

2017

You PC bro? : how experiences of racial microaggressions affect undergraduate African American student retention

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A Dissertation

entitled

You PC Bro? How Experiences of Racial Microaggressions Affect Undergraduate
African American Student Retention

by

Kyle J. Brezinski

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Counselor Education

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The University of Toledo

August 2016

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An Abstract of

You PC Bro? How Experiences of Racial Microaggressions Affect Undergraduate African American Student Retention

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This study assessed the impact of racial microaggressions on African American college students. I examined the relationship between racial microaggressions and college students' retention. This study aimed to answer the research questions: Is there a relationship between African American college students' retention and their experience of racial microaggressions? Previous research indicated that racial microaggressions have a negative impact on undergraduate African American college students (Sue, 2008). The purpose of this study was to further understand the degree, if any, racial microaggressions have on African American college students' retention. This study collected survey data from 53 participants who self-identified as African American. Data collection was conducted through demographic questionnaire, retention questionnaire, and use of the Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS) (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). There was a statistically significant relationship between the subscale of Foreigner/Not Belonging and African American's thoughts on dropping out during the ongoing semester [$r(51) = .338$, $p < .05$]. The results suggested that although African Americans have strong thoughts

towards dropping out due to racial microaggressions, they do in fact frequently experience racial microaggressions while on campus. Implications, limitations, and future research approaches were provided.

For my parents Elizabeth and Steve. You have helped me get to this point in life more than you could even imagine and for that I thank you from the bottom of my heart.
Thanks for adopting me!

Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not have been possible without the love and positive encouragement I received from my parents. At this stage in the process, I have now realized the amount of time my mother set aside to listen to me complain about the difficulties and hardships I went through during my entire college process. I am deeply grateful to my father for setting multiple days aside from his busy work schedule to come visit me on campus and witness all of my graduations. I am extremely thankful for my two wonderful puppies Fox and Kozzy for allowing me to use them as pillows while writing many of my papers for the doctoral program. I also want to say a big thanks to Oscar Lazarky, Daryl Dickerson, and Chris Iglesias for the support and encouragement throughout the doctoral program.

My dissertation could not have been completed without the constant help and feedback from my dissertation Advisor. When I first met Dr. Laux I had always been afraid of him and I'm not sure why. I believe part of me never wanted to let him down. I always viewed Dr. Laux as a successful, competent leader, who overcame many challenges to get to where he is today. In my head, I always wanted to follow in his footsteps to achieve a similar level of success in my own personal growth and development. Without his leadership and guidance, I would not be at the place I am today.

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List of Abbreviations

PWI.....Predominantly White Institutions

RMA.....Racial Microaggression

Chapter One

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

A student's college experience can be an important factor in the development of their personal and professional identity (Hirschy et al, 2015; Zarshenas et al, 2014). However, minorities tend to have added stressors in their developmental process due to multicultural issues that are not faced by persons from the dominant culture. For the purpose of this dissertation we followed Merriam-Webster's definition of a minority as "a group of people who are different from the larger group in a country, area, etc., in some way (such as race or religion)" (Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, 2015). A problem for minorities is that racial inequalities can hinder the developmental process and inhibit these students from achieving success (Sue, 2008). African Americans have one of the lowest four-year degree completion rates in comparison to all other races/ethnicities (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2012; Jones & Williams, 2006).

The literature shows that we know some of factors that influence retention (Dabney, 2010) but not all of them. There is a gap in the literature that looks at the degree to which, if any, racial microaggressions (RMA) affect retention. A RMA is defined as being an intentional or unintentional act that sends a hostile, derogatory, or racial insult toward an ethnic/racial minority (Sue et al, 2008). These acts can be either verbal or nonverbal forms of communication. .To date, few studies have examined the phenomenon of racial microaggressions on predominantly-White campuses (Torres, Driscoll & Burrow, 2010; McCabe, 2009; Smith, 2007).

In Torres, Driscoll and Burrow's (2010) study, the researchers examined the influence racial microaggressions may have on the mental health of African American

doctoral students and graduates of doctoral programs. The researchers used a mixed-method approach by having participants first identify types of microaggressions experienced followed by an investigation to determine what effect the reported microaggressions had on participants mental health. The researchers found that the experience of racial microaggressions could be partially responsible for perceiving that one's life is stressful. These experiences were shown to have the possibility of increasing an individual's depressive symptoms.

Janice McCabe (2009) looked at the patterns of experienced gender and racial microaggressions of undergraduate students at predominantly White campuses. The researcher conducted 68 one-on-one interviews and four focus group interviews from participants at a single Predominantly White Institution (PWI). A PWI is defined as being an institution in which White students make up for 50% or more of the student body (Brown & Dancy, 2009). Four main themes emerged from the collected data: students viewed African American males as threatening, Latina women were viewed as sexual objects, African American females predominantly experienced racial microaggressions in the classroom by being viewed as the voice of their entire race/ethnicity and being viewed as academically inferior in comparison to their peers, and White women experienced gender microaggressions in academic majors that were viewed as being "male dominated." The author recommended from the results of the study that universities should increase their efforts in supporting student organizations that create and foster a positive racial and gender identities. The author also recommended that universities implement university-wide mentoring programs for students.

In Smith, Allen, and Danley's (2007) study the researchers looked at the experiences of 36 African American male students at PWIs. The researchers found that these students suffered from what they called "racial battle fatigue" due to constant stereotyping and discriminating practices. The researchers described racial battle fatigue as increased levels of frustration, stress, anger, disappointment, resentment, and anxiety.

The participants in the prior research studies were all at PWIs. However, it is also important to study how racial microaggressions may be influencing undergraduate students at more diverse campuses. Enrollment in college for minorities has been steadily increasing since 2005 (U.S. Department of Education, Institution of Education Sciences [IES], 2015). The increase in minority enrollment has resulted in a more diverse campus climate at many universities. A more diverse campus climate creates opportunities for students, varying in ethnic and racial backgrounds, to interact with one another, but may lead to an increased opportunity in experiencing racial discrimination (Rothman, Lipset, & Nevitte, 2003). Thus it is important for researchers to study the relationship of racial microaggressions and retention.

Studies have been showing that one of the prominent reasons minorities left their current institution was due to racial discrimination (Lewis & McKissic, 2010; Grier-Reed, 2010). Studying the effects of racial microaggressions and retention may assist universities in increasing their multicultural competencies to continue providing a safe, diverse learning environment. This study aimed to look at how African American undergraduate college students' retention is affected by racial microaggressions. The main issue this study looks at is the degree to which, if any, racial microaggressions affect African Americans' retention rates.

Background of the Problem

Sue et al (2008) stated that racial microaggressions can be intentional or unintentional. Racial microaggressions communicate hostile or negative insults towards people of color. An example of an intentional racial microaggressions would be purposefully serving a White person over a minority at a bar. An example of an unintentional racial microaggressions could be asking a minority “where they are from?” thinking because they look different they must be internationally born, ignoring the possibility that they could have been born in the United States. These types of interactions can occur verbally or non-verbally through a type of action directed at a specific individual or group of people. This study’s focus will be on the less blatant acts that are subtle but still devastating, if not more devastating, to the individual the act was directed towards (McCabe, 2009). Subtle acts of discrimination can be more harmful than blatant discrimination due to their ambiguous nature (Driscoll & Burrow, 2010; Sue et al., 2008). Subtle acts can leave the victim in a confused state wondering if the act was meant to be intentional or if it was a misunderstanding. Eventually this cognitive thought process takes a psychological toll on minorities which can lead to a decrease in personal mental health (Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008).

Universities have been struggling at successfully graduating minority students from four-year degree programs (Ahorlu & Nicole, 2013). One of the main races effected by this are African Americans. Since the early 90’s African American undergraduate students have had one of the lowest degree completion rates in comparison to all other races in the United States (Ahorlu & Nicole, 2013; Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2012; Jones & Williams, 2006). To help solve this issue universities have begun to implement different

retention initiative programs in order to increase African American student success (Carter, 2006; Wells, 2008). Programs like Upward bound, first-year introduction, tutoring services, and African American Student centers, have been rolled out in order to better serve African American Students. However, even with these programs, universities are still noticing a trend of African Americans failing at completing four-year degrees (Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2012).

Researchers have noted that one of the most influential reasons African American undergraduate students are failing to complete four-year degrees is related to racism and racial discrimination (Ahorulu & Nicole, 2013; Grier-Reed, 2010; Wells, 2008). The Diverse Learning Environment (DLE) project collected data and found that one of the significant barriers for African Americans achieving academic success were racial stereotypes (Ahorulu & Nicole, 2013). These stereotypes were that African American's felt they were being perceived as intellectually incapable and that they were being closely monitored. As a result, African Americans leave universities in which they experience forms of racial discrimination and head to universities that are known for being historically Black colleges (Grier-Reed, 2010; Henson, Derlega, & Pearson, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to further understand the degree, if any, racial microaggressions have on African American college students' retention. African Americans have one of the lowest degree completion rates at four year institutions in comparison to all other minorities (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). Dabney (2010) discussed four important factors that influence retention rates among African Americans (academic, personal, social, and financial). This research looked to see if racism and racial

discrimination are an added factor that significantly influences African American college students' willingness to stay enrolled at the university during the semester or after the semester ends. Researchers have stated that racial microaggressions negatively affect African Americans' level of mental health functioning. Researchers have also shown that African American's attending PWIs, who experience racial microaggressions, end up leaving for colleges known for being historically Black. The study looked to add to the current body of literature involving African Americans and their experience of racial microaggressions. Essentially this study looked at students who attend universities with a more diverse racial and ethnic student population.

Research Questions

General research hypothesis: There is a relationship between African American college students' experiences of racial microaggressions and their decisions regarding dropout.

Specific research hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between African Americans college students' experiences of racial microaggressions and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H0₁: There is no statistically significant positive relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H1₁: There is a statistically significant positive relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

Specific research hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H0₂: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H1₂: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

Specific research hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Criminality subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H0₃: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Criminality subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H1₃: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Criminality subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

Specific research hypothesis 4: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Sexualization subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H0₄: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Sexualization subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H1₄: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Sexualization subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

Specific research hypothesis 5: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H0₅: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H1₅: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

Specific research hypothesis 6: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Invisibility subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H0₆: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Invisibility subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the ongoing semester.

H1₆: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Invisibility subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the ongoing semester.

Specific research hypothesis 7: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Environmental subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H0₇: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Environmental subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H1₇: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Environmental subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

Specific research hypothesis 8: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' experiences of racial microaggressions and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H0₈: There is no statistically significant positive relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H1₈: There is a statistically significant positive relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' experiences of Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

Specific research hypothesis 9: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H0₉: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H1₉: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

Specific research hypothesis 10: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Criminality subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H0₁₀: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Criminality subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H1₁₀: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Criminality subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

Specific research hypothesis 11: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Sexualization subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H0₁₁: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Sexualization subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H1₁₁: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Sexualization subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

Specific research hypothesis 12: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H0₁₂: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H1₁₂: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

Specific research hypothesis 13: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Invisibility subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H0₁₃: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Invisibility subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H1₁₃: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Invisibility subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

Specific research hypothesis 14: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Environmental subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H0₁₄: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Environmental subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H1₁₄: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Environmental subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

Significance of the Study

This particular research study is important for several reasons. The first being that there is a gap in the research that shows how retention rates of African American college students at diverse universities are affected by racial microaggressions. The majority of the research looks at the affect of racial microaggressions on minorities at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). This researcher investigated the manner in which minorities, in particular African Americans, overcome racial disparities and still achieve academic success. There is a small amount of published literature that discusses retention and how it is influenced by microaggressions. There is also a small amount of research data that discusses how all minorities, not just students, are affected by microaggressions on

college campuses (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Sue, 2008). This study aimed to uncover how racial microaggressions can affect African American college students' willingness to return to campus the following semester. Universities claim that they provide a diverse, safe, learning environment for students to feel welcomed while on campus. Universities have also been implementing freshman initiative programs such as Upward bound to help maintain retention rates for minority college students (Carter, 2006; Wells, 2008). However research continues to show that minorities do not feel safe or welcomed while on campus (Crockett et al., 2007). Minorities reported that instead of feeling safe or a sense of belonging, they feel as if their thoughts and feelings are invalidated. Minorities feel as if they are made out to be less than equal in comparison to the dominant culture due to the categorization of factors outside of their control.

The research shows that African American students who experience racial microaggressions at PWI's end up creating counter spaces in order to persevere through racism and racial discrimination (Grier-Reed, 2010). Along with the creation of counter spaces, the literature shows that African Americans end up leaving PWIs for schools that have a more diverse student population (Grier-Reed, 2010; Henson, Derlega, & Pearson, 2013; Lewis et al. 2013). Students leave their original school for schools that offer a more diverse student population where the population represents students of their own racial/ethnic or cultural background.

Definition of Terms

Microaggressions. Subtle acts that occur in everyday life. They can be verbal or nonverbal, and communicate hostile or negative messages to an individual based upon their group membership (Sue et al, 2007).

Retention: In regards to this study, we are defining retention as students' willingness to return to their university for the following academic semester.

Organization of Chapters

Chapter I introduces the problem and provides a rationale for the study. Chapter II reviews relevant literature. Chapter III presents the methodology to be used in this study.

Summary

Racial microaggressions are typically subtle, unconscious, and unintended acts of racism. They are aimed at demeaning minorities and making minorities feel lesser than the dominant culture. Although the acts themselves may not prove to be significant in causing immediate harm, they can cause everlasting effects to the intended victim. It is important to study retention of African American undergraduate students so we can find if there is a relationship between racial microaggressions and retention.

This research study is designed to discover a relationship between racial microaggressions and African American undergraduate college students' willingness to remain enrolled at the university. Teachers, faculty, and staff members may use the data from this study to further improve the levels of diversity on campus, improve multicultural student satisfaction, and improve the campus racial climate.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

A review of the literature shows that researchers have studied the effects of racial discrimination on college student retention. Given the importance of racial discrimination and its negative effects on African American college students, this chapter provides a review of the literature on (1) racism; (2) racial discrimination; (3) racial microaggressions, and (4) African American student retention.

Racism

A common trait among human society is the ability and need to categorize and classify similar things into groups (Setareh et al., 2011). Examples of these categories include, race, class, gender, and religion. McIntosh (2013) wrote that ways of classifying people are social constructs created by humans and not categorized by biological bases. In other words, there are no true biological differences between individuals except for the label society designates. Bonilla-Silva (2015) pointed out that race has “real” consequences. Graves Jr. (2015) explains how the killing of Trayvon Martin was not due to his biological genetic structure, but instead caused by the long held stereotypical views towards African Americans that have been deeply embedded into America’s culture. These consequences can be how individuals’ perceive a certain racial class. For example, a member from the White dominant class may have the perception that all African Americans are violent criminals or all individuals from the Middle East are terrorists.

Racism is described as being a belief system such that one group is better or superior than another group based on their physical traits or characteristics (Bonilla-Silva 2015; Cornelius, 2013 Wallis, 2007). Racism is rooted in a history that featured racial

domination projects (slavery and colonialism) that resulted in misguided perceptions about groups being embedded into society (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Racism creates races out of individuals who may not have been directly involved in a specific culture or ethnicity. According to Jacobson (1999), an example of this process is how disparate groups who came to the United States from Europe eventually lost their national identity and became simply “White”. Through this process, Europeans slowly shed their regional identities (losing color or specific identifying traits) and becoming “White”. An example of this process could be a German family coming to America. The first generation holds strong ties to their cultural beliefs, values, and norms. Then, the second generation still holds some of these same cultural values and norms, but begins to infuse them with the “American” culture. Finally, the third generation no longer places strong values or emphasis on their German heritage and more closely associated themselves as being American, or as Jacobson (1999) described it, as becoming “White.” Wright (2004) had a similar description of this process, as originally several different ethnic and cultural groups came to America from multiple countries in Africa: once they arrived in America, they were stripped of their rich ethnic identities and simply described as being “Black.” These terms ended up stripping down individual characteristics and placed them in a group of others based on one trait, usually unimportant, or one characteristic.

Researchers argued that racism should no longer be viewed as idealist, but instead a materialist fashion (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Wallis 2007, McIntosh, 2013). Racism, or the act of being racist, creates a racial structure that leads to a pattern of systematic advantages for the dominant class and creates disadvantages for minorities. Bonilla-Silva (2015) described the racial structure as “a network of social, political, economic, and

ideological levels that shapes the life changes of the various races” (p.1360). This shaping leads to inequality between races that exist as long as society continues to allow stereotyping and prejudicial viewpoints.

Oppression. There are many facets of racism (social structure, institutional racism) that concludes in oppression against minority groups. Social structure in regards to racism is defined as the patterns of social interaction between varying racial group members of an overarching social organization (Howarth, 2006). These patterns of interactions form the behaviors of group members in the society (Karlsen & Nazroo, 2002). Institutional racism is a part of society, can be overt, covert, subtle, or color-blind, and occur, when certain groups are discriminated against due to their race (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Examples of institutional racism (macroaggressions) can be found when minorities do not have the same employment, housing, access to health care, or educational opportunities as other races. Oppression, in and of itself, is defined as individuals having unearned treatment or control over someone or something (Hays & Chang, 2003). Oppression is an attitude and belief in which one group holds all the power while societal norms reinforce the oppressive belief system (Hays & Chang, 2003). The act occurs over a prolonged period of time because the dominant group maintains complete control or power over the oppressed group. Oppression can be a difficult concept to grasp because an individual can be part of both the oppressed and oppressive group (Hanna et al., 2000). For example, an oppressor may hold a certain amount of power over a marginalized group (the oppressed), but at the same time be part of a different group that is being oppressed by a third party.

Oppression does not solely effect those from an institutional disadvantage standpoint. It also affects ethnic and racial minorities, sexual minorities, children, and individuals with disabilities (Hanna et al., 2000). Similar to individuals being oppressed, oppression is not only executed by governments; specific individuals like educational institutions, employers, and bank lenders, can also be oppressors. Research has shown that just because an individual may be a part of a marginalized group, it does not directly mean they are being oppressed (Hanna et al., 2000; Windsor, 2010). There have been several instances where individuals who are from minority or marginalized groups are still able to become as successful as members from dominant groups. (Hanna et al., 2000; Prilleltensky, 2003). However, an important issue is that Eurocentric White norms, values, customs, and beliefs, still place ethnic minorities at a significant disadvantage (Steyn, 2005). Minorities are forced to strip down their own cultural norms to fit into a society controlled by the dominant culture. One of the more popular examples of how Eurocentric White norms affect minorities are Eurocentric beauty standards.

For decades, researchers have been interested in seeing how the perceptions of beauty have been influenced by the media (Sekayi, 2003; Thompson, 2009; White, 2005). African American women would go to great lengths to straighten their curly hair to appear more “White” (Thompson, 2009). Magazine have been criticized for lightening darkened skin models as well as individuals in parts of Asia would use skin Whitening creams to appear more “White.” The Clark doll experiment conducted in 1939 provides a great example of Eurocentric beauty standards (Clark & Clark, 1947). The researchers lined up two identical dolls, one White and one Black, and had the child participants

choose which doll was more beautiful. The researchers found that in almost all cases, the children would pick the White doll.

Researchers have found that with the complexity of oppression, it can lead to minorities identifying more with the dominant culture (Hays & Chang, 2003; Windsor, 2010). This is that over time, the oppressed group will begin to work towards being accepted by the dominant group. They lose their marginalized group identity and start to identify with the dominant groups' oppressing belief system. They will then take this belief or message and become an oppressor towards the group they were once apart of or fear prosecution (Hays & Chan, 2003; Guess, 2006). Minorities fear that they could lose the small amount of opportunities that have been presented to them and be out casted by society if they do not conform to the group norm. It is important to note that oppression is not just limited to a political domain or just only to acts of racism (Hanna et al., 2000). The act of oppression can be expressed in several different ways (racism, classism, ableism, sizeism, sexism). Even with copious amounts of public policies, advocacy, and different organizations, oppression continues to be a major issue for African Americans in the United States (Windsor, 2010). An example of this is the legislation passed to have children removed from homes if the mother tested positive for cocaine. Researchers studying these policies found that they were based on racist and classist assumptions and used as a form of social control (Benoit, 2003; Wilson, 2012; Windsor, 2010).

Windsor (2010) found that the form of oppression can be found in ways like classism, racism, and sexism. In Windsor's study, classism was defined as each individual living in the United States had equal opportunities to resources and would be able to adequately support themselves. However, the study found that these assumptions

would often disregard the reality for many impoverished African Americans. Windsor's study also found that African Americans' economic status impacted their ability to graduate from high school and learn the needed skills to maintain suitable employment. In the same study, Windsor (2010) refers to racism as a dimension of oppression; the assumption was that the governmental agencies will serve and protect all individuals regardless of their racial background. What they found was that the African American community did not share the same belief as the dominant culture. Instead, they were mistrusting of police and did not feel as if they would be protected.

White privilege. White privilege is described as having unearned advantages over a minority group that contributes to systematic oppression (Hays & Chang, 2003; Boatright-Horowitz, Frazier, Harps-Logan, & Crockett, 2013; Todd, McConnell, & Suffrin, 2014;). It is a belief system held by Whites that only their cultural norms, standards, values, and opinions are accurate, which reinforces the racial distance between Whites and ethnic minorities (Hays & Chang, 2003). The belief system allows for Whites to maintain control over ethnic minorities. It continues to reinforce the incorrect social assumption that states all individuals, regardless of racial background, have equal access and opportunities to material resources (Taylor & Clark, 2009; Todd, McConnell, & Suffrin, 2014). Researchers note that White privilege is set up to take the guilt away from the individual receiving the benefits by placing blame on ethnic minorities and allowing the oppressed group to believe their disadvantages are their own problem (Chang & Hays, 2003; Horowitz, Fraizer, Harps-Logan, & Crockett, 2013). McIntosh (1988) found that one advantage of White privilege, is that Whites do not have to actually think or recognize White privilege and how it benefits their life. This allows for Whites to not

only experience their unearned advantages in society, but also to not recognize their own racial identity.

White privilege allows for Whites to believe that their actions are considered the cultural norm (Guess, 2006; Pennington et al., 2012). White privilege often goes unnoticed and allows for Whites to continue to feel superior over others (Todd, McConnell, & Suffrin, 2014). Researchers are finding a common theme amongst White participants in that they are “tired of hearing about race” (Lund & Carr, 2010; Ross, 2009). Lund and Carr (2010) found in their “Whiteness Project” that many participants were annoyed of hearing things about their Whiteness and White privilege. A major theme that emerged from the study was that White participants were enraged by the amount of attention White guilt receives. Participants felt it was not their fault the color of their skin is White and they believed that they should not have to feel guilty about their privilege in society. A second theme that emerged in the study was that Whites were tired of hearing all the complaining about racism. Some participants even stated that if minorities thought oppression and privilege was so bad, then they should return back to their originating countries. Sydell and Nelson (2000) found that White college students have become annoyed and tired of hearing things about racism. The researchers found that White students’ attitudes towards race relations on campus were that Black students intentionally segregate themselves from Whites on campus. Sydell and Nelson (2000) also found that Black students should lose their ethnic and cultural identity and begin to “act White” to better fit into society. These beliefs and attitudes continue to reinforce White privilege in that the societal norm is “Whiteness” and those who act or think differently are considered outsiders (Pennington et al, 2012).

Another example of White privilege was demonstrated in 1988 by Peggy McIntosh. McIntosh published a list of 46 items that would illustrate common daily effects of White privilege. This list encompassed items that McIntosh believed White individuals benefited from, but had unintentionally turned a blind eye to their effects. For example “I can turn on the television or open the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely and positively represented” and “Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance that I am financially reliable” (McIntosh, 1988). When using McIntosh’s list of White privilege, researchers have found that it effects White students’ views towards racism by changing their original viewpoint on racial discrimination (Boatright-Horowitz, Fraizer, Harps-Logan, & Crockett, 2013; Case, 2012; & Stewart et al., 2012). Boatright-Horowitz et al., (2012) gave pre and post-test questionnaires to 274 psychology students at a local north eastern university. The pretest survey was used to determine the student’s current level of agreement with the effects of White privilege in society. After reading McIntosh’s list, many White students showed higher ratings of acknowledgement in regards to accepting that racism still in fact exists today on their posttest survey. The participants’ highest levels of agreement with White privilege still existing was with items related to quality of life at home. Researchers also found that White students began to accept the notion that they had benefited from the advantages provided to them through White privilege (Boatright-Horowitz, Fraizer, Harps-Logan, & Crockett, 2013; Case, 2012).

In conclusion, White privilege is described as having unearned advantages over a minority group that contributes to systematic oppression (Hays & Chang, 2003; Todd, McConnell, & Suffrin, 2014; Horowitz, Fraizer, Harps-Logan, & Crockett, 2013). White

privilege often goes unnoticed and allows for Whites to feel as if their actions are considered the cultural norm (Guess, 2006; Pennington et al., 2012; Todd, McConnell, & Suffrin, 2014). Researchers have used McIntosh's list of daily examples of White privilege and found that students level of agreement towards White privilege in society increases after reading the list (Boatright-Horowitz, Fraizer, Harps-Logan, & Crockett, 2013; Case, 2012).

Institutional racism. Besides White privilege, institutional racism has shown negative effects on the lives of African Americans. The term institutional racism became widely known during the American Black Civil Rights Movement and has been used for multiple different meanings (Souhami, 2014). Mendez, Hogan, and Culhane (2012) define institutional racism, or structural racism, as having policies, practices, and laws set in place that allow differential access to resources and opportunities based on an individual's racial or ethnic background. Examples of this are when minority group members do not have equal opportunities regarding education, health care, employment, and housing. Researchers point out that institutional racism can lead to further segregation of White and non-White, or mixed groups, as well as directing financial investments and material resources into solely White, non-mixed, communities. (Jones, 2000; Mendez, Hogan, & Culhane, 2012).

Studies have shown that institutional racism can have significant long lasting impacts on racial and ethnic minorities (Bozalek, 2010; Souhami, 2014; Taylor & Clark, 2009). Bozalek (2010) conducted a study on how institutional racism effects students' families in South Africa. The researcher collected data through an assignment that was handed out to 118 university students with questions pertaining to racial discrimination to

elicit student responses about their family circumstances. The researcher found that institutional racism caused high levels of personal insecurity in students and their family members. The researchers discovered that students and their families would become oppressed to the point of being unable to move around the country freely, forced into criminalization due to policies and laws passed, as well as negatively impacted their emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. Participants stated that laws passed prevented African families from obtaining employment. This restricted access to a pass that was made mandatory that allowed movement around the country by the influx control system. If Africans were caught without a pass, they were sent back to their originating country. Students also reported that their family members were not allowed to be in urban settings without a work permit which led to unwarranted searches and arrest.

Taylor and Clark (2009) found that institutional racism negatively effects minority students' educational opportunities. They found that even though district decision-makers (Superintendent, School Board, and District Technology Director) intentions were neutral, they still allowed for the sabotage of school improvement efforts by not effectively assuring federal money went to benefiting students. These funds were originally planned to purchase computers for classrooms and provide more opportunities to teachers for professional development. The study found that through the incompetence of the principal, the principal let funds aimed at improving the quality of education for students go to waste. Taylor and Clark (2009) also found, in the case of Dexter Elementary School, decision makers were intentionally passing destructive policies that sabotaged opportunities to improve the school. The researchers discovered that decision-makers were intentionally making one school an attractive location for higher income,

well off parents, while simultaneously opening a new school for low-income students that primarily encompassed minority students.

Stereotype threat. Steele and Aronson (1995) defined stereotype threat as “anything one does or any of one’s features that conform to it make the stereotype more plausible as a self-characterization in the eyes of others” (p. 797). Stereotype threat is when a minority is at risk of confirming a previously noted stereotype about their own race/ethnicity (Steele & Aronson, 1995). These could be the way they dress, talk, foods they eat, and music they enjoy. Steele and Aronson conducted four studies to determine how stereotype threat affected African American’s intellectual ability on verbal tests.

Study one. The researchers had two groups that were each given a 30 minute test that had difficult items from verbal portion of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). The researchers split 117 participants, both African American and White into two separate groups. In the first group, the diagnostic of intellectual ability condition, the participants were told that the test was measuring their intellectual ability. The researchers were hoping to plant the stereotype of intellectual ability into the African American participants’ heads. In the second group, non-diagnostic condition, no mention of intellectual ability was made and instead the test was described as a problem-solving task. The researchers found that when African American participants were told the test was measuring their intellectual ability, they performed worse than White participants in the same group. However, when the African American participants were told the test was a problem-solving task, their performance was equal to that of the White participants. Steele and Aronson (1995) noted a limitation to the study as there was only marginal significance in the data when the problem-solving task group participants were

removed from the study. Because of this limitation, the researchers decided to conduct a second study to strengthen the reliability of their study.

Study two. Steele and Aronson's (1995) follow up study included twenty African American and twenty White female undergraduate students from Stanford University. The participants in this study took the same GRE verbal test items as in the previous study, but also took the Spielberger State Anxiety Inventory immediately after the first test. The researchers were attempting to determine if levels of anxiety, among stereotype threat participants' influenced their performance. The researchers were also measuring the time participants' took to answer each question. Participants were split equally into diagnostic and non-diagnostic conditions, similar to the first study. Steele and Aronson (1995) found that African American participants in the diagnostic condition tended to be slower at answering questions (average of 94 seconds per question) than White participants in both conditions and African American participants' in the non-diagnostic condition (average of 71 seconds per question). The researchers did not find any significant conclusions in regards to participants' levels of anxiety influencing performance.

Study three. The third study was set up to look to see if participants were approving of excuses before the test to explain their poor performance (Steel & Aronson, 1995). The researchers wanted to know if the participants were expecting themselves to fail before they even started the test. The study had 35 African American participants and 33 White participants, all undergraduate students at Stanford University. The participants were placed either in the diagnostic condition, non-diagnostic condition, or the control condition. When the participants arrived they were told that they were completing a study

that looked at lexical access processing and higher verbal reasoning. The participants in the diagnostic condition were told that they were having their intellectual ability measured and will be provided with feedback on strengths and weaknesses at the end of the test. The participants in the non-diagnostic condition were told that they were not measuring the participants' abilities, but if the participants wanted feedback they could have it at the end of the test. Steele and Aronson (1995) found that African Americans in the diagnostic condition had significantly higher levels of stereotype activation about African Americans, significantly higher levels of self-doubt on their ability to perform well on the test, significantly higher levels of avoiding stereotypic preferences, and a significantly higher level of making advance excuses about their performance before the test began.

Study four. The final study conducted by Steele and Aronson (1995) looked to see if stereotype threat still effected African Americans' performance when the test was not presented as a diagnostic condition measuring ability. For this study, the researchers manipulated the variable of demographic information. For the race prime group participants were to include their race on the demographic sheet before taking the test, similar to the three studies before. However, for the non-race prime group, the demographic sheet was completely removed. The study used 24 African American and 23 White participants, and divided them into two groups (race prime and non-race prime). The participants were given the same GRE verbal test items that were used in the second study. The researchers found no significant difference in performance ability between the two groups of African American participants. The African Americans in the

race prime group showed no difference in levels of stereotype threat than those in the non-race prime group.

Summary. In conclusion, Steele and Aronson (1995) found that in all four studies African Americans who were told the test was going to measure intellectual ability performed at a lesser average than Whites who were given the same instructions and African Americans who were told the test was not measuring intellectual ability. The researchers were able to conclude that stereotype threat does exist amongst African Americans in regards to intellectual ability. They also found that African Americans were more likely to create excuses for poor performance on tests, when told they were measuring intellectual ability, before the test even began.

Racial Discrimination

Decades have passed since the civil rights movement in the 1960's and a plethora of policies and procedures have been passed; however many African Americans continue to struggle to overcome racial discrimination and its psychological aftereffects (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Researchers described racial discrimination as being unfair treatment or having negative attitudes towards individuals based on their membership of a racial minority group (Anglin et al., 2014; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Racial discrimination can be manifested in both blatant and subtle forms. For example, it can be demonstrated by faulty hiring practices (continually hiring underqualified White employees over qualified African American candidates), or deliberately calling minorities derogatory names. Researchers have established that racial discrimination can lead to African Americans' experiencing lower self-rating of health and higher levels of psychological distress (Ferdinand, Paradies, & Kelaher, 2015; Harris et al., 2015; Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

Researchers have long been interested in the relationship between racial discrimination and physical health (Williams & Mohammed, 2009). A growing body of literature suggests that racial discrimination leads to poorer health outcomes amongst African Americans (Cormack, Harris, & Stanley, 2013; Harris et al., 2015; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). The following will provide the reader with an overview of these findings. Borell and colleagues (2007) conducted a longitudinal study looking at the adverse effects of racial discrimination on African Americans' physical health. These researchers' analyzed data collected over a seven year time period to form a sample of 1507 African Americans and 1813 Whites. The study found that those African Americans who had reported experiencing racial discrimination (89%) were more likely to report using marijuana, alcohol, or cocaine at least 11 times during their lifetime. The researchers suggested that African Americans' use of drugs may have been used as a coping method to alleviate the negative effects of discrimination. Cozier et al. (2006) found that racial discrimination was associated with hypertension in African American women. The researchers discovered that the rate of hypertension was two to three times higher in African American women than that of White women. Researchers conducted a follow up study that utilized responses from approximately 59,000 African American women. They found an increase in self-reports of hypertension amongst African American women who had reported experiences of racism.

The literature also suggests that there is a positive link between racial discrimination and higher levels of psychological distress (Ferdinand, Paradies, & Kelaher, 2015; Priest et al, 2014; Perrin, 2013). Researchers are finding that racial and ethnic minorities who had experienced racial discrimination are more likely to have

poorer mental health (Ferdinand, Paradies, & Kelaher, 2015; Kessler et al., 1999; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). For example, African Americans', who report perceived experiences of racial discrimination, reported elevated feelings of anger, depression, and lower levels of life satisfaction and happiness (Harris et al., 2015; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Tobler and colleagues (2013) surveyed 2,409 racial and ethnic minority adolescents to discover if there was a relationship between racial discrimination and high-risk behaviors and mental health. Of the studies respondents, 73% of adolescents reported experiencing, what they believed to be, forms of racial discrimination. The researchers suggested that according to their findings, adolescents who had experienced forms of racial discrimination, were at a significantly higher risk for maladaptive outcomes like depression, suicidal ideation, physical aggression, and delinquency, than those who had not experienced forms of racial discrimination. In Ferdinand, Paradies, and Kelaher's (2015) study, the researchers collected data from 1,139 Australians in regards to experiences of racial discrimination. Their study concluded that racial discrimination is closely associated with the participants' mental health and wellbeing. The researchers found an inverse relationship between perceived experiences of racial discrimination and the participants' self-rated mental health. Ferdinand's study also found that the location of the experienced racial discrimination played an important role for the participants' mental health. They found an association with high or very high psychological distress depending on where the participants experienced forms of racial discrimination (shops, places of employment, government settings). The researchers findings supported current trends that experiences of racial discrimination on a reoccurring basis are associated with increased psychological distress and lower levels of mental health functioning.

In conclusion, racial discrimination can be manifested as subtle or blatant forms of racism. Researchers are continuing to find relationships between perceived experiences of racial discrimination and physical health (Cormack, Harris, & Stanley, 2013; Harris et al., 2015; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). Literature shows that African Americans who experience racial discrimination tend to be at a higher risk for hypertension, lower self-ratings of health, and higher risk of using illicit drugs as coping methods (Borell et al., 2007; Coizer et al., 2006; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). Researchers have also found associations between racial discrimination and mental health (Ferdinand, Paradies, & Kelaher, 2015; Priest et al, 2014; Perrin, 2013). African Americans were found to have higher levels of anger, depression, and lower ratings of overall life satisfaction (Harris et al., 2015; Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

Racial Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions have been described by researchers as subtle, often unintentional, forms of racial discrimination (Grier-Reed, 2010; Houshman, Spanierman, & Tafarodi, 2014; Jones & Galliher, 2014). Racial microaggressions frequently leave the intended victim in a confused state due to their ambiguity (Sue et al., 2009). These acts can be either verbal or non-verbal, and often communicate a hostile message towards group membership (Lewis et al, 2013). This new form of racism has been shown to be more harmful, and psychologically devastating, than older traditional forms of racism (Galliher, Jones, & Dahl, 2011) which can be attributed to its confusing and ambiguous nature. An example of racial microaggressions would be someone from the dominant culture making a racial joke about an African American and then following up with “It’s okay, I have a Black friend”. Within this statement, it causes misperception amongst the

minority overhearing this phrase because they start to wonder if it was intended to be offensive or truly a joke. Within microaggressions, Sue (2008) describes three subsets; microinsults, microinvalidations, and microassaults.

Microinsults. Microinsults are another subset of microaggressions that also tend to be unintentional. These messages can be verbal or nonverbal and they generally convey out of group inferiority (Jones & Galliher, 2015). They are meant to degrade a person's racial identity or membership to a specific group. An example of a microinsult is when an individual asks a Hispanic American how they acquired a job at their place of work. The meaning behind this could be the individual asking the question implies that the only reason the minority got the job was through the affirmative action policy. The key to understanding microinsults is understanding the context in which they were said (Houshmand, Spanierman, & Tafarodi, 2014). The person could have the best intentions of asking how the minority got the job because they personally have a friend who is looking for a job in a similar field. Without context, microinsults are difficult to determine if the comment was meant to discriminate against the minority or not

Microinvalidations. Microinvalidations tend to be unintentional comments that disregard a person of color's thoughts and feelings on a perceived event (Jones & Galliher, 2014). Their purpose is to negate the minority's rational perceptions and place blame of their misconception on the minority themselves. When an Asian American is discredited for the hard work they put in to achieve exemplary marks in school but then constantly told they receive high marks because "all Asians are smart", that's an invalidation of the effort and time put into the students studying habits. This goes to show that microinvalidations can occur off stereotypes that the dominant culture can perceive

to be positive or in the minorities' favor. Statements like "I don't see color" may be meant to convey the message of "I'm not racist and believe we are all humans". However, to the minority hearing this message, they can perceive the message as discrediting all the negative racial experiences had by that individual (Robertson, 2015).

Microassaults. The last subset of microaggressions are microassaults. The literature focuses more heavily on these types of communications because they are more intentional than the other two subsets. Jones & Galliher (2014) describe these as a conscious or deliberate attack on a person of color to again convey the message that they are lesser than the dominant culture. These acts can be intentionally serving a White person at a bar over minorities or publicly flying the confederate flag. These forms of racism are more closely related to traditional forms of racism as they are intended to intentionally degrade the minority. The main difference between microassaults and traditional racism, is that these attacks are considered covert (Jones & Galliher, 2015). This is that the user attempts to use these in closed situations where the likelihood of being caught or called out for discrimination are slim to none.

Racial Microaggressions Experienced by African Americans

Racial microaggressions create a plethora of challenges and inequalities for African Americans. Racial microaggressions negatively affect the quality of education for African Americans in comparison to their White counterparts (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2011) conducted a study that examined the experiences of 661 African American men at predominantly White colleges. The researchers found that African Americans' lived experiences with racial microaggressions led to an increase in societal and educational problems. These problems

were higher levels of stress in African American males as well as being more frequently stopped by campus police for being viewed as “out of place” or “fitting the description.”

Microaggressions effect potential employment opportunities and can support unfair hiring practices by employers (Miller & Travers, 2005). For example, a common microaggression towards African American men are that they are being hostile, aggressive, or angry. Coworkers, bosses, or future employers may be afraid, or intimidated, by African American men and may choose to avoid approaching them. Smedly and Smedly (2005) add that racial microaggression can affect African Americans’ access to quality healthcare. Further review of the literature shows that African Americans, when it comes to quality of health care, on average receive a poorer quality of health care in areas such as HIV/AIDS, infectious diseases, and diabetes, as well as clinical mental health services (Smedley & Smedly, 2005). African Americans are also more likely than Whites to receive less than desirable treatments or operations such as amputations (Gornick et al., 1996). Gornick et al., (1996) combined data collected from the U.S. census and matched it with data from Medicare beneficiaries in a given zip code. The researchers found that African American beneficiaries had, on average, fewer visits to physicians for outpatient care and fewer immunizations than White beneficiaries. However, African American beneficiaries had higher mortality rates and were hospitalized more times, on average, than White beneficiaries. In addition, the researchers found that African American beneficiaries had higher rates of full or partial amputation of lower limbs as a result of diabetes even though White beneficiaries had higher rates of confirmed cases of diabetes.

Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder (2008) conducted a qualitative experiment that looked at the life experiences of African Americans who are dealing with racial microaggressions. The researchers formed 2 focus groups composing of 13 African American's ages ranged from 22 to 33. Based on responses gathered from the focus groups, the researchers found 5 domains of the operation of microaggressions and they sequentially ordered them starting with incident → perception → reaction → interpretation → consequence. The researchers suggested that potential microaggressive incidents set this particular thought pattern in motion in order to determine whether the communication was racially motivated. After the incident occurs, the individual has their own perception or belief about the incident to help decide what took place and if it was intentional or not. Next is the immediate reaction the individual has towards the incident. The researchers suggest that the reaction the individual has is the internal struggle caused by the emotional response towards the event. An example would be an African American battling his own thoughts on determining if said event was racist or if they are being too paranoid and thinking every offense was racially motivated. The researchers refer to interpretation as how the individual has made meaning of the incident. Common messages were found during the study that resulted in high degrees of stress for African Americans for example, "You cannot be trusted," "You do not belong," and "You are intellectually inferior." The researchers concluded that as a consequence of these messages, African American's are left feeling powerless to the incident, invisible in situations involving Whites, and have an overall pressure to be the representative for their entire race/ethnicity.

African American college students are already at a significant disadvantage when it comes to achieving academically in higher education (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015). Many of these students have faced the challenges, prior to entering higher education, brought on because of institutionalized oppression. They come with personal experience of being openly discriminated against and not given the same opportunities to grow and advance educationally as their White counterparts. Students of color are more likely to attend school with a significantly lower amount of resources and have teachers that are less likely to notice and push academic success. Recent literature suggests that racial microaggressions negatively influence the lives of African American college students (Grier-Reed, 2010; Henson, Derlega, & Pearson, 2013; Lewis et al., 2013). One unfortunate trend is that educational institutions reward students for conforming to White norms (Lewis et al., 2013). These norms could be things like the way a person speaks, how an individual dresses, and how a person behaves in public. Practices like these reinforce discriminatory racial microaggression statements like “You speak so educated for an African American”.

Janice McCabe (2009) used interview data to examine both racial and gender patterns in racial microaggressions. McCabe conducted 68 one-on-one interviews and four focus groups using undergraduate students from a single PWI. The researcher found three main themes that emerged due to racial microaggressions. The first being that African American males were perceived as threatening. During McCabe’s interviews, several participants would mention noticing authority members (campus and city police) constantly on their dormitory floors as well as handing out stricter penalties to African Americans in comparison to White students who committed similar offenses. The second

being that Latina women were viewed as sexually available and exotic. Latina participants' stated that they would be approached and harassed by White males on campus and at bars and if the women would reject their advances, the men would say things like "go back to your own county." The final finding was that African American females commonly experienced microaggressions in classrooms settings. African American female participants' stated that they felt as if their opinions or concerns did not matter in class. They also mentioned how they were often made to be the voice of the African American race.

Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso, (2001) conducted a qualitative experiment aimed at examining the relationship between racial microaggressions and collegiate racial climate. The researchers collected data, using focus groups, from 34 African American students at three elite predominantly White research institutions (PWI). The researchers' discovered that the racial climate of the university lead to negative perceptions of African American students. The researchers' also discovered that African Americans who experienced racial microaggressions at PWIs were left: feeling that faculty members and White students had low expectations of them, instilled with a sense of self-doubt, noticed students, and professors negative assumptions for even looking like a minority, and had a general feeling of discomfort and racial tension.

Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzales, & Wills (1978), conducted a study in which to see the different types of racial discrimination shown in primetime television commercials. The researchers' first analyzed and recorded 50 White-show commercials (the majority of actors used in the shows were White) and then recorded 50 Black-show commercials (the majority of actors used in the shows were Black). While conducting the

recordings of the commercials, the researchers' noticed the vast difference in the amount of Black-show commercials in comparison to White-show commercials. It had taken the researchers two weeks to collect the Black-show commercials in comparison to two days for the White-show commercials. In the study, the researchers' found that Whites are shown as displaying superior knowledge and as authority figures, are shown as offering good and services where Blacks were never shown in that role, White females were majorly used as the standard of beauty or sexual attractiveness, Whites were shown in a way that implied family values while Blacks were never placed in a family setting, and Blacks were shown as working for wages or in subservient roles.

Coping with Racial Microaggressions

A strong coping strategy can serve to protect the individual against negative racial discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping (Lewis et al., 2013). Lewis et al., (2013) stated that one effective coping skill to be used against racial microaggressions is using one's own voice. This is that the individual experiencing the attack can take an active approach in dealing with their aggressor. This strategy includes confronting the aggressor immediately after the racial microaggression occurs. The theoretical framework behind this concept is to not let the aggressor slide by with excuses like "I did not know" or "It wasn't meant to be racist". An important piece to note about this strategy, is that it is not to perform a hostile retaliation towards the aggressor (Sue et al., 2009). Instead it is proposed that this strategy be used as a teaching tool for the aggressor. The individual who received the communication should express their thoughts and feelings towards the aggressor. They can then assist in teaching the aggressor the problems of using those forms of communications all while determining if the attack was intentional or

unintentional. Lewis et al. (2013), stated that the strategy gives the power back to the minority and lets them take control of the situation.

Recent research has shown that African Americans' ability to cope with microaggressions and other forms of discrimination influence the impact of stress from the perceived event (Utsey et al., 2008). However, Torres, Driscoll, and Burrow (2010) were only able to find partial support that linked active coping skills with African Americans' level of stress when faced with racial microaggressions. The researchers' conducted a mixed method study that interviewed 97 African Americans for the qualitative portion and 174 African American doctoral students and recent graduates for the quantitative portion. The study looked to examine how racial microaggressions influenced African Americans' mental health. The researchers' were able to conclude that racial microaggressions left African Americans feeling underestimated, ignored, and isolated, but were unable to find a significant correlation between ability to cope and levels of stress.

Creating counter-spaces. As a result of the constant barrage of racial microaggressions, African American college students ended up creating academic counter-spaces. Students use these counter spaces as a way of being heard and having feelings of belongingness, while on campus. Grier-Reed (2010) stated that these safe places are extremely important for African American students at PWIs. They are able to share experiences amongst each other without the fear of being further discriminated against. These spaces allow for growth and positive development among members by actively addressing emotional and academic issues that were originally pushed aside by faculty and staff members. Students would foster their own learning and have their

experiences validated between other members of the group. However, there is a downside to the creation of these counter-spaces. Case and Hunter (2012) pointed out that these counter spaces can further promote stereotyping of African Americans. For example, a group of White students all at a table can be viewed as a group of friends hanging out while a group of African American students could be viewed as furthering segregation. Another downfall is that some students end up using these counter-spaces as a social hour (Case & Hunter, 2012). Students can be easily distracted amongst each other because they have found a safe environment in which they can be themselves. What once used to promote academic growth and development has now been turned into an after school hang out.

Retention Rates among College Students

There is a strong correlation between African American students who experience racial discrimination and retention (Johnson-Ahrlu, 2013). African Americans have a significantly lower retention rates compared to their White peers (Grier-Reed, 2010; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). Johnson-Ahorlu (2013) noted that the national average of undergraduate students earning their bachelor's degree was at 57% and African American's degree completion rate was only at 42%. Studies show that racial microaggressions play an important factor on African American students' retention rates (Grier-Reed, 2010; Henson, Derlega, & Pearson, 2013; Lewis et al. 2013). Students noted that they do not feel safe, comfortable, or welcomed on these college campuses and end up leaving for schools that are known for being historically Black. These students face the same amount of stress as their counterparts in terms of academic achievement, but they also have the added stress of racial discrimination and being surrounded by others

whom are culturally different from themselves. A case example of this can be found in recent news articles about the University of Missouri. The University of Missouri has recently received a lot of backlash due to how administrators have handled racial discrepancies on campus. In more recent events, there have been racially charged episodes occurring on campus where individuals smeared a swastika on a wall with feces as well as placed cotton balls in front of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center on campus (Eligon, 2015). Students at the University of Missouri described the campus environment as being racially segregated. African American students reported that tensions grew so high that they no longer felt safe going to class (Eligon, 2015).

Factors that influence retention. University students of all races, ethnicities, nationality, and gender leave colleges for a variety of different reasons (Harper, 2009; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Drop out could be due to financial concerns, family issues, change of academic interest, or poor campus fit (Kuh et al., 2008). Researchers have noted that studying the relationship between race/ethnicity, along with family support, and retention is important due to the different life experiences undergraduate minority students have in comparison to White students (Kuh et al., 2008, Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). For example, an African American undergraduate student, majoring in psychology, may face different challenges based on their race or ethnicity that a White undergraduate psychology major did not have to face. These challenges could be the difference in financial support, socioeconomic status, level of parental engagement, or the level of campus community support. Dabney (2010) discussed four important domains that play a significant role in African American student retention; academic, financial, social, and personal. The following sections will discuss Dabney's perspectives on these domains.

Academic. Dabney (2010) noted that tutoring and the presence of a strong academic advisor were influencers of one's decision to stay at school. Tutoring programs, or learning centers, can play a significant role in matching high achieving students with other students who are struggling in their work. Tutoring programs also have the ability to provide resources, such as connecting students with deans and other faculty members, to assist students with other academic demands related to their studies (Lau, 2003). Students are able to meet with other students who have similar educational backgrounds and gain knowledge and insight on difficult assignments (Lavant et al. 1997). Brooks, Jones, and Burt (2013) found that African American male students who participated in freshman retention programs had stronger relationships with mentors and higher levels of academic acculturation. Participants in the study reported that because of these academic programs, they felt they had a stronger connection with their academic advisors and what resources they could connect with for academic support. The researchers also found a common theme that African American males reported a lack of support systems and not feeling a sense of belongingness that led to the decrease in motivation to complete college. When comparing these factors to Torres-Harding (2012) Racial Microaggression Subscales; Low Achieving/ Undesirable Culture and Foreigner/ Not Belonging fit in the academic factors category.

Financial. Dabney (2010) described the financial domain as the availability of grants and scholarships to students. Researchers have stated that students base their college decisions on financial reasons (Carter; 2006; St. John, Pulsen, & Carter, 2005). Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to drop out of school due to reduction of financial aid packages (Carter, 2006; Kaltenbaugh, St. John, and

Starkey, 1999). St. John, Carter, Chung, and Musoba (2006) analyzed the factors that influenced retention in Whites, African Americans, and Hispanics. African American and Hispanic students' academic success was more strongly related to their access to adequate financial aid than the level of education of their parents. The study included a high portion of low-income African American students in comparison to Whites and Hispanics. Because of this, the researchers found that for specifically African American students, any types of financial aid (loans, grants, scholarships) greatly improved retention rates. When comparing these factors to Torres-Harding (2012) Racial Microaggression Subscales, the Environmental subscale fits in Dabney's (2010) financial factors category.

Social. Dabney (2010) described the social domain as the student having access to student organizations relevant to their racial/ethnic background as well as having a similar racial composition of the general student body. Studies are showing that one of the main explanations for African Americans remaining at PWIs is their connection with the Black community (Grier-Reed, 2010; Lewis & McKissic, 2010). The Black community has also been referred to as an important factor in African American students' resilience to racism (LeSure, 1994). For example, African Americans, in the context of a community of other African Americans, are able to bounce ideas and thoughts about their experience with racial discrimination without the fear of being judged (Case & Hunter, 2012). Students are able to feel as if their voice is being heard by members who have experienced similar incidents (Lewis et al, 2013). Lewis and McKissic's (2010) study looked at the relationship between the Black campus community and African American retention at PWIs. The researchers conducted 40 interviews with students, faculty, and

administrators. The researchers found a common theme such that African American undergraduate students' academic persistence was due to their connection with the Black community. Participants in the study noted that when they reached out to other students with similar lived experiences, they felt renewed, rejuvenated, and restored. When comparing these factors to Torres-Harding (2012) Racial Microaggression Subscales; the Invisibility, Sexualization, and Criminality, subscales fits into Dabney's (2010) social factors category.

Personal. African American college students report that one of the main reasons for maintaining enrollment, even in the face of adversity, is due to their community supports. Dabney (2010) noted the importance that parental engagement, and religious or spiritual organizations play an important factor in retention. Wells (2008) found that students who had at least one parent with a college degree had significantly higher retention rates than those whose parents had no degrees. Parents with college degrees were shown to place higher emphasis on their student completing their degrees. The literature shows that when African American students do not feel connected or have strong community support, they tend to withdraw from their institution and enroll in community colleges with higher campus diversity or schools that are known for being predominantly Black (Kuh et al., 2008). Donahoo and Caffey (2010) conducted a study to determine the role religion and spirituality had on academic success for African Americans. The researchers found that African American college students used their involvement with their church as a coping method to help deal with stressors brought on by the college lifestyle. The researchers concluded that students attributed their academic performance, adjustment to college, and ability to cope with stress to their church

involvement. When comparing these factors to Torres-Harding (2012) Racial Microaggression Subscales; the Foreigner/ Not Belonging subscale fits into Dabney's (2010) personal factors category.

Summary. In conclusion, Dabney (2010) notes that there are four domains that significantly impact retention rates of African American's. These are; having strong tutoring and academic advisors for students (academic), students access to financial opportunities like grants and scholarships (finance), having organizations related to the students race/ethnicity (social), and the level of parental engagement and the presence of religious or spiritual organizations (personal). Without these four domains being met in African American college students, they are more likely to drop out of college without finishing a four year degree.

Retention Rates among African American College Students

Many post-secondary institutions struggle to retain and graduate students from four-year degree programs (Ahorlu & Nicole, 2013). There is a trend in the literature that shows researchers seek to discover the factors that influence retention rate. However, research still shows college retention is still a significant problem plaguing universities despite understanding specific factors (Allen, Robbins, Casillas, & Oh, 2008). This lack of understanding is especially pronounced when it comes to understanding African American college retention rates.

African Americans have had one of the lowest retention and degree completion rates amongst all the other races nationwide since the 1990's (Ahorlu & Nicole, 2013; Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2012; Jones & Williams, 2006). Universities have begun

implementing retention initiative programs such as the addition of African American student centers, Upward Bound, first-year introduction programs, and tutoring programs to help achieve and maintain strong retention rates (Carter, 2006; Wells, 2008). Despite these interventions, institutions still struggle to sustain successful retention rates (Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2012). Research studies have identified several factors that may explain what influences African American retention rates (Ahorulu & Nicole, 2013; Dabney, 2010). However, several studies are finding that one of the most influential factors on African American retention is related to race/racism (Ahorulu & Nicole, 2013; Grier-Reed, 2010; Wells, 2008). The following sections will summarize the research that investigates influential factors that are used to explain how race and racism is associated with African Americans' retention rates.

Ahorulu and Nicole's (2013) collected data from the Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) project to gain further insight on how stereotype threat influences African American undergraduates. The DLE project was funded by the Ford Foundation, housed at the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, and used as a tool to assist colleges in addressing the needs of a diverse student population (Hutado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013). The DLE project contributes important information about different factors that significantly influence minority retention (Ahorulu & Nicole, 2013). The DLE project collected data by administering surveys at 14 two- and four-year universities as well as conducted site visits, utilizing focus groups, at seven of the 14 universities. Ahorulu and Nicole's (2013) study included seven post-secondary institutions and conducted 16 group interviews with 94 participants. The participants represented the following groups: African Americans, Asian Americans, Latina/os, Native Americans,

and Whites from each university. The researchers found that African Americans had the lowest degree completion rates at each of the universities included in the study. A common theme emerged from the study which was that African Americans' felt that stereotypes and the threat of fulfilling preconceived stereotypes was a significant barrier to achieving academic success. African American participants felt as they were being viewed as intellectually incapable. They felt as if they were being looked down upon or closely monitored which resulted in difficulties of expressing their concerns, of being stereotyped, to faculty or higher administration.

Summary and Conclusions

Undergraduate African American college students are at-risk for having the lowest graduation rates among all minorities. Academic, financial, personal, and social issues, all play a significant role in retention for African Americans. The degree completion disparities among African Americans continues to worsen and as such, provide an area for additional research and intervention measures.

Racism and racial discrimination has been identified as major contributing factors to the poor retention rates of African American college students. Steele's stereotype threat, racial microaggressions, and perceived racial bias are all detrimental to African Americans' willingness to continue towards their education. These factors have also been identified as contributing to reasons why African Americans have low retention rates at predominantly White universities. Students reported feelings of invisibility, intellectually inferior, and made to be the voice of their entire race. As such, racial discrimination has been identified in the literature as significantly impacting retention. Unfortunately, research on racial microaggressions has received little attention on

African Americans retention at universities. The preceding literature review identified several pertinent issues that serve as a backing for the following research. To begin with, African Americans experience racial discrimination on an ongoing daily basis. Next, experiences of racial microaggressions are related to lower self-reports of life satisfaction. Furthermore, African Americans have the lowest rates of graduation from a four year degree in comparison to all other races/ethnicities. Finally, racial microaggressions have been identified as an impeding factor for African Americans' successful graduation from four year universities.

Chapter III

Methods

Overview of Methods

For this study, a cross sectional survey design was used to assess if undergraduate students thoughts on retention are associated with the experience of racial microaggressions. This allowed us to predict if there was relationship between racial microaggressions and students' degree of consideration for the following semester and during the semester (retention). This study also allowed us to identify if there was a difference between witnessing acts of racial microaggressions towards others and students plan for return the following semester. The study looked at African American undergraduate college students who were currently enrolled at the University of Toledo. The researcher used the Racial Microaggression Scale (RMAS) (Torres-Harding, Alejandro, & Daiz, 2012) and a self-report Likert scale that assessed thoughts about leaving college to collect the data for our study.

After approval from the University of Toledo's Institutional Review Board (IRB), participants were recruited from the University of Toledo. Participants were emailed a link to an online survey administered via Qualtrics, an online software company that specializes in internet surveys. This data collection method was chosen because online data collection has been shown to reduce total time, lowered cost, ease of data entry, and its flexibility in format (Granello & Wheaton, 2004). An online survey was quicker to administer as well as increased the ease of access to a broader range of participants.

Research Design

This study employed an ex post facto design. The ex post facto design was appropriate for this study because the researcher worked with variables that were already in existence and were not subject to manipulation (Simon & Goes, 2013). As such, there was no ability to randomly assign participants to a treatment or control group nor can the researcher manipulate any variable. Participants' experiences of racial microaggressions occurred prior to the study's onset. It would have been unethical to have assigned one group to experience a barrage of racial microaggressions and have another group assigned to a control group. Because the researcher was unable to manipulate variables or randomly assign participants to a treatment or control group, the researcher was unable to determine any causal relationship between the study's variables.

Description of Participants

The participants used in the study were undergraduate students, from the University of Toledo who were enrolled in at least 6 semester hours. A total of 1,677 emails were sent out to participants, only 23% (n = 397) opened the recruitment email. Of those, 21% (n = 84) started to take the survey and of those 84 participants, only 63% (n = 53) completed the survey thus making our response rate 13.4%. To be included in the study, individuals had to self-identify themselves as African American, be enrolled as an undergraduate student at the University of Toledo, and above the age of 18 before the time of the survey. Individuals that were excluded from participation of the study were those who did not identify themselves as African American. Graduate students and students under the age of 18, regardless of enrollment status, were also excluded from the study.

This sample of n=53 (Table 3.1) included 50 (94.3%) Black/African Americans and 3 (5.7%) Multiracial (part Black/African American). The average age of participants (Table 3.2) was 22.01 years old (SD=6.963, age range from 18-53 years old). One participant's age was omitted from data analysis due to incorrect number format. 13 (24.5%) participants self-identified as being Male, 38 (71.7%) self-identified as being Female while 2 (3.8%) identified as being Transgender (Table 3.3). 17 (32.1%) participants self-identified themselves as being a Freshman at the University of Toledo, 9 (17%) participants self-identified as a Sophomore, 11 (20.8%) participants self-identified as a Junior, and 16 (30.2%) participants self-identified as a Senior (Table 3.4).

Table 3.1 Participants Race/Ethnicity

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Black/African American	50	94.3	94.3	94.3
Multiracial (part Black or part African American)	3	5.7	5.7	100.0
Total	53	100.0	100.0	

Table 3.2 Participants Age

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Participant's Age	52	18.00	53.00	22.0192	6.96346
Valid N (listwise)	52				

Table 3.3 Participants Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	13	24.5	24.5	24.5
	Female	38	71.7	71.7	96.2
	Transgender	2	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	

Table 3.4 Participants Academic Status

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Freshman	17	32.1	32.1	32.1
	Sophomore	9	17.0	17.0	49.1
	Junior	11	20.8	20.8	69.8
	Senior	16	30.2	30.2	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	

Instrumentation

The Racial Microaggression Scale (RMAS) was created by Torres-Harding, Andrade, and Diaz in 2012). The scale was created because there was no instrument at the time that could measure the frequency of racial microaggressions based on Sue's taxonomy (Torres-Harding et al, 2012). Torres-Harding and colleagues were interested in creating a quantitative instrument that would allow for the occurrences of racial microaggressions to be measured across racial groups. The researchers developed the

Racial Microaggression Scale that would allow for researchers to measure not only the occurrences of racial microaggressions but the level of distress individuals experienced as a result of the act. Sue and colleagues then evaluated the effectiveness of their instrument by examining participant's results to see if the items reported fit into predetermined categories outlined in previous literature.

The Racial Microaggression Scale is a 32 item scale used to accurately assess themes of racial microaggressions (Torres-Harding, Andrade, & Diaz, 2012). The authors stated that the questionnaire used in their scale was based off Sue's 2007 article "Racial Microaggressions in the Everyday Life." The first items on the scale assess Sue's (2007) theme of "alien in own land." The next set of items assess for the theme of "ascription of intelligence." This is having the feeling that one is intellectually inferior or that one has low intellectual abilities (Torres-Harding et al, 2012). Next, is the theme of "color blindness and denial of individual racism." Torres-Harding describes this as the feeling of being accused of hypersensitivity in regards to cultural issues. Essentially, this is when a person of color is viewed as being overly sensitive and the accuser invalidates their feelings. Following color blindness, the next set of items assesses Sue and Constantine's (2007) theme of "assumption of criminal status." (p. 186). These items look at if the individual is looked at as violent or is perceived to have a criminal status (Torres-Harding, Andrade, & Diaz, 2012). The theme of being "eroticized" is the following category of items being assessed after "assumption of criminal status." The authors of the instrument describe this as being oversexualized due to an individual's racial background. The theme of "myth of meritocracy," as described by Sue (2007), is when one is viewed as incompetent or when one's success is viewed to be extraordinary. Torres-Harding,

Andrade, and Diaz (2012) assessed this theme by asking questions that look at blaming minorities for issues that were caused by systematic oppression. The next theme is aimed at measuring what the authors call “pathologizing cultural values and communication styles.”

The items in these seven questions look to see if and when an individual was asked to assimilate into the White culture or to decrease or eliminate behaviors from their own ethnic background (Torres-Harding, Andrade, & Diaz, 2012). For example, being asked to speak or dress “more White.” The theme of being a “second-class citizen” is assessed through three questions. The researchers are looking to see if participants have ever been made to feel as if they were less than equal to Whites. The theme of “environmental invalidations” is assessed by five items. They look to see if a participant notices a lacking of representation of their own race/ethnicity in roles of power in their community. The final set of items assess the theme of “invisibility.” The invisibility theme looks at if an individual has ever felt ignored or devalued by others based on their race (Torres-Harding, Andrade, & Diaz, 2012).

In terms of reliability, Torres-Harding, Andrade, Diaz used the Cronbach’s alpha. The authors ran the alpha on all 52 items and found it to have an alpha level of ($\alpha=.949$) (Torres-Harding, Andrade, & Diaz, 2012). After receiving feedback from the participants, the authors removed some of the questions because they were not as clear or could be misinterpreted. The authors compared the RMAS with another scale that measured racism-related events in hopes for a positive correlation. The authors used a Pearson’s correlation coefficient and found that the subscales did positively correlate

with the SRE subscales (Torres-Harding, Andrade, & Diaz, 2012), thus concluding convergent validity.

Torres-Harding and Turner (2014) conducted a follow up study using the Racial Microaggression Scale's distress subscales. The study had a total of 374 participants from varying ethnic and racial backgrounds. The researchers found the internal consistency for each of the seven subscales by using the Cronbach's Alpha. The foreigner distress subscale was found to have an alpha level of .77, Criminality Distress of .87, Sexualization Distress of .87, Low Achieving/ Undesirable Culture Distress of .90, Invisibly Distress of .86, and Environmental Distress of .82. The researchers also found that higher levels of reported frequency of experienced racial microaggressions were associated with higher levels of perceived stressfulness from those experiences.

The survey included items that measured undergraduate students' willingness to return to the university the following semester. For this, the researchers called this the students' degree of consideration. This occurred by having participants answer items stating; "please rate how you felt about coming back to the university for the fall semester." on a five point Likert scale. The scale ranged from 1-5 with 1 being "I am seriously considering not returning to this university," 3 being "I am not sure if I should stay or go," and 5 being "I will return for the following semester."

The beginning of the survey included a demographic sheet to gather personal information about the participants. This included age, race/ethnicity, education level, and gender. The collected information was used for comparative analysis to find the relationship between the race of the participant experiencing racial microaggressions and their willingness to return to campus the following year.

Variables

Demographic characteristics. Participants' race/ethnicity, age, gender, and educational level were used as control variables for the study. The race/ethnicity is based on their self-report on demographic items of the survey. The participants were classified into male (0) and female (1), Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American (0), Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American (1), South Asian or Indian American (2), East Asian or Asian American (3), Native American or Alaskan Native(4), Latino or Hispanic American(5), Middle Eastern or Arab American (6), Other (7). This classification system came from a modified version of the current U.S. Census. Participants' age and gender will also be collected through self-report on demographic items on the survey. Educational level corresponded with the number of years of education participants completed post high school. Participants had the option of choosing, first, second, third, or fourth year.

Perceived experiences of racial microaggressions. Participants perceived experiences of racial microaggressions were assessed using the Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS) (Torres-Harding, Alejandro, & Daiz, 2012). These measures included 35 items assessing experiences of racial microaggressions in different situations in participants' lives. Examples of these items were "I am mistaken for being a service worker or lower-status worker simply because of my race" and "I am singled out by police or security because of my race." There were 4 response options based off a Likert scale: 0= never, 1= a little/rarely, 2= sometimes/ a moderate amount, and 3= often/frequently. Higher scores on the items represented a higher experience of racial microaggressions.

Retention. Undergraduate students' retention was used as the dependent variable for this study. Participants' willingness to return to campus the following semester, or their retention, was assessed using a 5 point Likert scale. There were items included in the survey that were aimed to measure students' degree of consideration. An example of said items include; "please rate how you felt about coming back for the following semester at your University?" Participants had 5 options to choose from starting with 1, "I seriously thought about not returning to this university," and ending with 5, "I always knew I was returning for the following semester."

Procedure

Following approval from the University of Toledo's IRB, the participants were chosen from the University of Toledo. The researcher worked with the University of Toledo's Institutional Research Department in order to reach the participants eligible to engage in the survey. For the participants to qualify for the study they must have been enrolled at least part time at the University of Toledo. Every student enrolled in the study had the opportunity to participate in the survey; however, at the beginning of the survey, there was a demographic questionnaire asking what race/ethnicity the students consider themselves. Two surveys that were not 100% completely filled out were discarded from data analysis.

The study was of minimal risk to all participants involved. The probability of participants experiencing harm, discomfort, or any other negative effects from this study was not any greater than any typically encountered in daily life.

Statistical Hypotheses

General research hypothesis: There is a relationship between African American college students' experiences of racial microaggressions and their decisions regarding dropout.

Specific research hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' experiences of racial microaggressions and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H0₁: There is no statistically significant positive relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H1₁: There is a statistically significant positive relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' experiences of Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

Specific research hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H0₂: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H1₂: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

Specific research hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Criminality subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H0₃: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Criminality subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H1₃: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Criminality subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

Specific research hypothesis 4: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Sexualization subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H0₄: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Sexualization subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H1₄: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Sexualization subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

Specific research hypothesis 5: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H0₅: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H1₅: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

Specific research hypothesis 6: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Invisibility subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H0₆: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Invisibility subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H1₆: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Invisibility subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

Specific research hypothesis 7: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Environmental subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H0₇: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Environmental subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

H1₇: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Environmental subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out during the semester.

Specific research hypothesis 8: There is a positive relationship between African Americans college student's experiences of racial microaggressions and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H0₈: There is no statistically significant positive relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college student's scores on the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H1₈: There is a statistically significant positive relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college student's experiences of Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

Specific research hypothesis 9: There is a positive relationship between African American college student's scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H0₉: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H1₉: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

Specific research hypothesis 10: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Criminality subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H0₁₀: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Criminality subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H1₁₀: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Criminality subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

Specific research hypothesis 11: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Sexualization subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H0₁₁: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Sexualization subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H1₁₁: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Sexualization subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

Specific research hypothesis 12: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H0₁₂: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H1₁₂: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

Specific research hypothesis 13: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Invisibility subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H0₁₃: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Invisibility subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H1₁₃: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Invisibility subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

Specific research hypothesis 14: There is a positive relationship between African American college students' scores on the Environmental subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H0₁₄: There is no statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Environmental subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

H1₁₄: There is a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between African American college students' scores on the Environmental subscale of the Racial Microaggressions Scale and their decision to drop out between semesters.

Data Analysis

This study used descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, & range) were used in order to describe the sample and the variables. To answer each research hypotheses, a Pearson product-moment correlation was used to determine if there was a significant relationship between both variables.

The study's a priori alpha rate is set for .05. We controlled for the risk of increased error by using a Bonferroni error correction technique. The Bonferroni correction is utilized when a study has multiple hypotheses that will be tested simultaneously (Armstrong, 2014). To account for this increased error, the researcher divided the a priori alpha (.05) by the number of within semester hypotheses (6) to arrive at an alpha of .007 per hypotheses. The same was done for the between semester hypotheses. The researcher divided the a priori alpha (.05) by the number of between semester hypotheses (6) to arrive at an alpha of .007 per hypothesis.

The researcher conducted estimates of power (McNeil et al. 1996; Stevens, 1996) utilizing the most conservative estimates and a total sample size of 53. The researcher calculated an estimate of power for each of Cohen's (1992) suggested levels of effect sizes (f^2): small (.10), medium (.30), and large (.50) for a Pearson Product Moment Correlation. If the study yields a significant relationship within the population and the effect size is small, the power will be .69. If the effect size is medium, the power will be .98. Lastly, if the effect size is large, the power will be .995. Consequently, even if the

effect size is small (.02), the statistical procedures used in this study will be able to detect if a relationship exists.

Summary

The research methodologies in this chapter attempted to answer if there was a relationship between African Americans' experiences of racial microaggressions and their decisions to remain enrolled at the university. We aimed to answer this hypothesis by conducting statistical tests answering 12 separate specific hypotheses. The researchers used an ex post facto research design and conducted a survey to collect the data for the study. Torres-Haridng's (2012) RMAS was used as the instrumentation to measure levels of experienced racial microaggressions and a separate set of items to measure the students' degree of consideration in regards to retention. The participants used in this study were African American undergraduate students currently enrolled at the University of Toledo for at least 6 credit hours and are over the age of 18.

Chapter Four

Results

Introduction

The goal for chapter four is to offer further information on the methods used to contact participants. This chapter provides information on the instrument's total and subscale descriptive data including their means, standard deviations (SD), range of scores, and internal consistency. This chapter also includes a presentation of the results of the hypothesis testing. The researcher worked with the University of Toledo's department of Institutional Research in order to contact eligible participants for the study. An email was generated, through the department of Institutional Research, and sent out under the researchers first and last name. The email included a brief summary of the purpose of the study as well as a link to the study hosted with Qualtrics. The original email was sent on March 23rd, 2016 and reminder emails were sent out on March 28th and April 4th, 2016.

Along with reminder emails from the department of Institutional Research, three advisors of programs (Student African American Brotherhood and the Black Student Union) that predominantly served African American student organizations were asked to provide recruitment assistance for the survey. The email to the advisors asked if they would remind students, in their respective organizations, to participate in the study. The email sent to advisors, reminding students to participate, was sent out on March 28th. Only one of the three advisors asked for assistance replied to the request before the survey was closed on April 11th, 2016.

Descriptive Data

The following section provides an overview of the sample's descriptive data for each of the instruments used in the study. The study included Torres-Harding's Racial

Microaggressions scale which has 7 different subscales, the demographic questionnaire, and the retention questionnaire gauging students' decisions on whether or not they planned on dropping out of the University of Toledo.

The Racial Microaggression Scale (RMAS) was created by Torres-Harding, Andrade, and Diaz, in 2012, and was used in this study to assess African American undergraduate students' frequency of experienced racial microaggressions. The mean for RMAS total score was 2.493 (SD=.602, range= 1.06-3.56) (Table 4.1). The average amount of experienced racial microaggressions reported by our sample fell between the "sometimes/ a moderate amount" and "often/frequently." The data shows that on average, the samples reported experiencing a high frequency of racial microaggressions. A Cronbach's alpha was run on the entire sample which produced an internal consistency reliability estimate of .919. The mean for the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale score was 1.616 (SD=.720, range= 1.00-3.67). The mean for the Criminality subscale score was 1.103 (SD=.925, range= 1.00-4.00). The mean for the Sexualization subscale score was 2.062 (SD=.971, range=1.00-4.00). The mean for the Low Achieving/Undesirable subscale score was 3.073 (SD=.658, range= 1.00-4.00). The mean for the Invisibility subscale score was 2.113 (SD=.840, range= 1.00-4.00). The mean for the Environmental subscale score was 2.920 (SD=.591, range= 1.00-4.00). Table 4.2 includes the descriptive information on each individual subscale in the RMAS.

Table 4.1 RMAS Total Score

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total for How Often	53	1.06	3.56	2.4932	.60290
Total for Distress	53	.00	4.66	2.5852	1.44188
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Table 4.2 RMAS Subscales

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Foreigner/Not Belonging Subscale	53	1.00	3.67	1.6164	.72027
Foreigner/Not Belonging Distress	53	.00	4.33	1.2767	1.10310
Criminality Subscale	53	1.00	4.00	2.4953	.95259
Criminality Distress	53	.00	5.00	2.8538	1.81833
Sexualization Subscale	53	1.00	4.00	2.0629	.97195
Sexualization Distress	53	.00	5.00	1.8239	1.62592
Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture Subscale	53	1.00	4.00	3.0734	.65876
Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture Distress	53	.00	5.00	3.2558	1.75622
Invisibility Subscale	53	1.00	4.00	2.1132	.84005
Invisibility Distress	53	.00	5.00	2.4552	1.63295
Environmental Subscale	53	1.00	4.00	3.1283	.59108
Environmental Distress	53	.00	5.00	2.9208	1.59583
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Results of Hypothesis Testing.

This section provides a reminder of the research hypotheses as well as the results of the statistical analyses used to test the research hypotheses.

General Research Question 1

General Research Question 1 asked, “Is there a relationship between African American college students’ experiences of racial microaggressions and their decisions regarding dropout.” The specific research questions that address General Research Question 1 are as followed:

Specific Research Question 1 asked, “Is there a statistically significant relationship between African American undergraduate college students’ experience of racial microaggressions and their decision to drop out during the ongoing semester?” To answer Specific Research Question 1, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between total experiences of racial microaggressions and students’ decisions to drop out during the ongoing semester. The results indicated that there is not a statistically significant relationship between total experiences of racial microaggressions and students’ decision to drop out during the ongoing semester [$r(51) = .115, p = .411$].

Specific Research Question 2 asked, Is there a statistically significant relationship between African American college students’ scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale of the RMAS and their decision to drop out during the ongoing semester? To answer Specific Research Question 2, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale and students’ decisions to drop out

during the ongoing semester. The results indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale and students' decision to drop out during the ongoing semester [$r(51) = .338, p < .05$]. According to Cohen (1992), the strength of this relationship is medium.

Specific Research Question 3 asked, Is there a statistically significant relationship between African American college students' scores on the Criminality subscale of the RMAS and their decision to drop out during the ongoing semester? To answer Specific Research Question 3, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Criminality subscale and students' decisions to drop out during the ongoing semester. The results indicate that there is not a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Criminality subscale and students' decision to drop out during the ongoing semester [$r(51) = -.052, p = .713$]

Specific Research Question 4 asked, Is there a statistically significant relationship between African American college students' scores on the Sexualization subscale of the RMAS and their decision to drop out during the ongoing semester? To answer Specific Research Question 4, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Sexualization subscale and students' decision to drop out during the ongoing semester. The results indicate that there is not a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Sexualization subscale and students' decisions to drop out during the ongoing semester [$r(51) = -.230, p = .098$]

Specific Research Question 5 asked, Is there a statistically significant relationship between African American college students' scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale of the RMAS and their decision to drop out during the ongoing semester? To answer Specific Research Question 5, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale and students' decision to drop out during the ongoing semester. The results indicate that there is not a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale and students' decisions to drop out during the ongoing semester [$r(51) = .023, p = .873$]

Specific Research Question 6 asked, Is there a statistically significantly relationship between African American college students' scores on the Invisibility subscale of the RMAS and their decision to drop out during the ongoing semester? To answer Specific Research Question 6, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Invisibility subscale and students' decision to drop out during the ongoing semester. The results indicate that there is not a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Invisibility subscale and students' decisions to drop out during the ongoing semester [$r(51) = .021, p = .881$]

Specific Research Question 7 asked, Is there a statistically significant relationship between African American college students' scores on the Environmental subscale of the RMAS and their decision to drop out during the ongoing semester? To answer Specific Research Question 7, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to

determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Environmental subscale and students' decisions to drop out during the ongoing semester. The results indicate that there is not a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Environmental subscale and students' decision to drop out during the ongoing semester [$r(51)=-.116, p=.410$]

Specific Research Question 8 asked, Is there a statistically significant relationship between African American college students' experience of racial microaggressions and their decision to drop out between semesters? To answer Specific Research Question 8, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between experiences of racial microaggressions and students' decisions to drop out between semesters. The results indicated that there is not a statistically significant relationship between experiences of racial microaggressions and students' decision to drop out between semesters [$r(51)=.030, p=.835$].

Specific Research Question 9 asked, Is there a statistically significant relationship between African American college students' scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale of the RMAS and their decision to drop out between semesters? To answer Specific Research Question 9, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale and students' decision to drop out between semesters. The results indicate that there is not a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale and students' decisions to drop out between semesters [$r(51)=-.338, p=.612$].

Specific Research Question 10 asked, Is there a statistically significant relationship between African American college students' scores on the Criminality subscale of the RMAS and their decision to drop out between semesters? To answer Specific Research Question 10, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Criminality subscale and students' decisions to drop out between semesters. The results indicate that there is not a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Criminality subscale and students' decision to drop out between semesters [$r(51)=-.046$ $p=.747$]

Specific Research Question 11 asked, Is there a statistically significant relationship between African American college students' scores on the Sexualization subscale of the RMAS and their decision to drop out between semesters? To answer Specific Research Question 11, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Sexualization subscale and students' decisions to drop out between semesters. The results indicate that there is not a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Sexualization subscale and students' decision to drop out between semesters [$r(51)=.081$, $p=.571$]

Specific Research Question 12 asked, Is there a statistically significant relationship between African American college students' scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale of the RMAS and their decision to drop out between semesters? To answer Specific Research Question 12, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if there was a statistically significant

relationship between scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale and students' decision to drop out between semesters. The results indicate that there is not a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale and students' decisions to drop out between semesters [$r(51)=-.102$, $p=.478$]

Specific Research Question 13 asked, Is there a statistically significant relationship between African American college students' scores on the Invisibility subscale of the RMAS and their decision to drop out between semesters? To answer Specific Research Question 13, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Invisibility subscale and students' decision to drop out between semesters. The results indicate that there is not a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Invisibility subscale and students' decisions to drop out between semesters [$r(51)=-.226$, $p=.111$]

Specific Research Question 14 asked, Is there a statistically significant relationship between African American college students' scores on the Environmental subscale of the RMAS and their decision to drop out between semesters? To answer Specific Research Question 14, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Environmental subscale and students' decision to drop out between semesters. The results indicate that there is not a statistically significant relationship between scores on the Environmental subscale and students' decisions to drop out between semesters [$r(51)=.030$, $p=.835$]

Summary

The link to the survey was sent out through the University of Toledo's department of Institutional Research under the researchers name and email address. The department of Institutional Research used their database to identify potential participants that fit the inclusion criteria of African American undergraduate students, above the age of 18.

Using the Pearson Coefficient Correlation, it was found that there was a statistically significant relationship between African American's scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale of the RMAS and their decision to drop out during the ongoing semester. The data from Specific Research Question 2 provided general support for General Research Question 1.

Analyzing the data through the Pearson Coefficient Correlation, it was found that Specific Research Question 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 did not have a statistically significant relationship between African American's experiencing racial microaggressions and their decisions to drop out. The data showed that experiences of racial microaggressions did not have a difference on whether students were deciding to drop out between semesters or during the ongoing semester.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Introduction

The following chapter will provide a summary of the purpose of the study and the findings. Next, this chapter offers the interpretation of the data and integration of the findings into previous literature. Finally, the implications of the findings, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future studies will be provided.

Background and Study Findings

The purpose of the study was to further understand the degree, if any, racial microaggressions are associated with African American college students' retention. More specifically, the study attempted to see if racism and racial discrimination were added factors that influenced African American college students' willingness to stay enrolled at the university, both between semesters, and during the ongoing semester. Previous literature had shown that African American students who experienced racial microaggressions at PWI's end up leaving for colleges known for being historically Black (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). The researcher collected data from March 23rd, 2016 to April 4th, 2016. Once the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Toledo on March 15th, 2016, the researcher worked with the Department of Institutional Research and sent out an email through the department, under the name of the researcher asking for participants (APPENDIX C). The Department of Institutional Research compiled a list of eligible participants (African American undergraduate students) and sent a mass email. The study employed an ex post facto design and worked with variables that were already in existence and unable to be

manipulated. The researcher used a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient to answer the study's research questions.

The study sent out a total of 1,677 emails to participants and had a total of 53 participants who fully completed the survey. 50 participants self-identified themselves as Black/African American while three self-identified themselves Multiracial (part Black/African American). The participants' ages ranged from 18-53 years old. 38 of the participants were female, 13 of the participants were male, and two of the participants were transgendered. Among the 53 total participants, 17 participants were freshman, 9 participants were sophomores, 11 participants were juniors, and 16 participants were seniors. Two of the surveys were discarded due to the participants not fully completing the survey.

With respect to the participants' scores on the RMAS subscales, the findings show that participants' average scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale landed between "A little/Rarely" and "Sometimes/ a moderate amount." When looking at the Criminality subscale, participants' rated the frequency of these experiences between "Sometimes/ a moderate amount" and "Often/Frequently." On the Sexualization subscale, participants' also rated the frequency of their experiences at the "Sometimes/a moderate amount." The next subscale of Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture, participants' rated that they experienced these types of racial microaggressions often. The following subscale looked at the frequency in which participants' felt Invisible. Average scores of participants' showed that African Americans' experienced the racial microaggression of invisibility at a moderate amount. The last subscale scored on the

RMAS was the Environmental subscale. Participants rated the frequency of these types of experiences quite frequently.

The findings on the subscales of the RMAS indicated that African Americans frequently experience racial microaggressions on campus. The participants rated the Environmental subscale as the most experienced type of racial microaggression on campus. This meaning that African American students frequently found themselves in situations where there were noticeably an absence of people of their own race/ethnicity. These can include faculty and staff positions, work supervisors, or police officers. Furthermore, the Low Achieving/Undesirable subscale was the next highest rated subscale on the RMAS. Participants' reported that they frequently experienced situations in which their race was viewed as dysfunctional, undesirable, and that the only reason they made it to college was due to affirmative action (Torres-Harding & Turner, 2014). The participants rated Criminality as the third highest subscale. Participants indicated a moderate amount of racial microaggression experiences of being viewed as criminals. Essentially, this scale shows that African Americans on campus had moderately high encounters of being viewed as aggressive, threatening, or hostile. Finally, participants rated experiences of being overlooked, or the Invisibility subscale, at the moderate amount. The findings showed that African Americans perceive themselves to be dismissed in group settings due to their race as well as feel that they have their thoughts and feelings invalidated.

The findings of the study showed that more than half the participants reported knowing that they were going to return for the following semester. Less than ten percent of the participants reported that they were seriously considering not returning to the

university for the following semester while seven percent of participants reported being undecided on whether or not they would be returning. Of the same sample, 50.9% of participants reported certainty that they were not going to drop out of the current semester. A small percentage of participants (3.6%) reported serious consideration of leaving the university before the end of the semester. Only ten percent of the participants reported being undecided on whether they would stay or leave before the semester ended.

The findings of the study suggested that there is a positive relationship between student's feelings of being a foreigner and that they do not belong, and their decision to drop out during the ongoing semester. Further, the strength of this relationship is large. The study found that there was no relationship between students' total experiences of racial microaggressions and their decision to drop out during the ongoing semester and between semesters. Furthermore, the study found that there was no relationship between students' scores on the Criminality, Sexualization, Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture, Invisibility, and Environmental subscale, and the students' decision to drop out during the ongoing semester. Lastly, the study found that there was no relationship between students' scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging, Criminality, Sexualization, Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture, Invisibility, and Environmental subscale, and the students' decision to drop out between semesters.

Integration of Findings into the Literature

The purpose of the study was to further understand the degree, if any, racial microaggressions have on African American college students' retention. Several researchers have evaluated the influence racial microaggressions have on African American retention rates at PWIs. The findings of this study are similar to previous

studies however this study looked at racial microaggressions influence on African American students at a more diverse campus.

Previous literature suggests that African American college students' had difficulties fitting in and having a sense of belonging on their campuses (Dabney, 2010; Grier-Reed, 2010; Lewis & McKissic, 2010; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). The results of the study were similar to those found in Grier-Reed's (2010) study who found that students at PWIs felt uncomfortable in their surroundings and that they did not belong. The students in Grier-Reed's study were more likely to drop out and attend Historically Black Colleges. The results in this study showed that the scores on the Foreigner/Not Belonging subscale had a strong relationship with African Americans' decision to drop out during the ongoing semester. Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder (2008) found similar results in their study that African Americans feel as if they do not belong or that they are an outsider.

Furthermore, the current study did not find a relationship between students' scores on the Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture subscale and retention. Ahorulu and Nicole (2013) found contrary results that African American students, who felt the threat of fulfilling the stereotype of being intellectually incapable, had lower rates of degree completion. Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) also found contrary results that students experiencing racial microaggressions and being viewed as academically inferior ended up dropping classes or leaving the university. Both of these results contradicted the results found in the current study.

Although the study looked at the influence of racial microaggressions had on retention, the findings showed that participants rated high frequencies of experiences on

the “Low Achieving/Undesirable Culture,” “Environmental,” and “Criminality” subscales. These findings support Steele and Aronson’s (1995) study on stereotype threat. The researchers’ found that when students are faced with achievement tests and are told they are measuring academic ability, African American students perform, on average, less than their White counterparts that were told the test was measuring academic ability as well as African Americans who were not informed the test was a measure of academic ability.

Participants rated high frequencies on the Environmental subscale. These findings supported Torres-Harding, Andrade, & Diaz’s (2012) study which found that African Americans’ felt that their race was not being represented in roles of power in their community. Harper (2009) found similar results that African American students at predominantly White colleges felt that racial stereotypes negatively affected the expectation of Black males in leadership positions. African Americans also noted that there was an absence of representation of their own race in their school and work settings, as well as in the media (Torres-Harding & Turner, 2014).

The findings showed that participants rated high experiences of being viewed as criminals on campus. These findings further support current literature. Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2001) found that African American students on predominantly White institutions reported high level of stress due to being frequently stopped by the police or “fitting the description.” Miller and Travers (2005) found that African American men reported being viewed as hostile, aggressive, or angry. The researchers also found that participants’ felt that coworkers, bosses, and employees were afraid or intimidated which led to the avoidance of African American males. The results of the current study show

that African Americans are finding themselves in different situations in which they are being viewed as criminals. These can include a higher frequency of being stopped by police officers than their White counterparts or being perceived that they are likely to engage in criminal activities (Torres-Harding & Turner, 2014).

Implications

University Implications

Educate faculty members and staff: African American students are feeling as if they are foreigners or that they do not belong on campus. The results of the study showed that African American students felt disconnected between themselves and the campuses that they attend. Greater efforts should be taken to educate faculty and staff of universities on the importance of making all students feel welcomed and included in the classroom. Universities should mandate yearly diversity trainings to all faculty and staff members to increase multicultural competencies. Current programs like “Safe Place” trainings are a wonderful example of university led programs that successfully increase acceptance of diverse students.

Furthermore, faculty and staff members need to be aware of their own personal biases as well becoming more aware to possible racial microaggressions educators may be unintentionally communicating to African American students. Regardless of what race/ethnicity, sexuality, or gender the faculty or staff member is, everyone has their own inherited biases. It is important for authority figures to be aware and recognize their own biases to decrease the possibility of unintentional biases slipping out into their profession. Faculty and staff members should also be open and accepting of their students’ stories which leads to empowering students and allowing them to feel that their voice is heard within the campus society.

Faculty and staff members, not just counselor educators, should encourage African Americans to pursue graduate degrees and hold positions of power. Even though the focus of the study was not looking individually at experiences of racial microaggressions, the average score on the Low Achieving/Undesirable and Environmental subscales were the highest amongst all other subscales. These scales indicated that African Americans do not see people of their own race/ethnicity in positions like professors, CEOs, or community leaders. These scales also indicated that African Americans feel as if they are viewed as being academically inferior or incompetent to other students around them. Faculty and staff members should increase their efforts in encouraging and supporting minorities to join doctoral programs, which will lead to an increase in diversity amongst graduate programs, which leads to African Americans being seen in positions of power.

Programming in residence halls with Greek life: The literature shows that African Americans felt that other races invalidated their experiences of racial discrimination, were unable to connect with other individuals on campus, or put them in a position to be the spokesperson of their race. As a result African American students' created counter spaces with one another to feel as if they "fit in" on campus. Programming in residence halls alongside with Greek life, on racial microaggressions, will help bridge the gap between minority students and Whites on campus and create a more united campus climate. There have been several instances in the media where racial discrimination (racial slurs, excluding specific group members, Black face) had been perpetuated by Greek organizations on campus. Regular diversity trainings at residence halls for students would allow for students to have a better understanding on how their actions may be viewed differently or seen as offensive by other races/ethnicities.

Proactive actions by senior administrators. Alongside improving Greek life student resident halls, senior administrators can implement diversity trainings across campus for both staff and other students. These trainings would allow for faculty and staff members across campus to be better prepared to work with a growing diverse student body. The results of the study showed that African Americans frequently experience perceptions that they are of criminal status. Senior administrators could work with campus police departments in creating a stronger relationship between police officers and African American students. Trainings would be offered to assist in changing the perception authority figures have on the African American community.

Universities should also advocate for and increase the use of first-year programs and having faculty and staff members more visible to minority communities. These programs, such as learning communities, allow for minority students to learn and progress academically together. In turn, this could increase minority student's graduation rate by allowing for groups of students, who have shared experiences, work and bounce ideas off one another. Having faculty and administrators actively working to create a positive environment by becoming more visible at minority events could inadvertently increase the trust between African Americans and the university. This would work by increasing the presence of faculty members being involved in student sponsored events without having the faculty members as a supervisory role. Essentially, faculty members would be building trust and rapport amongst the minority student population so that students of color felt their cultural beliefs and values were welcomed on campus.

Counselor Educators Teaching Students about Racial Microaggressions

Teaching racial microaggressions in diversity classes. This topic should not only be covered in multicultural counseling courses, but also included across the curriculum for future counselor educators. The counseling education curriculum already includes elements of diversity across all courses. Counselor educators should educate students on what constitutes a racial microaggression. They should then go over the three different subtypes of racial microaggressions illustrated by Sue (2007). Once students are able to properly identify racial microaggressions, counselor educators can create a safe space in which discussions of racial microaggressions can occur. Students would be encouraged to share personal experiences of events that occurred in their own lives without fear of judgement and invalidation.

Talking about racial microaggressions with counselor education students. In addition to education counselor educators to be aware of their own racial microaggressions, counseling students should also be aware of how to appropriately handle racial microaggressions regardless of race/ethnicity. Counseling students should be made aware of how racial microaggressions affect the students around them and the psychological distress they cause. Students, along with faculty members, can create a safe environment, in which students of all colors can feel comfortable sharing their experiences with discrimination. Students should also be made aware of how to appropriately confront acts of racial microaggressions without being viewed as hostile or aggressive.

Assess for the presence of racial microaggressions in counselor education programs. Counselor educators already distribute formative and summative evaluations throughout the duration of the course. Within these evaluations, counselor educators

could begin to assess for racial microaggressions by adding in an element to the survey about racial discrimination, racial microaggressions, and the racial climate of the classroom. This would allow for counselor educators to evaluate how students perceive the classroom environment and make any necessary changes before the course ends.

College counseling with African Americans and racial microaggressions

Lastly college counselors can use a strengths based perspective to assist African Americans in overcoming the adversity of the racial microaggression that they may have faced while on campus. The literature shows that racial microaggressions cause significant psychological distress due to their ambiguity. Counselors would be able to assist African Americans by first helping to identify if the act was considered a racial microaggression and if the communication was intentional or not. Then the counselor could help the student by measuring the level of distress these acts caused on the individual. The counselor would then be able to process the event with the student and empower the student to no longer feel invalidated or powerless to subtle acts of racism.

Statement of Limitations

Sue et al., (2009) discussed that students may have difficulties discussing racism or racist events that occurred in their classroom or on campus. Therefore, a limitation to the study is that students may not have felt comfortable participating in a survey that encourages them to rethink past events of racial discrimination. However, because the sample population is coming from a more diverse environment than PWI's, students may have felt more comfortable reporting personal experiences of racial microaggression.

Another limitation to the study is that the participants may have not been completely honest while taking the survey. Some students may not have felt comfortable

sharing all parts of their experiences and may lessen the influence of the received microaggression. There is a possibility that some students may have inflated their experiences of racial microaggressions to appear as if they were discriminated against more than what actually took place. Lefever, Dal, and Matthiasdottir (2006) wrote that one difficulty with online surveys is participants lack willingness to participate. This may have caused respondents to speed through the questionnaire without reading the questions.

Students may have engaged in retrospective recall. Retrospective recall occurs when people are asked to remember specific experiences in their past (Solhan, Trull, Jahng, & Wood, 2009). The nature of the study is asking participants to take a survey that has participants recall specific instances of experienced racial microaggressions. Due to the design, the study was at risk to have the results influenced by recall bias. When studies use retrospective reports from participants, the results may be limited in their usefulness due to the participants recall bias (Hufford, 2007). Participants may have experienced different emotions, behaviors, and thought patterns during the event they were asked to recall. Because of this, their recollection of the event may have been somewhat skewed due to how they perceived the event. There is a possibility that students who have experienced racial microaggressions will have been unable to accurately report their personal experiences based on the given responses of the survey as well as their specific recollection of the event.

Another limitation with the study was in the research design. This study employed an ex post facto research design which means that we are looking at data that occurred after the event. The main issue with this design was that the research subjects are not

randomly assigned to a control and a treatment group. This design does not allow for us to compare African Americans who experienced racial microaggressions with African American students who did not experience racial microaggressions and their degree of considering drop out. Furthermore, this study was unable to sample participants who had already dropped out of the university which means we cannot confirm their experiences of racial microaggressions and if they had any influence on their decision to drop out. The study was only able to survey those students who had already made the decision to come back to the university. There may have been a group of African American students who had such a negative experience, due to racial microaggressions, they refused to re-enroll at the university. Future research should seek out those individuals who did not re-enroll to determine which, if any, racial microaggressions influenced their decision to no longer attend the university.

Survey fatigue/burnout may have been a factor impacting the response rate of the participants. Approximately eight other surveys were administered by the Institutional Research Department to the general student population during the fall semester. Because of this, participants may have felt oversampled and decided to drop out of the study prematurely or ignore the participant request all together. A few of the surveys administered by the Institutional Research Department were similar in nature to this study. Therefore, students may have felt they had already taken a survey on the racial climate of campus and again decided to withdraw from the survey prematurely or ignore the request for participation.

Following survey fatigue, an additional limitation may have been that students were unsure of the meaning of racial microaggressions. The recruitment email did not

include a formal definition on racial microaggressions. Because of this, students may not have been able to accurately determine if they experienced what the survey was asking or if they believed the survey pertained to their occurrences.

Finally there were limitations to using an online survey over an on-paper survey. Research shows that response rates of online surveys are much lower than those administered in person on paper (Nutly ,2008). Surveys administered in person allow for a thorough explanation on the purpose of the study through direct face to face contact. Online surveys require students to be motivated and dedicated to decipher the purpose of the study to determine their willingness to participate on their own. On-paper studies also allow the added benefit of explaining specific questions participants may have while taking the survey which may deter them from withdrawing from the study prematurely. A few of the participants in the current study dropped out of the survey prematurely leaving their survey partially completed and the researchers with unusable data.

Suggestions for Future Research

Research on African Americans' experiences of racial microaggressions influencing retention is a fairly overlooked topic. Most studies looked at African Americans' experiences of racial microaggressions, in terms of frequency and mental health, and when the retention aspect was introduced, researchers looked at PWIs. More studies are needed in order to understand how racial microaggressions influence African Americans' on more diverse campuses, which will lead to universities being better equipped in handling a diverse campus climate.

To begin with, the current study should be recreated with a larger sample size. One issue with this study was time constraints. Due to the short amount of time allocated

for the survey to be running, there was a smaller sample size than expected. With such a small sample size, it makes generalizability of the data difficult if not impossible. A similar study with a larger sample size may yield more meaningful findings. This would allow researchers to obtain a broader perspective of the relationship racial microaggressions have on retention in African Americans.

In addition to recreating the study with a larger sample size, the study could be duplicated with more ethnicities included in the study. The current study only looked at how African Americans' retention was influenced by racial microaggressions. With a more diverse sample size looking at other races/ethnicities, researchers could determine if there was a difference the frequency and type of racial microaggressions experienced on campus. Researchers could also determine if different races/ethnicities differed in their thoughts on retention when experiencing racial microaggressions.

Furthermore, a replica study could implement qualitative measures alongside the quantitative approach. The data from this study was collected through self-reported data which may have been influenced by how the participant remembered the event and their emotional state. Adding a qualitative framework would allow for researchers to gather objective data on experienced racial microaggressions. This information could be compared to the quantitative data and increase reliability and validity of the study's findings.

Summary

Racial microaggressions have been found to cause significant psychological stress in the lives of African Americans. This study was a small step in adding to the current body of literature on the influence racial microaggressions have on African Americans'

and retention. Although the results of the study provided information in regards to racial microaggressions and retention, there were several other areas that need to be further explored to determine the relationship (if any) racial microaggressions have on African Americans students' retention and their decision to remain enrolled in their current universities. The researcher wishes that the results of the study will have an impact on the field of counselor education as well as continue to promote the equal treatment of African American students on college campuses.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

ADULT RESEARCH SUBJECT - INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigator: *Kyle Brezinski, Graduate Student, 740-513-6074*

Purpose: You are invited to participate in my research project assessing the effect of racial microaggressions on retention of undergraduate students, which is being conducted at the University of Toledo. I have chosen to study racial microaggressions on college campuses because it will create a vision on how microaggressions affect the willingness to return to the university for the following semester in college students. If at a future time I would like to use the research for some other purpose, I will talk to you and present you with a different consent form, stating the purpose of the research.

Description of Procedures: The researcher will first acquire the listserv of African American undergraduate students currently enrolled by contacting the registrar's office and Informational Technology (IT). For the participants to qualify for the study, they must be enrolled at least part time at the University of Toledo, be older than the age of 18, and of African descent. Every student enrolled in the study has the opportunity to participate in the survey, however at the beginning of the survey there will be a demographic questionnaire asking what race/ethnicity they consider themselves as. Any survey that is not 100% completely filled out will be discarded from data analysis.

After you have completed your participation, I will be happy to tell you about the data and research area under study and answer any questions you may have about the research.

Potential Risks: There are minimal risks to participation in this study, including the possibility that you will feel uncomfortable about my observing you or asking questions. If you feel upset in any way, please tell me. We can stop the research at any time.

Potential Benefits: The only direct benefit to you if you participate in this research may be that you will learn about how qualitative research studies are conducted. I will be the only person who benefits directly from this project, as it will help me learn to conduct research and it will fulfill one of my requirements for my graduate work.

Confidentiality: I will make every effort to prevent anyone other than my instructor from knowing that you provided this information, or what that information is. The consent forms with signatures will be kept separate from field notes and interview

transcripts, which will not include real names and which will be presented only to my instructor for grading purposes. Although we will make every effort to protect your confidentiality, there is a low risk that this might be breached.

Voluntary Participation: I hope you will participate in this research only if you truly feel comfortable with it and want to do it. If you have any misgivings, please do not feel you must participate. Your decision not to participate in this study will not affect our relationship and will not affect your relationship with The University of Toledo. Please remember that in addition, you may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits.

Contact Information: Before you decide to accept this invitation to take part in this study, you may ask any questions that you might have. If you have any questions at any time before, during or after your participation you should contact me, Kyle Brezinski at 740-513-6074 or kyle.brezinski@rockets.utoledo.edu.

Appendix B

Demographic and Retention Form

Please help us describe the people who provided information to us. Do not provide your name.

What is your age? _____

Ethnicity origin (or Race): Please specify identify your ethnicity.

- _____ White / European American
- _____ Hispanic or Latino
- _____ Black / African American
- _____ Multiracial (part Black or part African American)
- _____ Multiracial (no part Black or African American)
- _____ Native American or Alaskan Native
- _____ East Asian / Asian American
- _____ South Asian / Indian American
- _____ Middle Eastern / Arab American
- _____ Other

Please specify your gender.

- _____ Male
- _____ Female
- _____ Transgender
- _____ Other

What is your academic status?

- _____ Freshman
- _____ Sophomore
- _____ Junior
- _____ Senior

Please rate how you feel about coming back to the University for the fall semester.

5	4	3	2	1
I am seriously considering not returning to this university.	I am considering about not returning to this university.	I am not sure if I should stay or go.	I am fairly sure I will return for the following semester.	I will return for the following semester.

Did you ever feel like dropping out during the ongoing semester?

5	4	3	2	1
I seriously thought about leaving during the ongoing semester	I thought about leaving during the ongoing semester	I wasn't sure if I was going to leave or stay	I was fairly certain I was staying for the ongoing semester	I always knew I was staying for the ongoing semester

Appendix C

Recruitment Email

Greetings,

My name is Kyle Brezinski and I am a doctoral candidate at The University of Toledo. You have been invited to participate in this dissertation, "You PC Bro? How Experiences of Racial Microaggressions Affect Undergraduate African American Student Retention." This dissertation is being conducted under the direction of Dr. John Laux. The purpose of the dissertation is to understand how racial discrimination effects African American's decision to stay enrolled at their current university.

To participate in this study, you have to be 18 years of age and self-identify as an African American. You also have to be enrolled as an undergraduate student at the University of Toledo.

This study is completely confidential and your answers will not be linked to you. Participation in this study is voluntary and you will have to read and agree to the terms of the informed consent. You have to right to stop at any time. The entire survey should take 15-20 minutes.

If you have any questions regarding this study at any time, please contact

Dr. John Laux: john.laux@utoledo.edu

Kyle Brezinski: kyle.brezinski@rockets.utoledo.edu

Please click on the link to participate:

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Kyle Brezinski

Follow this link to the Survey:

[Take the Survey](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

https://utoledo.rockets.utoledo.edu/qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_8IapVEk78kHjJQ1&Q_CHL=email&Preview=Survey

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:

[Click here to unsubscribe](#)

Appendix D
IRB Approval Form



The University of Toledo
Department for Human Research Protections
Social, Behavioral & Educational Institutional Review Board
Office of Research, Rm. 2300, University Hall
2801 West Bancroft Street, Mail Stop 944
Toledo, Ohio 43606-3390
Phone: 419-530-2844 Fax: 419-530-2841
(FWA00010686)

To: John Laux, Ph.D. and Kyle Brezinski
Department of School Psychology, Higher Education, Counselor Education & Supervision

From: Walter Edinger, Ph.D., Chair
Kamala London Newton, Ph.D., Vice Chair
Patricia Case, Ph.D., Chair Designee

Signed: Kamala Newton **Date:** 3-17-2016

Subject: IRB #201284
Protocol Title: *You PC Bro? How Experiences of Racial Micro-aggressions Affect Undergraduate African American Student Retention*

On 03/15/16, the Protocol listed below was reviewed and approved by the Chair and Chair Designee of the University of Toledo (UT) **Social Behavioral & Educational Institutional Review Board (IRB)** via the expedited process. The Chair and Chair Designee noted that you have been granted a waiver of written consent. However an information sheet regarding the study should be distributed to potential participants. This Information Sheet should include the name and telephone number of a contact person in case the subjects need additional information. This action will be reported to the committee at its next scheduled meeting.

Items Reviewed:

- IRB Application Requesting Expedited Review
- Current IRB Approved Adult Informed Consent Information Sheet(s) (version date 03/15/16)
- Current IRB Approved Survey(s) (version date 03/15/16)
 - Demographic
 - Retention and RMA

This protocol approval is in effect until the expiration date listed below, unless the IRB notifies you otherwise.

Only the most recent IRB approved Consent/Assent form(s) listed above may be used when enrolling participants into this research.

Approval Date: 03/15/16 Expiration Date: 03/14/17

Number of Subjects Approved: 544

Please read the following attachment detailing Principal Investigator responsibilities.