBCUs devoted greater effort to academic activities and reported greater educational gains (i.e., personal and social development, critical thinking and science/technology, history and cultural awareness, vocational and career skills, and arts and literature) compared to African American students at PWIs. Further, African American students at HBCUs tend to have higher rates of graduation compared to those who attend PWIs, in which the trajectory is that more than half will fail to persist (Benton, 2001).

In reference to mental health, research indicates that African American students at PWIs report elevated levels of stress, which likely negatively affect their psychological functioning (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993; Wei et al., 2010). In contrast, African American students at HBCUs have reported feeling generally more comfortable, having more positive perceptions of
the university environment, and experiencing greater faculty support and lower levels of social climate stress than their peers at PWIs (Mitchell, 2018). The findings from the Mitchell (2018) study revealed that, compared to African American students attending PWIs, African American students attending HBCUs experience them as providing unique, nurturing environments that foster academic success and emotional well-being; these features appeared to predict greater persistence in school for these students. These effects may help to explain the finding that African American students enrolled at HBCUs, when compared to peers at PWIs, are higher in racial cohesion (i.e., behaviors and attitudes that express one’s degree of attachment to one’s racial community) and report fewer experiences of global racism-related stress, as well as institutional and individual racism (Bentley-Edwards & Chapman, 2015).

**Enrollment Patterns of African American Students in Higher Education**

According to Stepler (2016), approximately 79% of African American parents across the United States endorse wanting their children to attend college. This makes sense when contextualized by the finding that 43% of African Americans in Stepler’s sample believed that attending college was a requirement in order to be middle class. Despite these perceptions, college enrollment rates for African American students belie the praxis of these sentiments (i.e., in 2012, African American students were only 14% of enrolled, college-aged students). To complicate this discrepancy further, other researchers have found that, on average, only 40% of African American college students will successfully earn a degree (Peteet, Montgomery, & Weekes, 2015).

Eligible African American students decide not to enroll in college for a variety of reasons. One common explanation is that many of these potential students do not believe that a college or university would actually admit them. For example, when Lyons (2005) asked non-
Hispanic White and African American research participants to evaluate which one of two students (i.e., one White and one African American, but all other qualifications being the same) would have a “better chance” of receiving admission to a four-year university, a discrepancy was uncovered between how each group of respondents evaluated the likelihood that these two applicants would have an equal chance of being admitted. Specifically, while 50% of White respondents reported that both students would have an equal chance of being admitted, 64% of African Americans respondents believed that the White student would have a better chance of being accepted. Further, other explanations for why more African Americans choose not to attend college include the fact that many choose to join the military because it provides a source of social mobility, steady employment, and numerous other benefits (Kleykamp, 2006). Given these advantages, it is not surprising that many African Americans, especially African American men, choose to enlist in the military at higher rates than other racial groups, and that many remain in the service for their entire careers. Other factors that also reduce African American enrollment rates at universities include uncertainty concerning receiving sufficient financial support to complete a degree (Allen, 1992; Tidwell & Berry, 1997) as well as reasonable concerns about the implications of taking on relatively large, high-interest-rate student loans (Jackson & Reynolds, 2013).

Enrollment rates at HBCUs. Anderson (2017) analyzed data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and reported that overall enrollment rates at HBCUs have risen in the past several decades. In Fall 2015, the combined total enrollment of all HBCUs was approximately 293,000 compared to 243,000 in 1980. This rise in enrollment could be due to HBCUs being more likely to enroll and provide resources to African American students who might not otherwise attend college due to various barriers (e.g., finances) compared to PWIs
African American college students reported that when guaranteed adequate financial support, they worried less about monetary concerns and dedicated more time and attention to their studies (Guiffrida, 2005). However, despite the increase in HBCU enrollment rates in the past several decades, the number of African American students who decided to apply to and attend an HBCU began to slightly decline in recent years (Anderson, 2017). This is likely due to an increase in access to financial aid (Anderson, 2017) and rising incomes (Anderson, 2017; Berube, 2019) in some African American communities. Consequently, African American students have had more options with regard to their selection of colleges, and this has meant that an increasing number of these students are choosing to apply to more PWIs. Despite this trend, HBCUs still account for a large number of college degrees earned by African American students (Anderson, 2017). For instance, in 2015, approximately 27,000 bachelor’s degrees were awarded to African American HBCU students, making up 15% of all bachelor’s degrees earned by African Americans that year (Anderson, 2017).

African American College Students and Their Encounters with Racism on Campus

Incidents of racial discrimination are prevalent at American universities (Chang, 2000; Henson, Derlega, Pearson, Ferrer, & Holmes, 2013). A study by Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, and Bylsma (2003) collected both qualitative and quantitative data through a daily diary where their participants detailed daily experiences of racism. They found that African American college students enrolled at a PWI reported that they often experienced discrimination and prejudice on campus. Respondents in this study also indicated that they sometimes felt threatened due to their race. On average, African American students experience more incidents of differential treatment in college-related situations compared to other students of color and their White peers (Suarez-Balcazar, Orellana-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan, & Andrews-Guillen,
Students report that racial incidents leave them feeling less secure on campus (D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012). Such experiences are not uncommon for African American students at PWIs. For example, Solórzano and colleagues (2000) conducted interviews with African American college students and found that these students regularly experienced microaggressions in the classroom. Specifically, these students reported having to endure negative treatment by faculty, as well as experiencing social rejection by their peers during group assignments. These respondents reported experiencing both subtle and overt forms of racism; however, it appears that while covert bias was more common in classroom settings, more overt acts of racism tended to occur within more social spaces on campus---i.e., racial profiling by campus police (Smith, Mustaffa, Jones, Curry, & Allen, 2016; Solórzano et al., 2000) and having stricter enforcement of rules and regulations for Black-initiated social functions compared to White student sponsored events on campus (Solórzano et al., 2000). Other racist incidents students have reported experiencing at PWIs are “Blackface” themed parties and “noose hangings” around campus (Beamon, 2014).

In summary, these findings support the adage that university campuses can be a reflection of the broader society. Thus, the racial dynamics discussed in the beginning of this paper occur on university campuses as well. This fact can be particularly stressful for people of color when they are enrolled at a PWI (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Despite the research reviewed above, there is a dearth of research that assesses how racism on African American students varies across PWI vs. HBCU campuses. The current study addresses this insufficiency in the literature. First, I hypothesized that students attending a PWI would report experiencing higher levels of perceived racist incidents than students attending an HBCU.
Racism and Potential Consequences for African American Students

**Racism’s negative impact on college students’ psychological health.** Experiences of racism generally have negative effects on students of color and their adjustment to college (Ervin, 2001). Students reported that being targets of racist treatment is “tiring” (Beamon, 2014). Additionally, students state that such encounters elicit feelings of anger, humiliation, depression (Swim et al., 2003), and other psychological stress responses (e.g., frustration, disappointment, anxiety, helplessness, hopelessness, and fear) related to “racial battle fatigue” (Smith et al., 2016). Finally, students also report lower perceptions of social support and overall life satisfaction (Prelow, Mosher, & Bowman, 2006).

**Racism’s negative impact on college student’s academic performance.** Besides some of the negative psychological effects discussed previously, there is literature that suggests that if African American college students are frequently in racially charged environments, particularly when they encounter racial discrimination, their academic performance may be compromised (Solórzano et al., 2000; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Some students have reported that their experiences with racism on campus have pushed them to drop classes, transfer schools, and doubt their ability to obtain a college degree (Solórzano et al., 2000). After conducting interviews with African American male students attending a PWI, Smith and colleagues (2016) found that these students reported that experiences of racism on campus made them feel like illegitimate members of their university’s community.

Thus, when we consider the detailed literature that exists about the psychological effects of experiencing racism on African American college students, these findings suggest several hypotheses related to the focus of the current study. For the sake of practicality, I shall focus on only a few key hypotheses related to this domain of information. I hypothesized that students
attending a PWI would endorse higher rates of experiencing symptoms of negative affect compared to students at an HBCU. Additionally, I hypothesized there would be a negative association between negative affect and academic performance, which would be moderated by both perceptions of racism on campus and the type of school at which a student is enrolled (i.e., PWI or HBCU; see Figure 1). I theorized that students attending a PWI would experience more racism than students at an HBCU, and this would lead to them evincing higher levels of negative affect. This higher level of negative affect was expected to be associated with lower academic performance. Further, this dynamic should be stronger at a PWI (where students are expected to experience higher levels of both negative affect and racism) than will be observed at an HBCU.

**Figure 1.** Moderated moderation model: Effect of negative affect on academic performance as a function of the levels of perceived racism and school environment (i.e., PWI or HBCU).

**Sense of belonging.** As previously stated, African American students attending a PWI reported that experiences of racism on campus make them feel like illegitimate members of their university (Smith et al., 2016). This could be related to how those students assess their sense of belonging. If individuals are the target of racial discrimination on their college campus, it makes sense that they might feel that they do not belong.
The construct of sense of belonging is defined as the degree to which one’s personal involvement in a community or social system fosters relatively strong feelings of rapport, connection, and integration within that community (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bauwsema, & Collier, 1992). Self-reports from students of color at a public Midwestern university revealed that ethnic identity and school sense of belonging were significantly associated with self-worth (Gummadam, Pittman, & Ioffe, 2016). Furthermore, sense of belonging was found to be positively associated with scholastic competence and social acceptance, in addition to self-worth, and was negatively associated with depressive symptoms. Finally, the lowest levels of self-worth were evinced by students who neither connected to their school nor racial group.

At top-tier PWIs, African American students have traditionally accounted for approximately 5% to 6% of the undergraduate population (McGill, 2015), but in recent years (i.e., between 1994 and 2013), this number progressively declined (McGill, 2015). One potential explanation for this decline in enrollment arises from the theory that many African American students feel alienated from predominantly White campus communities and, consequently, leave or preemptively avoid such places. Another potential explanation could be due to experiences of perceived racial discrimination. Research has uncovered that experiences of discrimination negatively affect sense of belonging and retention among African American students, as well as Latino students (Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015).

In 1995, Feagin and Sikes found that in addition to feeling alienated, African American college students attending a PWI felt pressured to give up or suppress their identities to adapt to the school’s culture. Additionally, students in this study reported that the university’s initiative to have an inclusive campus climate by increasing everyone’s sense of belonging did not seem like a sincere priority. Students discussed examples of this by stating how universities rarely hosted
events that were of interest to people of color, forcing people of color at the universities to come together to host their own events for their communities. In a more recent study by Booker (2016), African American students in their sample were similarly reporting a lack of a sense of belonging on their campuses.

According to Freeman, Anderman, and Jensen (2007), feeling a sense of belonging in the classroom was associated with elevated feelings of academic self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation for college students of color. Further, students’ perceptions of the characteristics of faculty (i.e., their warmth, openness, and encouragement), along with feeling socially accepted by their peers, was also found to be associated with these students’ sense of belonging to their institution (Freeman et al., 2007). Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007) conducted a study with first-year students from a mid-Atlantic university and found similar findings regarding the effects of faculty and peer support. Finally, Strayhorn (2008) found that for the sample of African American male college students, organizational involvement (i.e., social or leadership-based student organizations) was yet another factor that contributed to students’ sense of belonging because it often fostered supportive relationships and facilitated social adjustment.

Consequently, I hypothesized that there would be a negative association between African American respondents’ perceptions of being the target of racism and their sense that they belong and are welcome at their chosen university; further, I posited that this association would be moderated by respondents’ school environment (i.e., PWI or HBCU; see Figure 2). Specifically, I expected that the negative association between experiencing racism and feeling a sense of belonging would be stronger for students attending a PWI compared to those attending an HBCU.
Racial Identity as a Protective Factor That May Buffer the Effects of Racism

Similar to sense of belonging, how people think of their racial group and how the group is treated by others in their surrounding environment can be an influential factor in how a student perceives themselves and racist incidents. One way this idea has been assessed is by measuring African Americans racial identity. Developing a deeper sense of one’s overall identity necessitates understanding how race influences this aspect of self.

The concept of how racial injustice impacts an individual’s social identity or development is one that has been studied for years. Historian and sociologist W.E.B. DuBois proposed that racial injustice leads to African Americans having to develop a unique social identity (Gaines & Reed, 1995). For instance, not only are they considered an American, but they also are not traditionally accepted as one. He was insinuating that this lived experience creates a complicated social developmental course, one of duality, for racially oppressed Americans compared to White Americans. Unlike Gordon Allport, an American psychologist studying personality, who saw assimilation to “White middle-class society” as an adaptative strategy for African Americans, W. E. B. DuBois acknowledged the obstacles set forth by racism but still...
recognized the strengths (e.g., talent, dedication, pride) and rich heritage of African American culture (Gaines & Reed, 1994). This is considered to be some of the early thinking that considered how racial divide impacts African Americans’ identity or self-concept.

In recent decades, the number of theories of Black racial identity has increased. Racial identity has generally been defined in terms of the attitudes and feelings that individuals have about their assigned racial status. As noted previously, much of the modern theorizing about this topic was instigated as a reaction to conclusions drawn about African American identity (particularly the idea of Black self-hatred) that were promulgated by readers of the Clark and Clark (1996) doll studies. A desire to more fully explore the implications of their findings served as the foundation for the follow-up research conducted by Cross (1971) and others (Baldwin & Bell, 1985; Cross, 1978).

A study by Neblett and Carter (2012) discussed how racial identity can be a protective factor or buffer for race-related stress, particularly as it relates to high blood pressure, a condition that occurs with relatively higher incidence in this community (Hajjar, Kotchen, & Kotchen, 2006). Further, they noted that there is research that demonstrated that individuals who strongly identify with their racial identity tend to have more positive outcomes. They encouraged more research to be conducted on the effectiveness of racial identity as a buffer between racism and other factors; the current study aspired to do so.

The multidimensional theory of racial identity (MMRI). For the current paper, we focused upon the work of Sellers and colleagues (1997) and their multidimensional theory of racial identity because it is one of the most widely used methods for accessing African American racial identity. As this theory’s name denotes, it is an attempt to describe the phenomenon of how African Americans give meaning to their racial status. It uses a multidimensional approach
that coalesces around the following four general dimensions of racial identity: (a) ideology, (b) centrality, (c) regard, and (d) salience (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). In the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) scale, these general dimensions are operationalized by being broken down into seven subscales that explicitly assess the following overlapping themes: (a) racial centrality, (b) private regard, (c) public regard, (d) assimilation attitudes, (e) humanist orientation, (f) oppressed minority identity, and (g) nationalist orientation (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998).

**The underlying themes of racial ideology.** Assimilation attitudes, humanist orientation, oppressed minority identity, and nationalist orientation all fall under the general dimension entitled *racial ideology* (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). Assimilation attitudes refers to the viewpoint that emphasizes the commonalities between African American and European American cultures, as well as assessing the degree to which African Americans desire to fit into White cultures. The humanist orientation refers to attitudes that emphasize the commonalities amongst all humans, minimizing the importance of race. The oppressed minority identity refers to recognizing the commonalities between African Americans and other oppressed groups. Nationalist orientation refers to recognizing the uniqueness of the African American race. Each of these themes is manifested across areas of functioning (i.e., political-economic issues, cultural-social activities, intergroup relations, and interaction with White Americans). For the current study, I focused on the following subscales: racial centrality, private regard, and public regard (see Method section for additional descriptions).

**Racial centrality.** Per the MIBI, racial centrality refers to the extent to which people use race as a cardinal indicator of their personalities; specifically, it attempts to capture how salient or important individuals’ racial identity is to them (Sellers et al., 2003). How central an
individual perceives their racial identity can be experienced as both a risk (e.g., strong identification with one’s racial group likely makes one more sensitive to instances of being targeted for racial discrimination) and a protective factor (e.g., strong identification might also buffer against psychological distress and the negative effects of discrimination). According to the literature, endorsing higher levels of racial centrality is found to be inversely related to experiencing symptoms of stress, depression, or anxiety. Further, racial centrality has been found to moderate the relationship between racial ideologies (i.e., assimilation, nationalist, and oppressed minority ideologies) and academic performance (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998):

Consistent with the MMRI, racial centrality moderates the relationship between racial ideology and academic performance such that assimilation and nationalist ideologies were negatively associated with grade point average (GPA) and a minority ideology was positively associated with GPA for students who scored high on racial centrality. Racial ideology was not a significant predictor of GPA for participants who scored low on racial centrality. (p. 8)

Interestingly, this study also found that grade point average was positively correlated with racial centrality. Thus, while previous studies have suggested that African American college students who distance themselves from their racial communities tend to have more positive academic outcomes (Fordham, 1988), the summary above reveals that this association is likely more complex.

While the implications of being an African American college student and feeling that one needs to assimilate to “White culture” in order to excel seems highly problematic from a multiculturally conscious standpoint, more work needs to be done to more fully understand the facets of this correlation. For example, some related research suggests that African American
students who strongly identify with their race can also excel academically (Marryshow & Boykin, 1992; Ogbu, 1985). The latter finding was also affirmed by Sellers, Chavous, et al. (1998). These researchers recruited African American participants from both a PWI and a HBCU for their study. Generally, students who reported higher racial centrality and racial ideology tended to have higher GPAs and were less likely to endorse assimilation behavior (Sellers, Chavous, et al., 1998). An interesting distinction was found when assessing institutional differences. Participants from PWI’s reported significantly higher assimilation behaviors and had slightly lower GPA’s than participants who attended HBCUs (Sellers, Chavous, et al., 1998).

The current study expanded upon this area of research by analyzing the difference in degree to which students endorsed racial centrality based on their school environment (PWI vs. HBCU). I hypothesized that students attending an HBCU would endorse higher levels of racial centrality than students at a PWI.

**Racial regard.** This dimension consists of two subscales: private and public regard. Private regard is defined as the extent to which individuals positively or negatively evaluate what it means to be African American (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). An example item for this subscale is as follows: “I feel good about Black people.” Sellers and colleagues (1997) found that African American students who attend HBCUs rather than PWIs evinced higher levels of private regard attitudes (i.e., higher levels of positive attitudes about their in-group membership). They were also more likely to recognize the uniqueness of African American experiences compared to students at PWIs. The current study attempted to replicate these findings by assessing if respondents’ scores on the private regard subscale differed across school environments (i.e., respondents at a HBCU should endorse higher levels of private regard than those attending a PWI). Bynum and colleagues (2008) found that private regard reduces the effect racism has on
ASSESSING DIFFERENCES IN LEVELS

internalizing symptoms such as anxiety, but not depressive symptoms. Another study using a multivariate mediation analysis revealed an indirect effect of racial pride messages on depressive symptoms through private regard (Neblett, Banks, Cooper, & Smalls-Glover, 2013). This was interpreted to indicate that the more frequently African American respondents were exposed to racial pride messages, the more likely they were to report both feeling positively about their race and feeling less likely to experience depressive symptoms (Neblett et al., 2013).

Public regard is defined as the extent that African Americans believe outgroup members hold positive or negative attitudes towards African Americans (Sellers et al., 2003). An example item for this subscale is as follows “Overall, Black are considered good by others.” This construct has been found to be associated with a variety of psychological and academic outcomes. For example, individuals who perceive other racial groups as having negative attitudes toward African Americans report experiencing more psychological distress in response to instances of racism than those with lower endorsement of this construct (Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Sellers et al., 2003). Among African American high school and college students, it appears that public regard was unrelated to personal self-esteem (Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998). Interestingly, in the same study, participants whose race was more central to them tended to report believing that other groups had more negative feelings or attitudes toward African Americans. Thus, racial centrality was negatively correlated with public regard. Regarding academic outcomes, a longitudinal study on African American adolescents found that public regard positively related to school achievement (Chavous et al., 2003). Brown (2011) found that although there is a significant association between public regard and academic self-esteem, the finding was inconsistent with their prediction that low public regard would predict decreased academic self-esteem. Thus, another hypothesis of this study was that I expected students
enrolled at a HBCU would endorse lower levels of public regard attitudes than students enrolled at a PWI. Additionally, I hypothesized that the association between perceived racism and negative affect would be moderated by both public regard and school environment (PWI vs. HBCU; see Figure 3). More specifically, I theorized that students at a PWI will exhibit a stronger negative association between perceptions of racism and negative affect compared to students at an HBCU, and this association would be further moderated by participants’ endorsement of public regard attitudes.

![Moderated moderation model: Effect of perceived racism on negative affect as a function of the levels of public regard and school environment (i.e., PWI or HBCU).](image)

**General Coping Behaviors in African American Communities**

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is defined as cognitive and behavioral efforts used to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised to be taxing or exceeding one’s resources. Two common categories of coping styles are (a) *approach coping* and (b) *avoidance coping*. Approach coping strategies are characterized by behaviors that actively confront a problem. This contrasts with avoidance coping strategies, which are typified by behaviors that distance individuals from their problems. Of course, other theorists
conceptualize coping utilizing different unidimensional schemes. Specifically, some researchers have classified coping behaviors along a different continuum wherein emotion-focused coping (e.g., coping strategies that primarily focus upon regulating one’s emotional responses) at one end of this spectrum is contrasted with active coping (e.g., approach-based coping that focuses upon developing and implementing specific problem-solving strategies in an effort to change a stressful situation) at the other (Knight, Silverstein, McMallum, & Fox, 2000; Sanchez, Lambert, & Colley-Strickland, 2013). It is imperative to have a foundational understanding of common coping behavioral approaches; the previously discussed coping styles are broad frameworks that are typically used by many individuals. African American communities use multiple coping styles and understanding the breadth of their coping behavior is important.

How do the previous coping styles apply to how African Americans respond to stress? Sanchez et al. (2013) found that African Americans tend to use both active coping and emotion-focused coping strategies. In a study conducted by Chapman and Mullis (2000), White and African American students in seventh through twelfth grade were studied in order to assess racial differences in coping and self-esteem. The results revealed that African American adolescents reported using diversions, self-reliant behaviors, engaging in demanding activities, solving family problems, relaxation, confiding in close friends, and spiritual support more frequently than their White peers. These findings indicate that African Americans seem to utilize both active and emotion-focused coping strategies. While most researchers in this area assert that active forms of coping are generally better than emotion-focused coping, this is not always the case. That is, although active coping has been found to be associated with a multitude of healthy outcomes including increased self-esteem, appropriate action toward problems, and healthier psychological adjustment (Chapman & Mullis, 2000; Roth & Cohen, 1986; Sanchez et al., 2013),
it is unclear if this view of coping is true for socially marginalized populations. For instance, African American adolescents exposed to violence or dangerous environments may engage in avoidance because approach-based coping (or adapting to the environment) might result in additional negative outcomes (Garbrino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991; Tolan, Groman-Smith, Henry, Chung, & Hunt, 2002).

**Specific Africultural-based coping strategies.** This paper specifically assessed Africultural-based coping. Seeking social support is a prevalent active/Africultural-based coping strategy used in African American communities (Constantine, Wilton, & Caldwell, 2003; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Utsey, Adams, & Bolden, 2000). It is a strategy whereby individuals rely on family, close friends, significant others, and community members to help them manage risk and adversity. Ross and Aday (2006) found that among their participants, using social support as a coping response was common and tended to be predictive of family strength for African American grandparents who were primary caregivers for their grandchildren. Interestingly some findings in the early 2000’s highlighted that African American women utilize social support to cope more than African American men (Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000); however, African American women are still likely to use avoidance coping more than social support or problem-solving strategies (Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2008). African Americans are likely to engage in seeking social support rather than seeking professional mental health treatment (Buser, 2009). Seeking social support has been seen as having a beneficial impact on the well-being of African Americans and found to be predictive of positive quality of life (Buser, 2009).

Research has revealed that religious (Ellison & Taylor, 1996; Neighbors, Jackson, Bowman, & Gurin, 1983) and spiritual practices (Fowler & Hill, 2004; Utsey et al., 2000) are
common coping responses specific to African American communities, with praying being one of the most common manifestations of these strategies (Ellison & Taylor, 1996; Utsey et al., 2000). Religious coping refers to cognitions, behaviors, and practices that are used to manage the perception, occurrence, and/or consequences of an undesirable or threatening event or situation (Taylor, Chaters, & Levin, 2003). The literature on religious coping is typically treated as unidimensional (i.e., it is usually measured as the frequency of church involvement). However, religious efforts are multidimensional and encompass a variety of behaviors, activities, and beliefs that can be used independently or coupled with other coping strategies (Pargament et al., 1990). Ellison and Taylor (1996) identified three primary dimensions of African American religiosity: (a) nonorganizational religiosity (e.g., frequency of devotional activities), (b) organizational religiosity (e.g., the frequency of institutional participation), and (c) subjective religiosity (e.g., the strength of religious identity). Their findings revealed that the use of multiple dimensions of religiosity was predictive of the use of prayer, particularly during trying events or situations (i.e., bereavement and health-related concerns). Spiritual coping represents the degree to which beliefs about God or a higher power are used in managing adversities (Utsey, Bolden, Lanier, & Williams, 2007) in addition to fostering a connection with spiritual elements in the universe (Utsey et al., 2000). Spiritual coping literature poses that spiritual coping enhances resilience by providing a basis for optimism and the ability to recover from adversity (Barbarin, 1993). Additionally, spiritual coping appears to be associated with better mental health, specifically for individuals experiencing depressive, anxiety, or substance abuse symptoms (Koenig, 2010).

As discussed, both seeking social support and religious and/or spiritual coping are prominent forms of coping in African American communities. Both forms of coping have been
found to be predictive of experiencing a positive quality of life and good mental health functioning (Utsey et al., 2007). While there are a variety of coping behaviors that African Americans use, discussing all of them is beyond the scope of this study. The present study focused on two Africultural-based coping skills: (a) collective coping behaviors (e.g., seeking social support) and (b) spiritual-centered coping behaviors. Collective (Utsey, Giesbrecht, Hook, & Stanard, 2008) and spiritual-centered coping (Beagan, Etowa, & Bernard, 2012; Lewis-Coles & Constantine, 2006) have been found to be common coping responses for African Americans responding to a variety of life stressors, including when they are the targets of racism (Forsyth & Carter, 2012; Greer, 2011).

**Common coping behaviors among African American college students.** Most of the coping behaviors identified in this section will coincide with coping behaviors that were previously reported. For instance, a study on African American undergraduate students who were enrolled at a PWI revealed that the students were more likely to seek social support rather than formal mental health services when stressed. This was found to be particularly true when respondents reported greater satisfaction with both their social support network and their spiritual coping resources (Avent, Harris, & Wong, 2018). Further, their results also revealed that spiritual coping and having a religious leader were an integral part of their coping.

Findings for coping behavior among African American college students in relation to stress experienced as being a person of color while dealing with general stress and academic performance were found to be different depending on whether or not a student attended a PWI or an HBCU (Greer & Brown, 2011). Specifically, African American participants attending a PWI experienced higher levels of stress than those attending an HBCU. Additionally, students enrolled at the HBCU reported higher rates of using problem-focused coping strategies and
spiritual coping compared to students enrolled at the PWI. Greer and Brown (2011) found that African American students who attended an HBCU had better academic performance than African American students attending PWIs. As previously emphasized, it is assumed that HBCUs foster a more nurturing environment for African American students, which likely leads to better academic achievement (Allen, 1992; Greer, 2008; Greer & Brown, 2011). The more a student feels the need to use passive and avoidant coping strategies, the more likely it is that their grade-point average and overall academic performance will decrease (Greer & Brown, 2011).

Given the brief literature that has just been reviewed on commonly used coping responses among African American college students, I postulated that African American students enrolled at an HBCU would utilize Africultual-based coping (specifically, collective coping and spiritual-centered) to a higher degree than students enrolled at a PWI.

**Coping with Racism in African American Communities**

As previously stated, seeking social support is a common coping skill used in African Americans communities, and the literature highlights how this form of coping is used to cope with racism. Studies show that seeking social support is one strategy that African American women tend to use to cope with racism, which differs from how African American men are thought to cope with instances of racism (Brown, Phillips, Abdullah, Vinson, & Robertson, 2011; Utsey et al., 2000). Specifically, when it impacts their life satisfaction or self-esteem, men are thought to be more likely than women to cope using strategies such as confrontation (i.e., challenging the appropriateness of such behavior), rumination (i.e., repeatedly reflecting on the event), and avoidance (i.e., avoiding being around people, using humor, or substance misuse; Hoggard et al., 2012).
West, Donovan, and Roemer (2010) found that for African American women in their sample, using higher levels of problem-solving coping buffered the effects of perceived racial discrimination on depressive symptoms. Unsurprisingly, using avoidant coping strategies appeared to exacerbate the latter association. Similar to the drawbacks that occur with using avoidant coping, coping by using anger appears to have deleterious effects on the mental health of African Americans (Pittman, 2011). There is literature that details how African American communities cope with racism, but less has focused on how they cope with its effects on mental health other than intentionally choosing not to seek professional services. Additionally, few articles analyze the intersection between how they cope with racism and their mental health in academic settings. The literature often highlights negative coping mechanisms (e.g., defiant behavior, violence, substance use) that some individuals in African American communities have turned to when responding to racial stressors in life; however, this is by no means the only coping response utilized by this group.

**How African American college students cope with racism.** Lewis and colleagues (2013) found that African American female college students experiencing racial microaggressions coped in a variety of ways. Three common themes were reported: (a) seeking social support, (b) resistance (i.e., speaking up and addressing microaggressions), and (c) self-protective factors (i.e., affirmations of, “Be[ing] a resilient strong Black woman,” or using avoidance/escape, or desensitization). Avoidance was also reported as a way to cope with racially stressful events in Hoggard and colleagues’ (2012) study, along with confrontation and rumination, as previously noted. In a study focused on doctoral students of color, Truong and Museus (2012) found that these students reported a few different ways of coping with racism they experienced in their program. For example, some students reported that they sought mental
As for the rest of the content, it appears to discuss assessing differences in levels of health services, transferred to a different program, suppressed reactions/responses at times, spoke up, or filed complaints.

This literature made me ponder about the correlation between experiencing racism and coping response based on the racial composition of an individual’s environment. I hypothesized that the association between perceived racism and Africultural-based coping (i.e., collective coping and spiritual-centered, respectively) would be moderated by school environment (i.e., PWI vs HBCU; see Figure 4). Specifically, I posited that the positive association between students’ ratings of how much racism they experience and the degree to which they report using both collective or spiritual-centered Africultural-based coping styles, respectively, would be stronger for students attending an HBCU compared to those enrolled at a PWI.

Figure 4. Moderation model: Effect of perceived racism on Africultural-based coping as a function of school environment (i.e., PWI or HBCU).
Study Aims and Hypotheses

The preceding review summarizes the lived experiences of racism and mental health in African American communities, as well as how African Americans have utilized various coping strategies in response to such experiences. More specifically, the review highlights how African American college students’ mental health and academic performance can be impacted by feeling racially discriminated against while attending college in different environments (i.e., PWIs versus HBCUs). This is an understudied area of research; consequently, the current study was an attempt to more fully understand this phenomenon. To review, I hoped to confirm the following hypotheses:

1. Students attending a PWI were expected to report higher levels of perceived racism compared to students at an HBCU.

2. Students attending a PWI were expected to endorse experiencing more symptoms of negative affect compared to students at an HBCU.

3. An inverse association was expected to exist between negative affect and academic performance (i.e., students’ cumulative GPA), and those variables would be moderated by both perceived racism and school environment (i.e., PWI vs. HBCU). I theorized that students attending a PWI would experience more perceived racist incidents; thus, they would have a stronger inverse association between negative affect and academic performance than students at an HBCU.

4. A negative association was expected to exist between perceptions of racism and sense of belonging, which would be moderated by school environment (i.e., PWI or HBCU). I posited that the negative association between experiencing racism and feeling a sense of
belonging would be stronger for students attending a PWI compared to those attending an HBCU.

5. Students enrolled at an HBCU were expected to endorse higher levels of racial centrality and private regard, and lower levels of public regard, compared to students at a PWI.

6. An association between perceived racism and negative affect was expected to be moderated by both public regard and school environment (i.e., PWI vs. HBCU). I theorized that students at a PWI would exhibit a stronger negative association between perceptions of racism and negative affect compared to students at an HBCU, and that association would be further moderated by participant’s endorsement of public regard attitudes.

7. Students attending an HBCU were expected to endorse higher rates of practicing both (7a) collective and (7b) spiritual-centered Africultural-based coping skills compared to students at a PWI.

8. An association between perceived racism and Africultural-based coping was expected to be moderated by school environment (i.e., PWI vs. HBCU). I posited that the positive association between perceived racism and both (8a) collective and (8b) spiritual-centered collective Africultural coping strategies, respectively, would be stronger amongst students attending an HBCU than will be found for students at a PWI.
Methods

Participants

Participants were recruited by using a combination of direct recruitment to participants at each school, by engaging the assistance of relevant faculty who subsequently encouraged eligible students in their courses to participate in this study, and finally, by using SONA, an online research participant management platform. PWI participants were recruited from a medium-sized (about 14,000 undergraduates), Midwestern university. HBCU participants were recruited from a university in the Southwest with a relatively large undergraduate population for an HBCU (about 8,000 students). According to the PWI’s official website, it was founded in 1849 as a small teacher-preparatory school, but it has grown significantly since then and is now considered an R2 research institution comprised of seven colleges/schools (Eastern Michigan University, 2020). The HBCU was founded in 1876 as a land-grant university, built on a former slave planation, making it the first state supported college in Texas for African Americans during the reconstruction period after the Civil War (Prairie View A&M University, 2020a) The university is the second oldest public institution of higher education in Texas, with its original purpose of providing a preparatory curriculum for training teachers. The HBCU now has nine colleges/schools. These universities were chosen for recruitment efforts because they are comparable on a variety of key demographic variables such as the following:

- School Type: They are both publicly funded state schools.
- Student to Faculty Ratio: Equal for both schools at 18:1 (Eastern Michigan University, 2020; Prairie View A&M University, 2020b).
Both schools provide access to similar campus resources (e.g., counseling services, student life/organizations, career services; Eastern Michigan University, 2020b; Prairie View A&M University, 2020c).

Both schools exhibit similar student gender distributions (binary gender was reported; U.S. NEWS, 2020).
- PWI: 60% female and 40% male
- HBCU: 65% female and 35% male

Both schools have similar endowments.
- PWI: $72.6 million (End of 2017 fiscal year; Data USA, 2020a)
- HBCU: $76.6 million (End of 2017 fiscal year; Data USA, 2020b)

Although these criteria are not the only metrics with which we might concern ourselves, and they do not suggest that these school are perfectly matched on all dimensions, these characteristics do support the general contention that these schools are similar enough that utilizing them for the current study was a reasonable decision.

Participation inclusion criteria included identifying as African American/Black and being currently enrolled at their respective universities as an undergraduate or graduate student. Per G*Power analysis (software used to calculate statistical power), a study using regression with three independent variables, if assuming a medium effect size, should have a minimum sample size of 77 participants per group for analysis. Thus, the proposed study aimed to recruit this number of participants from both the PWI and HBCU (i.e., 152 total participants). In total we recruited 184 participants: 97 participants from the PWI and 87 participants from the HBCU.

Relevant participant demographics can be found in Table 1.
Procedures

IRB approval was completed at the PWI, and the HBCU adopted the already approved IRB submission (see Appendix A for approval letter). Once the IRB applications were approved, the data collection process began via the use of a Qualtrics survey. Prior to participants completing the survey, they were required to review the study’s informed consent material. After participants reviewed the informed consent document (see Appendices B and C), those who consented to participate were directed to a series of questionnaires that included a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D), several measures to assess the main constructs related to the hypotheses of this study, and a set of internal manipulation checks (i.e., internal manipulation checks consisted of questions meant to identify participants who were not attending to the survey content and were responding randomly; see Appendix E). The survey took participants approximately one hour to complete. Upon completion of the study the participants were not compensated, but some students earned research or course credit.
ASSESSING DIFFERENCES IN LEVELS

Table 1

*Demographics of Study Sample Compared by School Environment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>PWI Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>HBCU Means (SD)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (in years)</strong></td>
<td>22.32 (6.37)</td>
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<td>22.00 (4.67)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>33.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13.8</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>86.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class Year</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>25.6</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
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<td>20.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
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<td>21.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>28.2</td>
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<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>$10,000 - $19,999</td>
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<td>11.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16.3</td>
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<td>5.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than $100,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GPA</strong></td>
<td>3.04 (.72)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.16 (.49)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* PWI = predominately White institution, HBCU = historically Black college and universities, SES = socioeconomic status, GPA = grade point average
Measures

**Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI).** The MIBI is a 56-item self-report measure assessing three dimensions of African American racial identity (centrality, ideology, and regard). The measure is able to detect the diverse experiences within the African American communities. The measure was developed by Sellers and colleagues (1997), and the initial question pool was generated by 474 African American college students from both PWIs and HBCUs. Response options are mostly positively phrased and are on a 7-point Likert-scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). One score can be calculated from the Centrality scale, four scores are derived from the four Ideology subscales (Nationalist, Oppressed Minority, Assimilationist, Humanist), and two scores can be derived from the two Regard subscales (Public and Private Regard; Sellers et al., 1997). A composite score for the entire scale should not be created. For the purpose of this study, the results from the Centrality and Regard subscales are reported. Overall, the MIBI was found to be reliable and valid (Sellers et al., 1997). According to Sellers and colleagues (1997), Cronbach’s alphas for the seven subscales within the MIBI ranged from .60 (Private Regard) to .79 (Nationalism). Private Regard was the only subscale below .70. However, in follow-up studies using the MIBI, Cronbach’s alpha for Private Regard was found to be above .70 (i.e., $\alpha = .73$ for both Rowley et al., 1988, and Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Thus, the Private Regard scale appears to be an acceptable measure to use in the current study. Table 2 provides the means, standard deviations and Cronbach’s alpha for the Centrality and Regard subscales for the two samples recruited for the current study. See Appendix F for a copy of the measure.

**Index of Race Related Stress (IRRS).** The IRRS is a 46-item self-report measure of stress experienced by African Americans as a result of exposure to racism. This
multidimensional measure of racism has four subscales: (a) cultural racism, (b) instructional racism, (c) individual racism, and (d) collective racism (Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996). Respondents indicate whether they have ever experienced a given racism-related event and to what degree the event was stressful, this is done by choosing a response option on a 5-point Likert-scale (from 0 = event never happened to 4 = event happened and I was extremely upset). A total score is produced by summing items from each subscale. Higher scores reflect greater severity of race-related stress in each domain. IRRS was found to be significantly positively correlated with Harrell’s Racism of Life Events Scale, which is a conceptually similar scale (Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996; Utsey, Payne, Jackson, & Jones, 2002), confirming its convergent validity. The Cronbach’s alpha for the IRRS subscales were as follows: cultural racism = .87, institutional racism = .85, individual racism = .84, and collective racism = .79 (Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996).

This measure will be used to assess perceived racism. Table 2 provides the means, standard deviations, and Cronbach’s alpha for the total IRRS for the two samples. See Appendix G for a copy of this measure.

**Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21).** The short-form version of the DASS is a 21-item self-report measure developed to extend the understanding and differentiation of depression, anxiety, and stress (Antony, Bieling, Cox, Enns, & Swinson, 1998). Response options are on a 4-point Likert-scale (from 0 = Did not apply to me at all---never to 3 = Applied to me very much, or most of the time---almost always). A score is calculated for each subscale by summing relevant items, and a total score can be calculated by summing all items. The DASS-21 has been found to be a reliable and valid method of assessing depression, anxiety, and stress in clinical and non-clinical populations in a number of studies (Antony et al., 1998). Cronbach’s alphas were .94 for depression, .87 for anxiety, and .91 for stress. A study was conducted using
the DASS-21 on various racial groups and it was found that the measure was still a reliable and valid assessment of the subscales (Norton, 2007). Additionally, independent SEM analyses of the DASS-21 showed good model fit for the African American population. Table 2 provides the means, standard deviations, and Cronbach’s alpha for the total DASS for the two samples recruited for the current study. See Appendix H for a copy of this measure.

**Agricultural Coping Systems Inventory (ACSI)**. The ACSI is a 30-item self-report measure. It assesses the unique coping behaviors used by African Americans during stressful encounters within their environment (Utsey et al., 2000). The ACSI is grounded in an African-centered conceptual framework and consists of the following subscales: Cognitive/Emotional Debriefing, Spiritual-Centered Coping, Collective Coping, and Ritual-Centered Coping. Respondents are asked to recall a stressful situation that occurred within the past week or so and then indicate the degree to which they used the specific method noted to cope. Response options are on a 4-point Likert-type scale (from 0 = *do not use* to 3 = *use a great deal*). Higher subscale scores indicate greater use of that particular coping strategy in response to a stressful event. Scale scores for four distinct culture-specific coping preferences (Cognitive/Emotional Debriefing, Spiritual-Centered Coping, Collective Coping, and Ritual-Centered Coping) are derived by summing items across each of the subscales. For the purpose of this study, we only reported results from the Spiritual-Centered and Collective Coping subscales because these subscales are common coping strategies African American individuals use and they align with the hypotheses of this study. Additionally, this scale does not allow researchers to add subscales to obtain a total score. Confirmatory factor analyses with a sample of adult African Americans have repeatedly yielded a four-factor model as the best fit for these data (Utsey et al., 2000). Additionally, the ACSI demonstrated good reliability, concurrent validity (*all of the subscales, except for Ritual*)
Centered Coping, produced significantly positive correlations with the Ways of Coping Scale by Folkman and Lazarus, 1988), and internal consistency. The Cronbach’s alpha for the subtests were as follows: Cognitive/Emotional Debriefing = .80, Spiritual-Centered Coping = .79, Collective Coping = .71, and Ritual-Centered Coping= .75 (Utsey et al., 2000). Table 2 provides the means, standard deviations, and Cronbach’s alpha for these two subscales for the two samples. See Appendix I for a copy of this measure.

**Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM).** The PSSM is an 18-item self-report measure created by Goodenow (1993). The scale was developed to measure adolescent students’ perceived belonging or psychological membership in their school environment. Goodenow (1993) conceptualized school belonging for this measure to be a unidimensional variable for analysis. The original study was administered to adolescents in a suburban middle school (n = 454) and two multi-ethnic urban junior high schools (n = 301). The measure has since been adapted and successfully implemented with students in post-secondary education (Alkan, 2016; Freeman et al., 2007; Gummadam et al., 2016; Pittman & Richmond, 2007). Participants report on their feelings toward their school by reading the statements and indicating the degree to which they agree or disagree (Goodenow, 1993). Responses are a 5-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree) and higher scores are supposed to indicate a greater sense of belonging. It was stated that an individual having a total average on the scale below a 3.00 had a low sense of school membership/belonging (Goodenow, 1993; Holland, 2015). The PSSM was reported to have good internal consistency (α = .80; Goodenow, 1993). In other studies, the Cronbach alpha coefficients varied between .72 (Stevens, Hamman, & Olivarez, 2007) and .91 (Pittman & Richmond, 2007). Table 2 provides the means, standard
deviations, and Cronbach’s alpha for this scale for the two samples. See Appendix J for a copy of this measure.
Results

SPSS, version 27, was used to assess the data to assure the variables conformed to the expectations of normality incumbent with the types of analyses used to test the study hypotheses. Using the heuristic that neither the skew nor kurtosis should be more than two times their standard errors, most of the measures used in the current study appear to conform to the expectations of a normal distribution. However, there were two exceptions to this trend. Specifically, when the previously mentioned criteria were applied to the Racial Centrality and Private Regard subscale scores, the relatively large standard error scores for their skews and kurtoses, respectively, suggests that these scores might not adequately describe a normal distribution. A square root transformation was used to try to correct this problem in these data, and the relevant statistical tests were performed using both the transformed, and then the non-transformed scores for these variables. These analyses yielded comparable results; thus, the decision was made to use the original data with no transformation for ease of statistical interpretation. For the current study, internal consistency scores are provided in Table 2. For the Public Regard subscale, the Cronbach’s alpha was initially less than .70 (i.e., $\alpha = .66$); however, after the removal of one item (i.e., “Blacks are not respected by the broader society”) from the calculation of the subscale score, Cronbach’s alpha increased to acceptable levels (see Table 2). The analyses will be presented below from simple to more complex statistical analyses, for ease of reviewing the findings. Hypotheses 1, 2, 5, and 7 were tested using a series of independent sample t-tests. A test of simple moderation was performed to test Hypotheses 4 and 8. Lastly, a test of moderated moderation was performed to test Hypotheses 3 and 6.
Table 2
Independent Samples T-tests (PWI vs. HBCU), Cronbach’s Alpha, and Correlation Matrix for the Study’s Key Variables

| Variable                | School Environment | M (SD)   | p value | Cronbach’s alpha | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  |
|-------------------------|--------------------|----------|---------|------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1. Perceived Racism     | PWI                | 2.66 (.87)| .995    | .96              |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|                         | HBCU               | 2.66 (.82)|         |                  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 2. Racial Centrality    | PWI                | 5.35 (1.08)| .61     | .75              | .45**|    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|                         | HBCU               | 5.44 (.90)|         |                  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 3. Private Regard       | PWI                | 6.48 (.78)| .65     | .84              | .29**| .57**|    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|                         | HBCU               | 6.42 (.93)|         |                  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 4. Public Regard        | PWI                | 3.08 (1.07)| .04     | .71              | -.21*| -.22**| -.06|    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|                         | HBCU               | 3.46 (1.15)|         |                  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 5. Negative Affect      | PWI                | 1.66 (.58)| .10     | .94              | .37**| .04  | -.08| -.10|    |    |    |    |    |    |
|                         | HBCU               | 1.83 (.62)|         |                  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 6. Sense of Belonging   | PWI                | 3.40 (.46)| .03     | .85              | .15  | .35**| .44**| .10 | -.07|    |    |    |    |    |
|                         | HBCU               | 3.68 (.61)|         |                  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 7. Collective Coping    | PWI                | 2.20 (.62)| .003    | .81              | .23* | .22* | .09  | .17 | .14 | .25**|    |    |    |
|                         | HBCU               | 2.64 (.72)|         |                  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 8. Spiritual Coping     | PWI                | 2.16 (.72)| <.001   | .81              | .07  | .20* | .05  | .08 | -.07| .23**| .58**|    |    |
|                         | HBCU               | 2.53 (.69)|         |                  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 9. GPA                  | PWI                | 3.06 (.08)| .33     |                | -.17 | -.11 | .02  | .07 | -.01| .03  | .13  | .07 |    |
|                         | HBCU               | 3.16 (.06)|         |                  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |

Note. PWI = predominantly White institution, HBCU = historically Black college/university, GPA = Grade Point Average. The N ranged from 120 to 149.

*p < .05. **p < .01.
Preliminary Analyses and Descriptive Statistics

Mean differences. With regard to the discussion of means and mean differences for key variables across campus types (i.e., HBCU vs. PWI), these data shall generally be provided in the write-up of the hypotheses of this study that address questions of such mean differences. With regard to those variables that are not hypothesized to differ across campuses, but are amenable to such testing, see Table 2. With regard to the latter tests, no significant differences were found for GPA across school environments however, there was a significant difference for sense of belonging with students from the HBCU endorsing this variable more than students from the PWI.

Correlations. Preliminary correlational analyses revealed a number of statistically significant associations between many of the key variables of this study. Further, it appears that the direction of most of these correlations occurred in a manner consistent with the relevant theories for these variables (see Table 2). For instance, Collective and Spiritual-Centered Coping were positively correlated with one another. This suggests that respondents who seek counsel from family and friends to help them cope with stressors in life tend to also use prayer or other religious rituals to manage their stress. Additionally, both of these variables were also positively correlated with Racial Centrality attitudes. These correlations suggest that for those respondents who believe that being African American is an important part of their identity, they tend to utilize both of the aforementioned coping strategies when stressed. Interestingly, while Spiritual-Centered Coping scores were not found to be associated with participants’ ratings of experiencing racism, Collective Coping scores were associated with feeling that one was the target of racial discrimination. Additionally, participants sense of belonging was also significantly, positively correlated with both Collective and Spiritual-Centered Coping. This
suggests that participants who feel that they belong in their communities are more likely to use these two types of coping behaviors more than people who do not feel as if they belong. Sense of belonging was also significantly associated with racial centrality and private regard. This suggests that respondents who felt like they belonged to their communities were more likely to also be proud of their racial status, and they think favorably of African American people/being African American. Unsurprisingly, participants’ perceptions of racism were not only positively correlated with all three facets of African American racial identity used in this study (i.e., racial centrality, private regard, public regard), but it was also positively associated with feelings of negative affect. This suggests that the more African American students experience acts of racism the more likely their psychological well-being is negatively impacted. Finally, as is generally the case with this measure of racial identity, scores on the three subscales used in this study (i.e., Racial Centrality, Private Regard, Public Regard) were expected to be significantly, positively correlated with each other. This suggests that generally the stronger one resonates with their racial identity, the more likely they are to be proud of their racial status, feel good about being African American, and believe that other racial groups have negative views of the African American community.

**Main Analyses**

**Independent samples t-tests.** Hypotheses 1, 2, 5, and 7 were tested using a series of independent sample t-tests. For the means and standard deviations for these analyses, please refer to Table 2.

Hypothesis 1 posited that students attending a PWI would report experiencing higher levels of perceived racism compared to students at an HBCU. This hypothesis was not supported, \( t[131] = .01, p = .995; 95\% \text{ CI} [-.29, .29]. \) There appears to be no statistically significant
difference in respondents’ reported levels of perceived racism across the two school types examined in this study. That is, students at an HBCU were just as likely to report experiencing racial bias as students attending a PWI.

Hypothesis 2 posited that students attending the PWI would endorse experiencing more symptoms of negative affect compared to students at the HBCU. Counter to expectations, this hypothesis was also not supported, $t[129] = -1.64, p = .10$; 95% CI [-.38, .04]. Thus, there appears to be no significant difference in reports of experiencing negative affect across school environments (i.e., general levels of negative affect were the same at both schools).

Hypothesis 5 posited that students enrolled at an HBCU would endorse higher levels of racial centrality and private regard attitudes, but lower levels of public regard attitudes, when compared to students at a PWI. With regard to finding differences in the endorsement of racial centrality and private regard across campus types, no support was found for either of these facets of Hypothesis five, $t[143] = - .52, p = .61$; 95% CI [-.41, .24] and $t[146] = .46, p = .65$; 95% CI [-.21, 0.34], respectively. This not only suggests that students attending either a PWI or an HBCU appear to endorse similar levels of racial centrality and private regard, but it also suggests that it is not accurate to assume that students for whom their racial identity is important, and who view their racial identity favorably, are more likely to attend an HBCU over a PWI. With regard to my testing of the final facet of Hypothesis 5, an unexpected result was uncovered. Specifically, with regard to public regard attitudes, students enrolled at an HBCU were found to more strongly endorse public regard attitudes compared to students at a PWI, $t[147] = -2.06, p = .04$; 95% CI [-.74, -.02]. This finding was the opposite of what was hypothesized. This finding indicates that students at the HBCU tended to more strongly believe that society generally has a positive view of African Americans compared to the responses of students attending the PWI.
The seventh hypothesis of this study posited that students attending the HBCU would endorse higher rates of practicing both collective and spiritual-centered, Africultural-based coping skills compared to students at the PWI. Both facets of this hypothesis were supported and there was a significant difference for both Collective, $t(135) = -3.06, p = .003$ 95% CI [-.61, -.13] and spiritual-centered ($t(138) = -3.84, p < .001; 95\% \text{ CI} [-.66, -.21]$) coping, respectively. This finding indicates that when faced with difficulties, students at the HBCU are more likely to cope by engaging in behaviors such as seeking counsel or emotional support from family or friends and praying, compared to students at the PWI.

**Simple moderation analyses.** To test the hypothesis that the association between perceived racism and sense of belonging would be moderated by respondents’ school environment (i.e., Hypothesis 4), we utilized Hayes’s (2020) PROCESS 3.5 macro for SPSS. This macro allows researchers to readily perform both simple and complex tests of moderation, and it was used for all tests of moderation in the current study. Per Hayes’s technique (model 1 for simple regression), we specified that the sense of belonging scores would be the outcome variable, perceived racism was designated as the focal predictor, and school environment was entered as the moderator. Additionally, the default setting for these analyses is to utilize a 5000 bootstrap sample with bias corrected confidence intervals. The test of moderation for Hypothesis 3 was not significant, $b = .10, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.13, .32]$, $t(122) = .88, p = .38$. The association between perceptions of racism and one’s sense of belonging at their institution did not vary significantly across school environments.

Hypothesis 8 stated that the association between perceived racism and Africultural-based coping (i.e., both collective and spiritual-centered coping) would vary as a function of school environment (i.e., PWI vs. HBCU). To test this two-part hypothesis, two separate calculations of
Hayes’s technique for testing simple moderation (model 1) were performed. For both these calculations, perceived racism was designated as the focal predictor, and school environment was entered as the moderator. To test the first part of this hypothesis, collective coping was assigned as the outcome variable; and to test the second part, spiritual-centered coping was the outcome variable. These tests revealed that school environment was not a significant moderator of the association between general perceptions of racism and either collective, $b = .14$, 95% CI [-.26, .30], $t(125) = .12, p = .89$ or spiritual-centered, $b = -.01$, 95% CI [-.32, .30], $t(122) = -.07, p = .95$, Africultural-based coping behaviors. Thus, it appears that the association between perceptions of racism and the use of Africultural-based coping (i.e., collective and spiritual-centered coping) did not vary significantly across school environments.

**Moderated moderation analyses.** Hypothesis 3 posited that the inverse association between negative affect and academic performance (i.e., cumulative GPA) would be moderated by both respondents’ endorsed levels of perceived racism and the type of school environment they attended (i.e., PWI vs. HBCU). To test this hypothesis, I utilized model 3 of Hayes’s (2020) PROCESS 3.5 macro for SPSS. I specified that academic performance would be the outcome variable, negative affect was designated as the focal predictor, perceived racism was designated as the primary moderator, and school environment was entered as the secondary moderator. This test for moderated moderation did not yield the expected significant interactions; $b = -.17$, 95% CI [-.58, .25], $t (108) = -.79, p = .43$. In brief, this analysis revealed that the association between experiencing negative affect and academic performance (i.e., GPA) did not vary significantly across students’ perceptions of racism and their school environment.

Like Hypothesis 3, the sixth hypothesis of this study was another test of moderated moderation. I hypothesized that not only would there be a positive association between perceived
ASSESSING DIFFERENCES IN LEVELS

racism and negative affect, but that this association would vary as a function of both participants’ public regard attitudes and their school environment (i.e., HBCU vs. PWI). For this analysis (model 3), negative affect was entered as the outcome variable, perceived racism was designated as the focal predictor, public regard was designated as the primary moderator, and school environment was entered as the secondary moderator. The regression coefficient for this three-way interaction was not significant, $b = -.06, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.35, .23], t(109) = -.40, p = .69$. In brief, this analysis revealed that the association between perceptions of racism and experiencing negative affect did not vary significantly across students’ public regard attitudes nor their school environment.

**Exploratory Analyses**

Because so few of the main hypotheses of this study were supported, additional and purely exploratory analyses were performed to better contextualize these null findings. For example, an independent samples $t$-test was calculated to assess whether or not participants’ ratings of their sense of belonging would vary significantly across campus types. There was a statistically significant difference in respondents reported levels of sense of belonging across the two school types examined in this study, $t[133] = -3.01, p = .033; 95\% \text{ CI } [-.46, -.10]$. That is, students at the HBCU endorsed higher levels of sense of belonging than students attending the PWI. See Table 2 for the relevant means and standard deviations.

Additionally, although the formal hypotheses of this study utilized the combined DASS total score to assess participants’ symptoms of negative affect, it seemed like a useful follow-up analysis to test whether or not the three constituent subscales of the DASS (i.e., Depression, Anxiety, and Stress subscales, respectively) might independently vary across college types. Interestingly, although no significant differences were found with regard to the Depression and
Stress subscales of the DASS across school types, $t[139] = -.56, p = .69$; 95% CI [-2.04, 1.14] and $t[138] = -1.67, p = .59$; 95% CI [-2.97, .25], respectively, there was a significant difference across school settings for participants’ ratings of their anxiety, $t[141] = -2.52, p = .02$; 95% CI [-3.38, -.41]. These findings suggest that students attending either a PWI or HBCU endorse similar levels of depression and stress symptoms, but students attending an HBCU are more likely to endorse higher levels of anxiety compared to students at a PWI. See Table 3 for the relevant means and standard deviations for the DASS subscales.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>School Environment</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>$p$ values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>PWI</td>
<td>4.69 (4.90)</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>5.14 (4.65)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>PWI</td>
<td>3.75 (4.17)</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>5.63 (4.79)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>PWI</td>
<td>6.00 (5.03)</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>7.36 (4.59)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. PWI = predominantly White institution, HBCU = historical Black college and universities*

Additionally, bivariate correlations were calculated for all key study variables by school environment subgroups to assess if any potential differences in these correlations might exist across groups. Such an informal analysis of these associations might be useful when planning future studies on such topics. The following correlations were significant at the PWI, but not the HBCU: Perceived racism was positively correlated with public regard and collective coping. Racial centrality was correlated with public regard, and public regard was correlated with negative affect (see Table 4, PWI Participants Only). Further, the following correlations were significant at the HBCU but not the PWI: Racial centrality was correlated with sense of belonging, collective, and spiritual-centered coping; private regard was correlated with collective coping, and sense of belonging was correlated with collective coping (see Table 5, HBCU).
Participants Only). Given analyzing all of the significant correlations was beyond the scope of this study, further research should be conducted to assess if these differences across school types are legitimate or artifactual.

Table 4
Correlation Matrix for the Study's Key Variables (PWI Participants Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Perceived Racism</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Racial Centrality</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Private Regard</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Public Regard</td>
<td>-.36**</td>
<td>-.31*</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Negative Affect</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.33*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sense of Belonging</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Collective Coping</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Spiritual Coping</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Grade Point Average</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>(n/a)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. PWI = predominantly White institution. Cronbach’s alpha for relevant scales is reported in parentheses in the diagonal. The N ranged from 60 to 77. *p < .05. **p < .01. n/a = not applicable.

Table 5
Correlation Matrix for the Study's Key Variables (HBCU Participants Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Perceived Racism</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Racial Centrality</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Private Regard</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Public Regard</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Negative Affect</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sense of Belonging</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.53**</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Collective Coping</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.30*</td>
<td>.30*</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Spiritual Coping</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Grade Point Average</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>(n/a)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. HBCU = historically Black College/University. Cronbach’s alpha for relevant scales is reported in parentheses in the diagonal. The N ranged from 60 to 76. *p < .05. **p < .01. n/a = not applicable.
Discussion

In this study, the intersection between the concepts of perceived racism, mental health, and coping behavior was assessed in African American college students, both from a PWI and a HBCU. Multiple hypotheses were made to assess if there would be key differences in the experiences of African American college students attending university settings with differing racial compositions (i.e., PWI vs. HBCU). Although in the Results section the hypotheses were ordered by type of statistical analysis, the Discussion section will return to the order of theoretical analyses presented throughout the Literature Review and in the Methods section.

With regard to Hypothesis 1, students at both the HBCU and the PWI were found to endorse similar levels of perceived racially biased experiences, and this suggests that there were no significant differences in such experiences across school environments. This outcome does not support our first hypothesis and could be due to a number of factors. For example, the measure I selected to assess experiences of racism was a measure of global experiences of racism rather than being a measure that also included direct experiences of racism that might more commonly occur in a college setting. Thus, I speculate that the IRRS items may not capture enough gradations of nuance with regard to the unique experiences of racism that distinguish the racism on college campuses from that occurring more generally throughout the world overall. If the IRRS is a good measure of general racism, regardless of setting, then in the current study, the current results seem to suggest that experiences of general racism do not differ across our selected college campuses. However, this interpretation must be qualified by the possibility that the IRRS may simultaneously not allow us to see if the specific types of on-campus racism we attempted to examine differ across PWI vs. HBCU setting because the IRRS is too general of a scale to assess this. Yates (2020) used a survey created by Training Our Campuses Against
Racism (TOCAR; a program commissioned in 2001 on the campus of North Dakota State University) to assess students’ perceptions of racial issues in their community, school, and in the United States. This survey included questions that asked students to specifically draw on their experiences with racism at their institution:

“Been put down intellectually because of my race/ethnic origin,”

“Been followed or stopped by campus police/security because of my race/ethnic origin,”

“Been in a situation where a student embarrassed, patronized or treated me negatively because of my race/ethnic origin.” (p. 3)

It is possible that this survey would have more adequately assessed my target populations’ perceptions of racism. Thus, my lack of a finding may be due to the global pervasiveness of racism in the United States. Racism is engrained within our society, which makes it difficult to escape, meaning it is not limited to students’ college experiences, but is a part of their daily lives across many environmental contexts throughout their lives (Jee-Lyn Garcia & Sharif, 2015).

The results for the second hypothesis revealed that there was no significant difference in reports of experiencing negative affect across school environments (i.e., PWI vs. HBCU). On average, across both school environments, students endorsed experiencing relatively minimal negative affect. That is, most participants in this sample did not endorse clinically relevant levels of symptoms of negative affect; thus, my measurement of negative affect may suffer from a floor effect, precipitated by the lack of nuance in how the DASS assesses gradations in negative affect in those who are relatively low in such symptoms. Due to this potential floor effect, the analyses using this negative affect variable may not have had sufficient specificity to uncover any significant differences across groups on this variable. In addition to the floor effect, we might also postulate that students who experience severely elevated negative affect symptoms may not
be captured in the sample due to the fact that it would likely be more difficult for such students to maintain their successful enrollment in college. College students who struggle with their mental health typically engage in less studying, and this eventually results in both a decrease in their grade point average (Storrie, Ahern, & Tuckett, 2010) and a reduced likelihood of successful college matriculation (Auerbach et al., 2016; Storrie et al., 2010). This finding may not have good external validity, due to the potential lack of generalizability for students who might actually endorse elevations in affect.

Similar to the second hypothesis, the third hypothesis could have also been adversely impacted by the floor effect that seemed to occur with how negative affect was measured in this study. To review, Hypothesis 3 posited that there would be an inverse association between negative affect and academic performance (i.e., students’ cumulative GPA). Further, I proposed that the association between these variables would be moderated by both participants’ endorsed levels of perceived racism and their school environment (i.e., PWI vs. HBCU). My analyses revealed that the association between experiencing negative affect and academic performance did not significantly vary as a function of either feeling that one was the target of racism or by participants’ school environment. This analysis could have potentially yielded a different result if I targeted students who reported having sought counseling services provided from their university counseling centers, rather than selecting a random sample from the non-clinically distressed, general student population. That is, since most of our students appeared to experience normal (rather than relatively elevated) levels of negative affect, some of the effects that were expected to be uncovered may have been absent because these students were not distressed.

With that being said, a study that assessed the association of African American student’s stress levels and their GPA, with racism as contributing factor to the stress, found that while racism
was not a significant factor of stress, stress and GPA were significantly correlated (Woods, 2005). Given this information, it appears more research should be conducted on this specific topic area.

With regard to Hypothesis 4, I did not find support for my assertion that students’ school environment (i.e., PWI vs. HBCU) would moderate the association between students’ perceptions of racism and their sense of belonging to their respective university. Thus, although I was attempting to establish that African American students in predominantly Black spaces likely experience less racism on campus and subsequently feel more belongingness at HBCUs compared to their experiences at PWIs, this was not the case. One explanation for the lack of support for this hypothesis could be because college campuses are microcosms of the larger American society (Webb, 2012), and the same racial biases that occur on a macro level within the border society also occur on college campuses (Jaggers, 2019; Jones, 1990), irrespective of whether or not they are predominantly Black or not.

With regard to Hypothesis 5, counter to expectations, no significant differences were found across university type (i.e., PWI vs. HBCU) concerning students’ endorsement of racial centrality or private regard attitudes. These findings suggest that students whose racial identity is important to them, or who view their race favorably, are as likely to attend a PWI as they are an HBCU. There were no significant differences in these attitudes across school settings, thus it should not be assumed that if an African Americana individual highly endorses racial centrality or private regard attitudes that they are more likely to enroll at a HBCU. One explanation for this finding could be due to the fact that because there are more PWIs than HBCUs in the U.S., it seems reasonable to speculate that African American students going to college will have to choose to enroll at more PWIs than HBCUs, irrespective of their racial identity attitudes. Further,
there may be other factors impacting African American students’ choice for enrolling at a PWI instead of an HBCU, such as geographical location (Wheatle, 2017), financial opportunities, school resources, or desire for a particular collegiate experience (Humphrey, 2018).

Although part three of Hypothesis 5 yielded a significant result, this finding was the inverse of what was postulated. Specifically, students attending the HBCU were found to more strongly endorse the belief that society generally has positive views of African Americans compared to students at the PWI. This finding contrasts with the work of Tatini-Smith and colleagues (2013), who found that African American students attending an HBCU in their study tended to evince low levels of public regard attitudes (i.e., they believe other racial groups hold more negative views about African Americans). This assumption was in support of my hypothesis, but it was not replicated in the current study. One explanation for this lack of replication could be due to African American students at HBCUs having stronger peer networks with other African Americans (Jett, 2013; Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2010); thus, frequent interactions with their same-race peers could inadvertently be projecting more positive public regard sentiments. A study by Santos and colleagues (2017) examined peer influence on a few variables, including public regard, among students attending a predominantly Latino/a school and a predominantly White school. Findings revealed that peers influenced each other’s public regard attitudes (e.g., students changing their attitudes to be more similar to their peers) over time in both school settings, particularly for students who held extreme values (either very high or low) of public regard. One could speculate that positive socialization with predominantly African American peers might bias an African American student's public regard attitude such that they may come to believe that people generally think more favorably of African American people than African American students attending PWIs.
Hypothesis 6 was also not supported in this study. Specifically, although I predicted that the association between perceived racism and negative affect would be moderated by both participants’ public regard attitudes and the school environment variable (i.e., PWI vs. HBCU), respectively, my analyses revealed that the primary association was not moderated by either public regard or school type. The primary relationship between perceived racism and negative affect may have been compromised by the fact that neither of these variables appeared to vary across school environments, nor was negative affect significantly correlated with public regard attitudes. Perhaps using different measures to assess perceptions of racism (as mentioned previously) and negative affect may have yielded different outcomes.

The seventh hypothesis postulated that students attending the HBCU would endorse using collective and spiritual Africultural coping skills at higher rates than students at the PWI. This hypothesis was supported. This finding is consonant with a recent study that found that among mostly African American students, those who attended “minority serving institutions” (e.g., HBCU or Hispanic serving institutions) utilized more collective and spiritual coping skills than participants that attended PWIs (Agbelse, 2019). Additionally, it was found that a greater proportion of students who attended the PWI, in contrast to the HBCU or Hispanic-serving institutions, reported utilizing school mental health resources. Another factor could be that students attending HBCUs feel more comfortable utilizing Africultural coping behaviors because HBCUs tend to have more welcoming or nurturing environments compared to PWIs. HBCUs provide their students an experience of feeling a sense of community (e.g., mutual commitments, relationships beyond the classroom, shared heritage; Harris, 2012). Further, HBCUs tend to encourage interactions and a pedagogy among faculty and students in a community-oriented
environmental system (Harris, 2012) as well as instilling pride and resiliency (Nsonwu et al., 2019).

Although there were differences in coping behaviors across school environments, the eighth hypothesis that assessed the association between perceived racism and AfriCultural coping varying as a function of school environment was not supported. This null result could be attributed to the fact that across school settings in the current study, respondents endorsed similar levels of perceived racism. Additionally, it may be that African American students utilize AfriCultural coping skills for stressors aside from racism; however, those specific stressors were not measured in the current study. A recent study with a similar sample size as the current study \( (N = 162) \) found that African American students attending HBCUs compared to students at PWIs had slightly higher endorsements of using AfriCultural coping skills to protect themselves from being psychologically harmed by problematic social experiences such as racism (Gavin Jr, 2020). Given this information, the current study’s findings may be unique to the sample, but it appears more research is needed in this specific area.

**Limitations**

The discrepancies identified in this study may result from the following limitations. Assessing the participants mental health was a vital aspect of this study to assess how their mental health is impacted by other variables (e.g., perceived racism and school environment). The sample for this study was relatively healthy and did not endorse experiencing elevated depressive, anxiety, or stress symptoms. Given this floor effect, it is possible that using the DASS scale to assess negative affect as a key variable may have compromised the methodology for this study because the DASS might be more sensitive when assessing for more clinically significant expressions of negative affect, compared to typical distress that a college student
might experience. Most successful college students are not experiencing clinically significant levels of psychological distress while attending school. According to the National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI, n.d.) only approximately 11% of college students have been diagnosed and treated for anxiety and 10% for depression. Additionally, NAMI (2012) revealed that 64% of young adults who are no longer in college are not attending because of a mental health related reason (e.g., depression, bipolar disorder, and PTSD are primary diagnosis of this population). Given these statistics, using a measure that is more sensitive to non-clinical symptoms of dysphoria may have been a better choice for this study.

Another potential limitation could be due to the difference in how many male participants participated at the PWI ($n = 26$) compared to the HBCU ($n = 11$). Male participants are underrepresented in this sample; thus, the findings may be more representative of a female participant’s lived experiences. Research shows that African American men endorsed experiences of racial discrimination (e.g., unfairly stopped by police, treated unfairly in hiring, pay or promotion, or people acted as if they were suspicious of them) more than African American women (Anderson, 2019). Given this information, the study may not capture a broader scope of perceptions of racism in the analyses that used that key variable. Although male and female African American students may experience different types of racism-related stressors (e.g., males might experience more unjust stops by police, that lead to acts commonly referred to as police brutality, compared to women more sexual harassment), that does not mean that their responses to those stressors differ in severity/intensity.

An additional limitation of this study could derive from the unaccounted differences that likely exist when comparing a predominantly White school in the Midwest with a predominantly Black school in the Southwest. Such differences may have compromised the ability of my
methods to uncover significant effects. Despite this concern, this explanation for the lack of significant findings in this study seems like it would be more persuasive if I had found more (rather than fewer) significant differences with my hypotheses. In fact, the current findings suggest that despite these geographic differences, participants’ average responses across settings were actually quite comparable on a number of variables (e.g., perceived racism, racial centrality, negative affect). This could indicate that although geographical location is a notable difference, when conducting this type of research, researchers may not need to assure their opposing school environments are in the same region but instead comparable on other variables (e.g., school endowment or resources).

A final potential limitation of this study could be the unexpected confounding variables that were not anticipated at the onset of this project. The data for this study was collected in 2020 at a time when the world was seized by both the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and the international unrest inspired by the multiple examples of African American individuals being killed and maimed by police officers in the United States. The deleterious effects of these events have been exacerbated by the Trump presidency, an administration that has persisted in minimizing and misrepresenting the potential negative effects of both worldwide crises. These situations and their ramifications have negatively impacted people of color, particularly the African American community (Clayton, Moore, & Jones-Eversley, 2019; Hoofnagle et al., 2020; Kullar et al., 2020; Logan, Lightfoot, & Contreras, 2017; Tai, Shah, Doubeni, Sia, & Wieland, 2020; Weine et al., 2020). Plumbing the depths of the effects of these events on all research in the future will almost certainly spawn an entirely new field of study. Unfortunately, fully exploring these effects in the current study is beyond the scope of this project; however, these effects must still be acknowledged. We can certainly speculate that these confounding variables
may have interfered with the ability of the current design to successfully test the key hypotheses of this study, especially as these relate to the phenomena of perceived racism and negative affect.

**Future Directions and Conclusion**

There are a number of insights that can be gleaned from the findings of this study and used to inform future research on similar topics. African American students, irrespective of school environment and amidst the Coronavirus pandemic and international unrest, appeared to be doing well academically and emotionally based on the findings derived from this study (i.e., mean GPA and reports of low negative affect). Additionally, it appeared that African American college students utilize Africultual Coping skills to combat stress, although HBCU students reported utilizing them more than students at the PWI. These findings underscore African American college student's ability to be resilient.

With regard to future directions, the following highlights some areas that can be considered. To address the limitation noted regarding the sample having a floor effect with respect to negative affect, this study could be replicated with a sample that was recruited from the college or university counseling centers. With this approach, the sample would include more participants that would endorse experiencing elevated mental health symptoms and allow the opportunity to assess if those elevations lead to outcome differences in the current statistical analyses. Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study with a non-college sample of African American individuals (e.g., college age African Americans who opted out of pursuing higher education and decided to enter the workforce) and compare differences in responses for some of the key variables (e.g., perceptions of racism, private/public regard, negative affect) and the analyses with the current sample. Comparing the samples would allow for researchers to assess if there are any confounding variables or significant differences between
the sample populations. Further, it would also provide some insight into implications for how to interpret nuances in African American individuals lived experiences, who are and are not enrolled in college.

The total score from the IRRS measure was used as the perceived racism variable in this study. Since the sample was specifically focused upon the experiences of college students, in future studies, researchers might consider using a measure of racism that is explicitly designed to assess perceptions of racism within college environments. As was previously discussed, the IRRS measure may capture global effects of racism; thus, a measure that could further distinguish experiences of racism that are unique to the college environment (i.e., institutional racism) may yield different outcomes.

A confounding variable that was not assessed in this study was the number of African American individuals who inhabit participants’ friend networks. This variable could have been a potential moderator of some of the effects explored in this study. For example, maybe knowing the racial makeup of respondents’ regular and close social contacts might be an equal or better measure of their sense of belonging, and this might subsequently influence the degree to which respondents believe it is necessary to use various forms of Africultural-coping behaviors. It could be that the more African American friends a participant endorses having the more they feel a sense of belonging at their college or university or are more likely to engage in Africultural-coping when faced with a variety of stressors.

Those are few future directions where this research can evolve. The current study contributes to the growing body of research that assess African American college students’ lived experiences. This study specifically considered the intersection between experiences of racism, mental health, and coping behaviors; psychological health and academic performance; as well as
the nuances of such interactions and students reports based on the racial composition of their university (i.e., PWI vs. HBCU). While there is some literature on those concepts, research that contextualizes and assesses all of those factors with a focus on African American college students, both at the undergraduate and graduate level, is in the developing stages. Some of the main points uncovered in this study were that regardless of school environment (i.e., PWI vs. HBCU), African American students reported similar experiences on a variety of variables (i.e., perceived racism, negative affect, racial centrality, private regard, GPA). Further, African American students at the HBCU were found to utilize more Africultural-based coping behaviors compared to African American students at the PWI. The findings in this study not only provide perspective on African Americans students’ experiences in different school environments (i.e., PWI vs. HBCU), but these findings can also be a catalyst for university professors/personnel to better understand how environmental or social factors might help or hinder students college experiences or provide implications for how they can better support their African American students.
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ASSESSING DIFFERENCES IN LEVELS

graduation of minority nurses in colleges of nursing, 55-62.


Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

Apr 15, 2020 1:00 PM EDT

Taylor Garland
Eastern Michigan University, Psychology

Re: Exempt - Initial - UHSRC-FY19-20-203 PWI or HBCU: The Effects of the Racial Composition of School Environment and Perceived Racism on African American Students' College Experience

Dear Taylor Garland:

The Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee has rendered the decision below for PWI or HBCU: The Effects of the Racial Composition of School Environment and Perceived Racism on African American Students' College Experience. You may begin your research.

Decision: Exempt - Limited IRB

Selected Category: Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(b)(7).

Renewals: Exempt studies do not need to be renewed. When the project is completed, please contact human.subjects@emich.edu.

Modifications: Any plan to alter the study design or any study documents must be reviewed to determine if the Exempt decision changes. You must submit a modification request application in Cayuse IRB and await a decision prior to implementation.

Problems: Any deviations from the study protocol, unanticipated problems, adverse events, subject complaints, or other problems that may affect the risk to human subjects must be reported to the UHSRC. Complete an incident report in Cayuse IRB.

Follow-up: Please contact the UHSRC when your project is complete.

Please contact human.subjects@emich.edu with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
Appendix B: Consent Form for Eastern Michigan University

Principal Investigator (PI): Taylor Garland
Faculty Advisor: Stephen Jefferson
Department of Psychology

Purpose: You are being asked to participate in a research study on how African American students perceive racism and how racism impacts their mental health and coping behaviors. This study is being conducted at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) as an independent research project.

Duration: This study should take no more than an hour to complete.

Study Procedures: If you take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a series of questionnaires. Initially, you will be asked to provide some basic demographic information (e.g., age, gender, race, GPA, etc.). Then you will be asked to read statements from multiple questionnaires that assess your attitudes about a variety of everyday social issues that are relevant to the hypotheses of this study. We humbly ask that you complete the questionnaires for this study as thoroughly and as honestly as you can (i.e., there are not right or wrong answers; we just want to know your true beliefs concerning these issues). This study is estimated to take approximately an hour or less to complete.

Benefits: As a participant in this research study, there will be no direct benefit to you. However, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future. The results of this research will likely be published in a relevant professional journal in psychology or presented at a professional conference.

Risks: PLEASE READ THIS NOTICE BEFORE YOU CONSENT TO PARTICIPATING. This study entails very minimal risk to participants. You will be asked to sit in front of a computer, follow an Internet link to access the survey, and then asked about your thoughts and feelings concerning topics such as how your school addresses issues of diversity and inclusion. In the very highly unlikely circumstance that you experience a negative reaction to any part of this survey (i.e., heightened anxiety, depression, etc. as a result of the research experience), please note that such feelings should be temporary, dissipating during or shortly after the research experience has been completed. In the extremely improbably circumstance that you experience lingering negative effects after participating in this study, please be aware that EMU students are eligible for free counseling sessions at the Counseling and Psychological Services center in the EMU Snow Health Center. This resource is located at:

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
1075 N Huron River Dr.
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197
Telephone: 734.487.1118
Fax: 734.481.0050
Email: counseling.services@emich.edu
Hours: 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday

Costs: There will be no monetary costs to you for participation in this research study.
Confidentiality: Data collected and presented from this research project will only be discussed in terms of aggregated responses. This means that all of the responses you give will never be directly linked to any of your identifying information in any way. Please note that no personal information that could link you to this research will be included in any publications of this research.

Compensation: You will not be paid for taking part in this study. However, some instructors in the Psychology Department do offer course credit for research participation (researchers have no control over this). If your instructor does offer course credit for your participation, please note that AT THE END OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS ANONYMOUS SURVEY, YOU WILL NEED TO FOLLOW THE LINK PROVIDED TO A COMPLETELY SEPARATE SURVEY WHERE YOU WILL BE ASKED TO GIVE US YOUR NAME. THIS SECOND SURVEY WILL NOT IN ANY WAY BE LINKED TO YOUR EARLIER SURVEY RESPONSES AND IS ONLY COLLECTED SO THAT WE CAN GIVE PARTICIPANTS RESEARCH CREDIT BY NAME. IF YOU DO NOT COMPLETE THIS SURVEY, WE WILL HAVE NO OTHER WAY OF KNOWING YOUR NAME, AND WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO AWARD YOU SONA CREDIT.

Contact Information: If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Taylor Garland, at tgarlan4@emich.edu. You can also contact Ms. Garland’s faculty adviser, Dr. Stephen Jefferson, at sjeff2@emich.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research subject, you can contact the Eastern Michigan University Office of Research Compliance at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this research study is your choice. You may refuse to participate at any time, even after signing this form, with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Choosing not to participate in this study will not affect your relationship with any of your instructors or any department or representative at Eastern Michigan University.

Statement of Consent

I have read this consent form and acknowledge that by selecting the “I agree to participate” option below, I am indicating my consent to participate in this research study. If I choose “I do not agree to participate,” I indicate my desire to NOT participate in this study.
Appendix C: Consent Form for Prairie View Texas A & M University

Principal Investigator (PI): Taylor Garland
Faculty Advisor: Stephen Jefferson
Department of Psychology

Purpose: You are being asked to participate in a research study on how African American students perceive racism and how racism impacts their mental health and coping behaviors. This study is being conducted at Prairie View Texas A & M University (PVAMU) as an independent research project.

Duration: This study should take no more than an hour to complete.

Study Procedures: If you take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a series of questionnaires. Initially, you will be asked to provide some basic demographic information (e.g., age, gender, race, GPA, etc.). Then you will be asked to read statements from multiple questionnaires that assess your attitudes about a variety of everyday social issues that are relevant to the hypotheses of this study. We humbly ask that you complete the questionnaires for this study as thoroughly and as honestly as you can (i.e., there are not right or wrong answers; we just want to know your true beliefs concerning these issues). This study is estimated to take approximately an hour or less to complete.

Benefits: As a participant in this research study, there will be no direct benefit to you. However, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future. The results of this research will likely be published in a relevant professional journal in psychology or presented at a professional conference.

Risks: PLEASE READ THIS NOTICE BEFORE YOU CONSENT TO PARTICIPATING. This study entails very minimal risk to participants. You will be asked to sit in front of a computer, follow an Internet link to access the survey, and then asked about your thoughts and feelings concerning topics such as how your school addresses issues of diversity and inclusion. In the very highly unlikely circumstance that you experience a negative reaction to any part of this survey (i.e., heightened anxiety, depression, etc. as a result of the research experience), please note that such feelings should be temporary, dissipating during or shortly after the research experience has been completed. In the extremely improbably circumstance that you experience lingering negative effects after participating in this study, please be aware that PVAMU students have access to counseling sessions at Student Counseling Services. This resource is located at:

Student Counseling Services
Owens-Franklin Health Center Ste. 226
Telephone: 936-261-3564
Hours: 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Monday through Wednesday; 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Thursday through Friday.

Costs: There will be no monetary costs to you for participation in this research study.
Confidentiality: Data collected and presented from this research project will only be discussed in terms of aggregated responses. This means that all of the responses you give will never be directly linked to any of your identifying information in any way. Please note that no personal information that could link you to this research will be included in any publications of this research.

Compensation: You will not be paid for taking part in this study. However, some instructors in the Psychology Department do offer course credit for research participation (researchers have no control over this). If your instructor does offer course credit for your participation, please note that AT THE END OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS ANONYMOUS SURVEY, YOU WILL NEED TO FOLLOW THE LINK PROVIDED TO A COMPLETELY SEPARATE SURVEY WHERE YOU WILL BE ASKED TO GIVE US YOUR NAME. THIS SECOND SURVEY WILL NOT IN ANY WAY BE LINKED TO YOUR EARLIER SURVEY RESPONSES AND IS ONLY COLLECTED SO THAT WE CAN GIVE PARTICIPANTS RESEARCH CREDIT BY NAME. IF YOU DO NOT COMPLETE THIS SURVEY, WE WILL HAVE NO OTHER WAY OF KNOWING YOUR NAME, AND WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO AWARD YOU SONA CREDIT.

Contact Information: If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Taylor Garland, at tgarlan4@emich.edu. You can also contact Ms. Garland’s faculty adviser, Dr. Stephen Jefferson, at sjjeffer2@emich.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research subject, you can contact the Eastern Michigan University Office of Research Compliance at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this research study is your choice. You may refuse to participate at any time, even after signing this form, with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Choosing not to participate in this study will not affect your relationship with any of your instructors or any department or representative at Prairie View Texas A & M University.

Statement of Consent

I have read this consent form and acknowledge that by selecting the “I agree to participate” option below, I am indicating my consent to participate in this research study. If I choose “I do not agree to participate,” I indicate my desire to NOT participate in this study.
Appendix D: Demographic Questions

Demo1 What university are you currently enrolled at?

- Eastern Michigan University (EMU)
- Prairie View Texas A & M
- Other ________________________________

Demo2 What is your current class year?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate Student

Demo3 What is your current overall GPA (i.e., 3.0)?

______________________________________________
Demo4 Using the options below, what is the major that fits best with your current major or intended major?

- Literature, Science, Arts (e.g., History, English, Psychology, Sociology, African American studies, Philosophy, Creative writing)
- S.T.E.M. (e.g., Engineering, Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, Computer science, Information, Mathematics)
- Health Science (e.g., Nursing, Kinesiology, Public health, Health administration)
- Music, Dance, and Theater
- Business
- International Affairs
- Foreign Language (e.g., Spanish, French, Arabic)
- Architecture/Interior design
- Elementary/Secondary Education
- Criminal Justice, Political Science, & Law
- Masters Program
- Doctorate Program
- Other

Demo4 What is your age?

___________________________________
Demo 5 What is your gender identity?

- Male (cisgender)
- Female (cisgender)
- Male (transgender/transexual)
- Female (transgender/transexual)
- Gender queer/gender variant
- Other ________________________________
- Prefer not to answer

Demo 6 What is your race/ethnicity?

- White/European American
- African American
- Asian
- Hispanic/Latino/a
- Native American
- Middle Eastern
- Pacific Islander
- Biracial/Multiracial/Multiethnic
- Other ________________________________
Demo7 Are you a United States citizen or a permanent resident of the United States?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

Demo8 What is your current relationship status?

- Single, never married
- Married
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed

Demo9 What is your political affiliation?

- Democrat
- Republican
- Tea Party
- Libertarian
- Green Party
- Other ________________________________________________
Demo10 Politically, I consider myself to be...

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Very highly liberal

Very highly conservative

Demo11 Using the options below, please make you best guess about what you believe your yearly household family income currently is:

- [ ] Less than $10,000
- [ ] $10,000 - $19,999
- [ ] $20,000 - $39,999
- [ ] $40,000 - $59,999
- [ ] $60,000 - $79,999
- [ ] $80,000 - $99,999
- [ ] More than $100,000
Appendix E: Manipulation Check Questions

MC1 Please pick the number three as your answer choice.

- 8
- 33
- 19
- 3

MC2 What is the answer to the following equation: $2 + 2 = ?$

- 21
- 7
- 4
- 50
Appendix F: Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI)

Instructions: The following statements require you to draw on your attitudes regarding race and racial identity. Read each item and indicate to what degree it reflects your own thoughts and feelings, using the scale below. There are no right or wrong answers. Base your responses on your opinion at the present time.

Likert Scale:
1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Somewhat Disagree
3 = Disagree
4 = Neutral
5 = Agree
6 = Somewhat Agree
7 = Strongly Agree

1. Overall, being Black has very little to do with how I feel about myself.
2. It is important for Black people to surround their children with Black art, music, and literature.
3. Black people should not marry interracially.
4. I feel good about Black people.
5. Overall, Blacks are considered good by others.
6. In general, being Black is an important part of my self-image.
7. I am happy that I am Black.
8. I feel that Blacks have made major accomplishments and achievements.
9. My destiny is tied to the destiny of other Black people.
10. Blacks who espouse separatism are as racist as White people who espouse separatism.
11. Blacks would be better off if they adopted Afrocentric values.
12. Black students are better off going to schools that are controlled and organized by Blacks.
13. Being Black is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am.
14. Black people must organize themselves into a separate Black political force.
15. In general, others respect Black people.
16. Whenever possible, Black people should buy from Black businesses.
17. Most people consider Blacks, on the average, to be more ineffective than other racial groups.
18. A sign of progress is that Blacks are in the mainstream of American more than ever before.
19. I have a strong sense of belonging to Black people.
20. The same forces which have led to the oppression of Blacks have also led to the oppression of other groups.
21. A thorough knowledge of Black history is very important for Blacks today.
22. Blacks and Whites can never live in true harmony because of racial differences.
23. Black values should not be inconsistent with human values.
24. I often regret that I am Black.
25. White people can never be trusted where Blacks are concerned.
26. Blacks should have the choice to marry interracially.
27. Blacks and Whites have more commonalities than differences.
28. Black people should not consider race when buying art or selecting a book to read.
29. Blacks would be better off if they were more concerned with the problems facing all people than just focusing on Black issues.
30. Being an individual is more important than identifying oneself as Black.
31. We are all children of a higher being, therefore, we should love people of all races.
32. Blacks should judge Whites as individuals and not as members of the White race.
33. I have a strong attachment to other Black people.
34. The struggle for Black liberation in America should be closely related to the struggle of other oppressed groups.
35. People regardless of their race have strengths and limitations.
36. Blacks should learn about the oppression of other groups.
37. Because America is predominantly white, it is important that Blacks go to White schools so that they can gain experience interacting with Whites.
38. Black people should treat other oppressed people as allies.
39. Blacks should strive to be full members of the American political system.
40. Blacks should try to work within the system to achieve their political and economic goals.
41. Blacks should strive to integrate all institutions which are segregated.
42. The racism Blacks have experienced is similar to that of other minority groups.
43. Blacks should feel free to interact socially with White people.
44. Blacks should view themselves as being Americans first and foremost.
45. There are other people who experience racial injustice and indignities similar to Black Americans.
46. The plight of Blacks in America will improve only when Blacks are in important positions within the system.
47. Blacks will be more successful in achieving their goals if they form coalitions with other oppressed groups.
48. Being Black is an important reflection of who I am.
49. Blacks should try to become friends with people from other oppressed groups.
50. The dominant society devalues anything not White male oriented.
51. Being Black is not a major factor in my social relationships.
52. Blacks are not represented by the broader society.
53. In general, other groups view Blacks in a positive manner.
54. I am proud to be Black.
55. I feel that the Black community has made valuable contributions to this society.
56. Society views Black people as an asset.
Appendix G: Index of Race Related Stress (IRRS)

Instructions: There are many experiences that an African American person can have in this country because of his or her race. Some events happen just once, and others may happen more frequently. Please read the following statements and indicate whether or not you have ever experienced a given racism-related event and to what degree the event was stressful.

Likert Scale:
0 = This has never happened to me
1 = This event happened, but did not bother me
2 = This event happened, and I was slightly upset
3 = This event happened, and I was upset
4 = This event happened, and I was extremely upset

1. You have been in a restaurant or other White/non-Black establishment where everyone was waited on before you.
2. You notice that crimes committed by White people tend to be romanticized, whereas the same crime committed by a Black person is portrayed as savagery, and the Black person who committed it, as an animal.
3. You notice that when a Black person is killed by a White mob or policeman no one is sent to jail.
4. You have been followed by security (or employees) while shopping in some stores.
5. Sales people/clerks did not say thank you or show other forms of courtesy and respect (i.e. put your things in a bag) when you shopped at some White/non-Black owned businesses.
6. White people or other non-Blacks have treated you as if you were unintelligent and needed things explained to you slowly or numerous times.
7. You have been questioned about your presence in a White neighborhood for no apparent reason.
8. You notice that when Black people, the media informs the public of the victim's criminal record or negative information in their background, suggesting they got what they deserved.
9. Whites/non-Blacks have failed to apologize for stepping on your foot or bumping into you.
10. You have been threatened with physical violence by an individual or group of Whites/non-Blacks.
11. You were physically attacked by an individual or group of White/non-Blacks.
12. You did not receive a promotion you deserved; you suspect it was because you are Black.
13. You have observed that White kids who commit violent crimes are portrayed as "boys being boys," while Black kids who commit similar crimes are wild animals.
14. You have had trouble getting a cab to go certain places or even stop for you.
15. You seldom hear or read anything positive about Black people on radio, TV, newspapers, or in history books.
16. While on public transportation or in public places, White people/non-Blacks have opted to stand up rather than sit next to you.
17. Although waiting in line first, you were assisted after the White/non-Black person behind you.
18. White people have expected you to denounce or reject the views or remarks of controversial Black leaders.
19. You did not get the job you applied for although you were well qualified; you suspect because you are Black.
20. You were refused an apartment or other housing; you suspect it was because you are Black.
21. You have observed a double standard in the way the law or other systems of government (court, media, disciplinary committees, etc.) work (or don't work) when dealing with Blacks as opposed to Whites/non-Blacks.
22. While shopping at a store, the sales clerk assumed that you couldn't afford certain items (i.e., you were directed toward the items on sale).
23. White/non-Black people have been apologetic about the Japanese internment, Jewish Holocaust, and other violations of human rights, but would prefer to forget about slavery, Jim Crowism, and other abuses of Black people.
24. You were treated with less respect and courtesy than Whites and other non-Blacks while in a store, restaurant, or other business establishment.
25. You were the victim of a crime and the police treated you as if you should just accept it as part of being Black.
26. You were passed over for an important project although you were more qualified and competent than the White/non-Black person given the task.
27. Whites/non-Blacks have stared at you as if you didn't belong in the same place with them, whether it was a restaurant, theater, or other place of business.
28. You called the police for assistance and when they arrived, they treated you like a criminal.
29. You have observed the police treat White/non-Blacks with more respect and dignity than they do Blacks.
30. White/non-Black people have mistaken you for a salesperson, waiter, or other service help when you were actually a customer.
31. You have noticed that the public services are inadequate or nonexistent in Black communities (police, sanitation, street repairs, etc.).
32. You have been subjected to racist jokes by Whites/non-Blacks in positions of authority, and you did not protest for fear they might have held it against you.
33. While shopping at a store or when attempting to make a purchase, you were ignored as if you were not a serious customer or didn't have any money.
34. You have heard Blacks constantly being compared with other immigrants and minorities in terms of what they have not achieved, in spite of having been in the U.S. for so much longer than the other groups.
35. You have observed situations where other Blacks were treated harshly or unfairly by Whites/non-Blacks because of their race.
36. You have attempted to hail a cab, but they refused to stop, you think because you are Black.
37. You have heard reports of White people/non-Blacks who have committed crimes, and in an effort to cover up their deeds falsely reported that a Black man was responsible for the crime.
38. You have held back angry or hostile feelings in the presence of White/ non-Black people for fear they would've accused you of having a "chip" on your shoulder.
39. You have been asked to pay in advance for goods/services that are usually paid for after a person receives them; you suspect it was because you are Black.
40. You notice that the media plays up those stories that cast Blacks in negative ways (child abusers, rapists, muggers, etc. [or as savages] Wild Man of 96th St., Wolf Pack, etc.) usually accompanied by a large picture of a Black person looking angry or disturbed.
41. You have been given more work or the most undesirable jobs at your place of employment, whereas the White/non-Black of equal or less seniority and credentials is given less work and more desirable tasks.
42. You have heard it suggested that Black men have an uncontrollable desire to possess a White woman.
43. You have heard racist remarks or comments about Black people spoken with impunity by White public officials or other influential White people.
44. You have heard or seen other Black people express the desire to be White or to have White physical characteristics because they disliked being Black or thought it was ugly.
45. When you have interacted with Whites/non-Blacks, you anticipated them saying or doing something racist either intentionally or unintentionally.
46. You have discovered that the White/non-Black person employed in the same capacity as you with equal or less qualifications is paid a higher salary.
Appendix H: Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21)

**Instructions:** Please read each statement and indicate how much the statement applied to you over the past week. There are no right or wrong answers.

**Likert Scale:**
0 = Did not apply to me at all - Never  
1 = Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time - Sometimes  
2 = Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time – Often  
3 = Applied to me very much, or most of the time - Almost Always

1. I found it hard to wind down.  
2. I was aware of dryness of my mouth.  
3. I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all.  
4. I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g., excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in absence of physical exertion).  
5. I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things.  
6. I tended to over-react to situations.  
7. I experienced trembling (e.g., in the hands).  
8. I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy.  
9. I was worried about situation in which I might panic and make a fool of myself.  
10. I felt that I had nothing to look forward to.  
11. I found myself getting agitated.  
12. I found it difficult to relax.  
13. I felt down-hearted and blue.  
14. I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing.  
15. I felt I was close to panic.  
16. I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything.  
17. I felt I wasn't worth much as a person.  
18. I felt that I was rather touchy.  
19. I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g., sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat).  
20. I felt scared without good reason.  
21. I felt that life was meaningless.
Appendix I: Africultural Coping Systems Inventory (ACSI)

Instructions: Think of a specific stressful situation or event that you have encountered within the past week or so. Such situations might have been related to your family, friends, school, job, romantic relationship other things you consider important in your life. Please read the following statements and indicate the degree to which you used that specific method to cope with the stressor.

Likert Scale:
0 = Did Not Use
1 = Used A Little
2 = Used A Lot
3 = Used A Great Deal

1. Prayed that things would work themselves out.
2. Got a group of family or friends together to help with the problem.
3. Shared my feelings with a friend or family member.
4. Remembered what a parent (or other relative) once said about dealing with these kinds of situations.
5. Tried to forget about the situation.
6. Went to church (or other religious meeting) to get help from the group.
7. Thought of all the struggles Black people have had to endure and this gave me strength to deal with the situation.
8. To keep from thinking about the situation I found other things to keep me busy.
9. Sought advice about how to handle the situation from an older person in my family or community.
10. Read a scripture from the Bible (or similar book) for comfort and/or guidance.
11. Asked for suggestions on how to deal with the situation during a meeting of my organization or club.
12. Tried to convince myself that it wasn’t that bad.
13. Asked someone to pray for me.
14. Spent more time than usual doing group activities.
15. Hoped that things would get better with time.
17. Spent more time than usual doing things with friends and family.
18. Tried to remove myself from the situation.
19. Sought out people I thought would make me laugh.
20. Got dressed up in my best clothing.
21. Attended a social event (dance, party, movie) to reduce stress caused by the situation.
22. Asked for blessings from a spiritual or religious person.
23. Helped others with their problems.
24. Lit a candle for strength or guidance in dealing with the problem.
25. Sought emotional support from family and friends.
26. Burned incense for strength or guidance in dealing with the problem.
27. Sung a song to myself to help reduce the stress.
28. Used a cross or other object for its special powers in dealing with the problem.
29. Found myself watching more comedy shows on TV.
30. Left matters in God’s hands.
Appendix J: Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM)

**Instructions:** Please read the following statements and indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the specific statement, based on how you feel about your university.

**Likert Scale:**
1 = Strongly Disagree  
2 = Disagree  
3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree  
4 = Agree  
5 = Strongly Agree

1. I feel like a real part of this university.
2. People here notice when I am good at something.
3. It is hard for people like me to be accepted here.
4. Other students in this school take my opinions seriously.
5. Most professors at this university are interested in me.
6. Sometimes I feel as if I don’t belong here.
7. There’s at least one professor or other adult at this university I can talk to if I have a problem.
8. People at this university are friendly to me.
9. Professors here are not interested in people like me.
10. I am included in lots of activities at this university.
11. I am treated with as much respect as other students.
12. I feel very different from most other students here.
13. I can really be myself at this university.
14. The professors here respect me.
15. People here know I can do good work.
16. I wish I were at a different university.
17. I feel proud of belonging to this university.
18. Other students here like me the way I am.