UNDERSTANDING MIXED RACE AND MULTIETHNIC STUDENTS' SENSE OF

BELONGING IN COLLEGE

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Sense of belonging is a key factor in college student development and learning. For multiracial and multiethnic college students, limited information exists on sense of belonging as an independent construct with full attention to its social, cognitive, and affective elements. As such, it is difficult to clearly depict how these students experience institutional or contextual sense of belonging in college and what factors contribute to it. Further research is warranted to better support the growing multiracial and multiethnic college student population for the reasons that they have unique racial and ethnic needs and experiences that may bear on belongingness. This qualitative research study aimed to understand the factors that enhanced or hindered multiracial and multiethnic undergraduate students' sense of belonging in college and explored how race- and ethnicity-related factors influenced their institutional and contextual belonging in college. A constructivist paradigm using a phenomenological perspective and grounded theory via constant comparative analysis was adopted. Eleven self-identifying multiracial and multiethnic college students attending a large, predominantly white public university participated in the study. Participants represented all class years and a range of majors, with the majority identifying as female (N=9). Strayhorn's (2012) core elements of sense of belonging was the conceptual framework informing this study. Data were collected through single one-on-one in-depth semi-

structured interviews. Results revealed, among the multiple factors identified as influencing sense of belonging, the perpetuation of monoracial norms, fluidity of students' racial and ethnic identity, and experiences of multiracial microaggressions were uniquely reflected factors that impacted mixed race and multiethnic students' institutional and contextual belonging. Two behavioral strategies were used by students to manage their reduced sense of belonging: (a) accommodate to monoracial norms through situational identity and (b) resist conforming to monoracial norms through disengagement and disruption of multiracial microaggressions. Lastly, friendships were critical contexts where students' belongingness was enhanced through validation. These findings are important because they support and expand understandings of how mixed race and multiethnic students' unique racial and ethnic needs and experiences bear on their sense of belonging.

Keywords: mixed race, multiethnic, college students, sense of belonging

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

1.1   BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

At a national level, U.S. racial and ethnic demographic trends are currently shifting, with more individuals representing two or more races (*multiracial* or *mixed race*) and ethnicities (*multiethnic*). Between 2000 and 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau highlighted an increase in the multiracial population from 6.8 million to 9.0 million, respectively, making it one of the fastest growing populations in the U.S. (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011; Jones & Bullock, 2012) due to increasing interracial and interethnic marriages (Lee & Bean, 2004; Moniz, 2003; Root, 1992a; Waters, 2000), mixed race identification patterns, and new immigration numbers (Lee & Bean, 2004; Moniz, 2003). By 2050, the mixed race population is estimated to make up 21% of the total U.S. population, with one in five Americans identifying as multiracial (Farley, 2001; Lee & Bean, 2004; Smith & Edmonston, 1997).

As the mixed race and multiethnic population increases nationally, the number of racially and ethnically mixed students entering U.S. higher education institutions is also forecasted to increase (Jaschik, 2006; Renn, 2009). In the fall semester of 2012, 2.5% (505,092 students) of the total enrolled population were students who identified with "two or more races" (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The growing population of multiracial and multiethnic students significantly influences and is influenced by campus spaces and communities, particularly peer

cultures, identity politics, and engagement in academic spaces (Renn, 2011). Their unique developmental needs and experiences (e.g., intersecting racial and ethnic identity formations, experiences with monoracial bias on campus) vary from their monoracial and monoethnic peers and may impact various outcomes and experiences in college (e.g., persistence, sense of belonging). As such, higher education institutions hold the responsibility to respond to these changing student demographics in order to advance their democratic mission. They must understand these students' developmental and learning experiences to better respond to their needs as they transition to and through college towards successful degree completion, career preparation, and knowledgeable citizenry. The achievement of equitable outcomes for all students through civic learning, democratic engagement, college completion, and career preparation contributes to cultivating social and economic prosperity in the United States (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012).

A key motivation and aspect of a college student's psychosocial development and learning that positively contributes to developmental processes (e.g. identity development) and postsecondary education outcomes (e.g., persistence, engagement) in college is *sense of belonging* (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Maestas, Vaquera, & Muñoz Zehr, 2007; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Strayhorn, 2012). Scholars emphasize that a sense of belonging (the psychological element of integration on campus or, rather, students' subjective feelings of cohesion to an institution) is a critical element of students' academic and social integration on campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007). Sense of belonging is best understood within the research as a multidimensional construct that involves affective, relational, cognitive, and behavioral elements.

Existing research shows various factors (e.g., interactions with diverse peers, campus racial climate, participation in co-curricular activities) enhance or hinder sense of belonging on campus for monoracial and monoethnic students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008; Maestas et al., 2007; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Strayhorn, 2012), which may be insightful when examining belongingness for mixed race and multiethnic students. For specific college student populations that have been historically marginalized on campus, cultivating a sense of belonging has been shown to be an essential component to their success (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Locks et al., 2008; Maestas et al., 2007; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011).

Given the importance of sense of belonging on racially and ethnically diverse college students' growth and learning, understanding mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging in college is critical in supporting this student population in curricular, co-curricular, social, or personal settings within higher education. However, in this context, little information exists on the factors influencing their sense of belonging as well as understanding sense of belonging as an independent construct. Therefore, further research into the factors contributing to sense of belonging and the specific dimensions of belonging, such as affect, cognitive processes, behavioral outcomes, and social and cultural aspects, may better inform practices on campus that are intended to enhance spaces and opportunities promoting belongingness for mixed race and multiethnic students.

1.2   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Sense of belonging is a vital dimension of students' overall development, learning, engagement, and persistence in college and plays an important role in achieving the broader goals of higher education (e.g., graduation, democratic engagement). When racially and ethnically diverse students do not experience a sense of belonging on campus, negative implications arise, particularly for students of color at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Strayhorn, 2012). Dominant cultures on campus shape the campus racial climate, which may be incongruent with the cultural values, identities, skills, and knowledge students of color bring to campuses, resulting in students not feeling accepted, welcomed, comfortable, validated, or important at the institution (Museus et al., 2012a). Most often, when a student's need to belong is not satisfied, their motivations, academic performance, affect, development, and general experiences can be negatively affected (e.g., less academic engagement, less integration into campus, diminished motivation to persist, feeling less valued or accepted, experiencing discrimination) (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Rendón, 1994; Rendon & Muñoz, 2011; Strayhorn, 2012).

Mixed race and multiethnic students are often prone to unique experiences, and barriers in higher education at both macro-levels and micro-levels that may bear on their sense of belonging. For these students, systemic barriers still exist within current postsecondary educational contexts (e.g., structural diversity; historical exclusion; monoraciality; and social, psychological, and behavioral climate) (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1999). This influences their development and learning outcomes and experiences on campus (Chapman-Huls, 2009; Guillermo-Wann, 2013; Johnston & Nadal, 2010; Kellogg & Lidell, 2012; Renn,

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2004). For example, many institutions collecting racial data only reference monoracially-constructed race categories, forcing multiracial students to choose and "view themselves as parts of various or multiple monoracial communities rather than also as constituents of a multiracial collective subjectivity" (Daniel et al., 2014, p. 14). Furthermore, campuses often provide physical or academic spaces that are monoracially- and monoethnically-designed, such as identity centers, ethnic studies, or monoracial and monoethnic student organizations. These structures on campuses are key spaces that influence the campus racial climate as well as students' interactions with diverse peers, two important factors that are known to influence monoracial college students' sense of belonging. The intersectionality of race and ethnicity, among other social identities, is dynamically complex and has potential to influence and be influenced by these important developmental, academic, and social spaces on campuses that may be pivotal in fostering sense of belonging for mixed race and multiethnic students.

At a micro-level, there are negative implications for mixed race and multiethnic students' experiences in these racial and ethnic subcultures (e.g., identity-based organizations or centers, ethnic studies) on campus because of their unique developmental needs and experiences (Literte, 2010; Sands & Schuh, 2004). For instance, research shows that negative affect, such as anxiety, depression, jealousy, guilt, and loneliness, are often stimulated by negative experiences like social exclusion (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). For many mixed race and multiethnic college students, this social exclusion may occur when they are placed in positions that require them to choose or affiliate with only one of their multiple racial and/or ethnic identities, forcing them to reject or exclude salient aspects of how they identify at times (Kellogg & Lidell, 2012; Nishimura, 1998; Renn, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). As a result, students must evaluate cues they receive regarding who belongs, who enacts boundaries

and norms around belongingness in those settings, and how they fit it and are accepted and validated in those contexts.

While sense of belonging has been well documented in postsecondary education scholarship for various student populations (e.g., monoracial students, STEM students, students at different education levels), mixed race and multiethnic students have either been excluded from data reporting due to a small sample size or have been lumped within broader racial group cross comparative analyses (Johnson et al., 2007). What is generally known is that sense of belonging to racial and ethnic groups is integral to their racial and ethnic identity formations (Anhallen, Suyemoto, & Carter, 2006; Bettez, 2010; DaCosta, 2007; Renn, 2004) and is crucial to their overall success and development in college (Hyman, 2010; Renn, 2004). While insightful, these studies only offer a fragmented glimpse into belongingness for racially and ethnically mixed students. It remains unclear how these students develop and experience sense of belonging (to the institution and in different contexts), what factors specifically contribute to it, and what its influence is on important developmental and educational outcomes. This limited attention on understanding how multiracial and multiethnic students experience sense of belonging and what factors influence their belongingness in college creates a gap in knowledge that has implications for institutions striving to achieve racial equity, social justice, and other postsecondary education outcomes on their campuses. Given the anticipated increase in racially and ethnically mixed students entering U.S. postsecondary education institutions (Jaschik, 2006; Renn, 2009), this look into what sense of belonging means to these students and how it is (or is not) fostered for them on campuses can be useful to ensure administrators and educators are engaging in approaches that are culturally relevant, inclusive, and validating of mixed race and multiethnic students' development and experience overall.

1.3   PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand what factors contribute to multiracial and multiethnic college students' sense of belonging and investigated how race- and ethnicity-related factors influenced belongingness in college (institutional and/or contextual). A qualitative approach with a constructivist paradigm and phenomenological perspective was used to achieve the goals of this study. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 self-identifying mixed race and multiethnic students attending Academia University, a large, predominantly white public institution in the eastern U.S. Grounded theory via constant comparative analysis and open and axial coding techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) was the central strategy deployed in this study to analyze interview data as a means to identify themes and patterns relating to key factors contributing to students' sense of belonging and how race- and ethnicity-related factors influenced their belongingness in college. In addition to the interviews, data from a demographic questionnaire outlining information regarding background information (e.g., racial and ethnic background, age, gender) and other relevant information (e.g., education level, academic major, co-curricular involvement) was interpreted as a supplement to the interview data. Strayhorn's (2012) core elements of sense of belonging was the conceptual framework used to inform this study, as it was relevant to the focus of this study and useful in grounding the understanding of sense of belonging.

Depicted was a student-centered understanding of the various influencing factors with an emphasis on how race and ethnicity factors played an integral role in their institutional and contextual belonging at the institution. Findings support and expand understandings of how mixed race and multiethnic students' unique racial and ethnic needs and experiences bear on their sense of belonging. In particular, among the multiple factors identified as influencing sense

of belonging, the perpetuation of monoracial norms, the fluidity of students' racial and ethnic identity, and experiences of multiracial microaggressions were uniquely reflected factors that impacted mixed race and multiethnic students' institutional and contextual belonging. Furthermore, findings also offer a clearer depiction of how students' emotionally and cognitively processed as well as behaviorally managed their reduced sense of belonging as a result of multiracial microaggressions. Lastly, friendships were vital contexts in which students experienced sense of belonging through validation. This study is relevant and responsive to the currently shifting racial and ethnic demographic realities of higher education and offers new insights into mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging.

1.4   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What factors influence mixed race and multiethnic college students' sense of belonging in college?
2. How do race- and ethnicity-related factors influence mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging in college?

1.5   DEFINITION OF TERMS

In this section I describe and define various key terms referenced throughout this paper. Important to note is that these definitions have been described in various ways across the

literature; therefore, the descriptions provided below situates the terminology in the literature to best reflect the goals of this dissertation.

- **Sense of Belonging**: Sense of belonging carries multiple meanings stemming from multidisciplinary research in education, psychology, sociology, and anthropology, among others. Across the vast literature base on sense of belonging, it has been theoretically and empirically described and defined as a complex and multidimensional construct that is developed and experienced across psychological, social, cognitive, cultural, and affective domains and various environmental contexts. Sense of belonging is a basic human need and motivation that drives humans' behaviors (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1954). For the purposes of this study, Strayhorn's (2012) definition for college students' sense of belonging was adopted because of its grounding in a comprehensive review of literature on sense of belonging and relevance to higher education:

  > In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers). Indeed it is a cognitive evaluation that typically leads to an affective response or behavior in students. (p. 17)

  Throughout this paper, sense of belonging is used interchangeably with the terms belongingness and belonging.

- **Institutional Belonging**: Institutional belonging is described as students' sense of belonging to the overall institution. For instance, possessing a strong level of pride in attending the institution contributes to feeling a strong sense of connection to the institution.

- **Contextual Belonging**: Contextual belonging is described as students' sense of belonging within different contexts or situations. Instances of contextual belonging include experiencing a sense of belonging in an academic major/department, within one's social circles, when involved in a co-curricular activity or specific student organization, in their residence hall, among others.

- **Belonging Uncertainty**: Belonging uncertainty is defined as the doubt or uncertainty one feels about their sense of belonging (e.g., unsure if one is or will be accepted, doubtful about how one's personal characteristics fit with the environment they are functioning in or looking to be a part of) (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

- **Race**: Recent research has found that race is a complex construct and there are multiple dimensions of race (e.g., racial identity, racial category, racial ancestry, racial ascription, extra-racial), that are important to consider when defining and examining race in research (Johnston, Ozaki, Pizzolato, & Chaudhari, 2014). Race is widely described to be socially, culturally, and politically constructed. According to racial formation theory by Omi and Winant (1994), race is defined as "a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies...race is a matter of

both social structure and cultural representation" (p. 55-56). In their description of race, Omi and Winant explained, "the concept of race continues to play a fundamental role in structuring and representing the social world" (p.56). It is important for research to critically analyze, deconstruct, and problematize the social construction of race in ways that do not inadvertently reify it by essentializing it (Renn, 2004). Reifying race refers to the process of race as an abstract construct becoming concrete. While, race is a socially-constructed reality in the U.S., essentializing race would be problematic as it requires attributing essential characteristics that definitively define a racial group and does not account for various fluid individual characteristics and differences within races. Thus, similarly to Renn (2004), in this study, I did not capitalize racial categories such as black or white unless a term is linked to a continent, general geographic region, or nation (e.g., Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander). Renn (2000) states the reason for this application is "to create parity between mono– and multiracial descriptors…because there is no general agreement in the multiracial literature about terminology or conventions of capitalizing racial designators, my choices are designed to minimize the notion of racial categories as immutable entities" (p. 399).

Race is a fluid concept susceptible to change across contexts and time given historical, political, and social pressures and racial categories are not static which challenges essentialized notions of race. Changes on the U.S. Census forms since the late 18th century and into the 21st century are a clear example of how race is socially and politically constructed and how racial classifications can shift based on sociopolitical circumstances and community activism. For instance, the separation of Asian and native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander categories or the addition of "mark one or more boxes" on the 2000 U.S. census were more recent adjustments resulting from community activism. While there are U.S. federally designated races (e.g., black or African American, white, Asian, native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaska Native), emerging national trends in U.S. Census data depict that other communities (e.g., Arab and Latino/a) have been stigmatized on the basis of racial signifiers that have not yet been federally recognized. These communities along with U.S. federally designated races were included in the present study.

- **Interracial**: Interracial is a term that describes relations between two or more individuals who reference, affiliate, or identify with different monoracially-constructed groups.

- **Monoracial**: Monoracial refers to referencing, affiliating, or identifying with a single monoracially-constructed group. The terms monoracially-identifying and monoracially-constructed are often used to circumvent racial reification or racial essentialism of distinct racial categories (Renn, 2004).

- **Multiracial or Mixed Race**: Multiracial refers to referencing, affiliating, or identifying with two or more monoracially-constructed groups. While the majority of multiracial scholarship typically references U.S. federally designated monoracially-constructed categories in their studies as a way to classify their participants' race(s), the present study additionally acknowledged including communities that have been stigmatized based on racial signifiers that have not been federally recognized. Presently, Latino/as are categorized as an ethnicity with Hispanic origin and Arabs fall under the white racial

category according to federal designations. These institutionalized structures of race are being challenged in the present day and may shift come the next U.S. Census given communities advocating for their own representation and changing sociopolitical circumstances (i.e., policies affecting citizenship status for some racial and ethnic populations) (Krogstad & Cohn, 2014).

- **Biracial**: Biracial refers to referencing, affiliating, or identifying with two monoracially-constructed groups.

- **Racial Identity**: According to Johnston et al. (2014) racial identity refers to "having an understanding of her/his racialized self" (p. 60). Along these lines, Wallace (2001) described racial identity as the "dimension of a person's overall self-concept that is grounded in his or her experiences as a member of a broad racial group" (p. 34). In this study, racial identity was operationalized using these definitions. which included students having an understanding of their racialized self in the context of their experiences as members of a single or multiple monoracially-constructed racial group(s).

- **Monoracism**: Monoracism is a type of racism that is described by Johnston and Nadal (2010) as "a social system of psychological inequality where individuals who do not fit monoracial categories may be oppressed on systemic and interpersonal levels because of underlying assumptions and beliefs in singular, discrete racial categories" (p. 125). Monoracism is enacted in society in various forms and at different individual, organizational, and institutional levels through monoracial privilege or multiracial macro- and microaggressions, which are defined as negatively poised, unintended or intended, subtle messages (non-verbal or verbal) based on one's multiraciality (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). These terms were used as a framework in this study as means to better understand unique race-related experiences associated with intersecting racial and ethnic identities.

- **Monoraciality**: Monoraciality is a sociohistorical paradigm that is driven by a single race mentality. Monoraciality is described as "the lynchpin not only of US constructions of whiteness and its associated privileges, but also unearned social advantages, including cultural, social, economic, political, and other resources, which accrue to European Americans as well as traditional groups of color ("monoracial privilege")" (Daniel et al., 2014, p. 13). Monoraciality was an important concept in this study as it provided a broader context and framework for understanding how monoracial phenomena impact mixed race people and their identities and experiences.

- **Multiraciality**: Multiraciality is an overarching, comprehensive descriptor for phenomena (e.g., people, identity, groups, research or practice) related to the topics of mixed race. In this study, multiraciality was used to describe multiracial-related research, practice, identities, groups, etc. within the context of college.

- **Ethnicity**: Ethnicity is a dynamic construct that refers to socially constructed groups of people based on various commonalities. Moya and Markus (2010) stated that ethnicity
  > allows people to identify, or be identified, with groupings of people on the basis of presumed, and usually claimed, commonalities, including several of the

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following: language, history, nation or region of origin, customs, religion, names, physical appearance and/or ancestry group; when claimed, confers a sense of belonging, pride and motivation. (p. 22)

According to Spickard and Burroughs (2000) three factors contribute to ethnic group formation: shared interests, shared institutions, and shared culture. While ethnicity is a distinct concept from race, race and racism is a significant factor in many ethnic group formations and interethnic relations in the U.S. (Omi & Winant, 2014; Pierce, 2000) Historically ethnic groups have been racialized due to dominant racial norms in the U.S. (Pierce, 2000). As such, ethnicity cannot be fully understood without the context of race and racism in the U.S.

- **Ethnic Identity**: Ethnic identity refers to a subjectively designated ethnic label that individuals use to describe their ethnic affiliations and is rooted in one's cultural experiences. Associating with specific ethnic groups entails complex cognitive and affective processing (i.e., self-concept of knowledge, emotions, and attitudes towards the ethnic group[s]). Uba (1994) described an ethnic identity as

  a schema that (a) engenders general knowledge, beliefs, and expectations that a person has about his or her ethnic group; (b) functions as a cognitive, information processing framework or filter within which a person perceives and interprets objects, situations, events, and other people; and (c) serves as a basis for a person's behavior. (as cited in Ibrahim, Ohnishi, & Sandhu, 1997, p. 36)

- **Multiethnic**: Multiethnic refers to referencing, affiliating, or identifying with two or more monoethnic groups. Associated with this term, multiethnicity refers to an overarching, comprehensive descriptor for phenomena (e.g., people, identity, groups, research or practice) related to the multiethnic topics.

- **Mixed Heritage**: Mixed heritage refers to referencing, affiliating, or identifying with two or more monoracial or monoethnic groups. An example of someone identifying with mixed heritage is an individual who identifies with being monoracially Asian but also has multiethnic ancestry comprising of Japanese and Malaysian ethnicities. Another example is an individual who is transracially adopted.

- **Campus Racial Climate**: The campus racial climate is defined as "the overall racial environment" at a postsecondary institution (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 62). The campus racial climate primarily pertains to how individuals feel regarding existing attitudes, perceptions, and institutional values and expectations (e.g., racial prejudice, welcoming or accepting environment, racial discrimination or bias, cross-racial interactions) shaping the campus environment in relation to race (Bauer, 1998; Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

- **Validation**: According to Rendón (1994), validation is defined as "intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class agents (i.e., faculty, student, and academic affairs staff, family members, peers) in order to: (1) validate students as creators of knowledge and as valuable members of the college learning community and (2) foster personal development and social adjustment" (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011, p. 12). Types of

validation include academic, interpersonal, and cultural (Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011).

2.0   REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review sets the context for the study by covering the following areas of interest: (a) conceptual framework, (b) conceptual understanding of sense of belonging, (c) monoracial and monoethnic students' sense of belonging in college, (d) multiracial and multiethnic students' sense of belonging in college, (e) multiracial and multiethnic students' identities and experiences in college, and (f) race and ethnicity.

2.1   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Strayhorn's (2012) definition and core elements of sense of belonging in college was the conceptual framework used to inform this study. This framework was integral, as it is grounded in a comprehensive understanding of existing sense of belonging literature in higher education relevant to various college student populations. The seven core elements conceptualize sense of belonging to be: a fundamental human need; a motive for actions or behaviors; salient within certain contexts, at certain moments, and with certain populations; associated with and a result of mattering; affected by social identities (and intersecting social identities); contributing to positive outcomes; and, enhanced regularly and shifts with different conditions, contexts, and situations. These core elements offer a multifaceted understanding of how sense of belonging is experienced by college students. While the present study embraced a grounded theory

methodology, the study was considerate of this conceptual framework to better assist in understanding the multidimensional complexities of sense of belonging.

2.2   CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF SENSE OF BELONGING

Research shows sense of belonging to be a critical motivation and aspect of students' psychosocial development and learning in college. Sense of belonging has been theoretically and empirically described and defined as a complex, multidimensional construct that involves affective, relational, cognitive, and behavioral elements, including feelings of being accepted and valued, reciprocal relationships, group membership, shared beliefs or attitudes, perceived social support, belief one matters or is cared about, and cognitive evaluation. This construct has been linked to many developmental processes (e.g. identity development) and postsecondary education outcomes (e.g., retention, intent to persist, student involvement, student engagement). This highlights the benefits of investing in practices and research that promote belongingness on campus for all students (Strayhorn, 2012).

Over decades of research, belongingness has been examined from a multitude of perspectives across different academic disciplines (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hurtado & Carter, 1997, Johnson et al., 2007; Osterman, 2000; Strayhorn, 2012). From a sociological perspective, the experience of belonging has often examined within the context of social structures, such as organizations, communities, or social groups. Behaviors and social relations are important in understanding belonging not only for the individual but also for the group or entity engaged in the relational processes. Explorations from a psychological angle often observe the experiences of belonging through a combination of cognitive capacities (e.g., perceptions of

how others are viewed, how they experience cognitive dissonance) and affective elements (e.g., mattering or feeling valued, accepted, or needed). Social psychologists analyze belongingness often from various dimensions, including interpersonal communications, performance related to group tasks, or intragroup characteristics. In the discipline of anthropology, some have examined group formation and in- and out-group biases within different cultures to understand belongingness, which align and intersect with a sociological perspective. These multidisciplinary conceptualizations of belonging support an understanding that the concept of belonging is multidimensional.

In postsecondary education, sense of belonging is theoretically conceptualized to involve notions of social forces, psychological variables, cognitive capacities, affective elements, and behavioral responses. Early work on college students' sense of belonging has been couched in terms of understanding academic and social integration or membership on campus and their relation to college retention, persistence, and involvement (e.g., Astin, 1984, 1999; Tinto, 1975, 1993). In more recent years, scholars have expanded their understandings of belongingness to be more intentionally inclusive of psychological elements, such as affect and cognitive processes. For example, Tovar and Simon (2010) depicted that "sense of belonging has been defined as an individual's sense of identification or positioning in relation to group or to the college community, which may yield an affective response" (p. 200). According to Hagerty and Patusky (1995), sense of belonging is comprised of two attributes: (1) valued involvement, which is described as feelings of acceptance, value, or being needed; and (2) fit, a view that personal characteristics sync with the environment or system they are immersed in or seeking to be a part of. Scholars such as Bollen and Hoyle (1990) and Rosenberg & McCullough (1981) also highlighted sense of belonging as being comprised of cognitive and affective components that

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essentially drive behavior. Given this interest in the construct, Bollen and Hoyle's work on *perceived cohesion*, which stemmed from a social psychological standpoint, is noteworthy. The authors described perceived cohesion as an individual's perception of their own cohesion to a group. This is comprised of two dimensions: sense of belonging and feelings of morale. Perceived cohesion has been referenced in a few postsecondary education studies on belonging (i.e., Hurtado and Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007), which have been insightful in explaining the experiences of belonging for some historically marginalized populations on campus, such as racial and ethnic minorities in college. For instance, in their study on understanding Latino/a students' belonging and perceptions of racial climate on campus, Hurtado and Carter (1997) built on the importance of Bollen and Hoyle's construct of perceived cohesion within a higher education setting. The authors emphasized that sense of belonging is the psychological element of integration on campus or students' subjective feelings of cohesion to their institutions. They state that sense of belonging is a critical element in studying students' academic and social integration on campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Strayhorn's (2012) comprehensive description of sense of belonging is also an important operational definition to highlight:

> In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers). Indeed it is a cognitive evaluation that typically leads to an affective response or behavior in students. (p. 17)

Strayhorn argues that sense of belonging may be experienced differently based on different contexts, which can influence educational and developmental outcomes (e.g., excelling academically, motivation, intention to persist).

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Strayhorn (2012) shed light on the complexities of sense of belonging for college students by outlining a list of seven core elements that are used as a guiding reference for this study:

> (1) sense of belonging is a basic human need; (2) sense of belonging is a fundamental motive sufficient to drive human behavior; (3) sense of belonging takes on heightened importance (a) in certain contexts, (b) at certain times, and (c) among certain populations; (4) sense of belonging is related to, and seemingly a consequence, of mattering; (5) social identities intersect and affect college students' sense of belonging; (6) sense of belonging engenders other positive outcomes; and (7) sense of belonging must be satisfied on a continual basis and likely changes as circumstances, conditions, and contexts change. (pp. 18-23)

The set of core elements compiled by Strayhorn was based on an existing body of comprehensive research on sense of belonging. It lends a useful framework for understanding what is known about this construct from a multifaceted perspective (e.g., contextual considerations, interpersonal influences, intrapersonal dimensions such as affect, cognitive elements, and identity). As such, Strayhorn's definition of sense of belonging and core elements were adopted as a conceptual framework for the present study.

Most who conduct research on belonging would agree that it is a basic fundamental need for all humans, a motive that drives beliefs and behaviors (Maslow, 1954; Strayhorn, 2012; Weiner, 1990). In education and psychology, a widely referenced model is Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. In this model, belonging is one of five fundamental needs that drive human motivation and behaviors. These five needs include physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and needs for self-actualization. According to Maslow, all individuals possess these same five basic needs, yet how those needs are satisfied can vary by individuals across contexts and experiences. For college students, postsecondary education literature on student development, involvement, and retention supports the understanding that

satisfying this need to belong can occur across different domains (e.g., curricular or co-curricular) (Strayhorn, 2012).

As students are constantly immersing and transitioning between multiple contexts throughout their time in college, the need to belong is often a salient aspect of their experiences across these different domains. According to Schlossberg (1989), experiences of marginality (whether through transitions, change in roles, or navigation of multiple identities) may elicit certain emotions and interpersonal behaviors that would influence one's feelings of mattering and, consequently, sense of belonging. If people feel that they matter, are valued, accepted, or needed and believe they are cared for, the experience of belonging becomes optimal and results in healthy behaviors (e.g., involvement on campus, increased motivation) and positive well being. When students experience support, validation, and guidance within curricular and co-curricular realms, sense of belonging is more likely to be fostered. This, ultimately, contributes to students' likelihood to excel in those various learning environments (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Osterman, 2000).

Many studies have pointed out that aspects of human behavior, motivations, cognitive processes, and emotions can be explained by the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In terms of affect, positive emotions are often associated with forming social attachments with others, subsequently linking to higher levels of belonging. For instance, in the realm of postsecondary education, when students feel accepted, validated, and cared for by in- and out-of-class agents through social attachments (e.g., friendships, faculty) and feel a sense of relatedness towards the academic and co-curricular activities they are involved in, students feel that they belong (Hoffman et al., 2003-2003; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011; Renn, 2004; Strayhorn, 2012). On the other hand, negative affect, such

as anxiety, depression, jealousy, guilt, and loneliness, are often stimulated by negative experiences of belongingness, like social exclusion (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In these situations, an individual may feel low levels of sense of belonging, no sense of belonging, or belonging uncertainty. Belonging uncertainty pertains to an individual feeling a sense of doubt or uncertainty about their belongingness (Walton & Cohen, 2007). This may include a person thinking about how accepted they are or will be by others or feeling doubtful of how they fit in a certain environment they are looking to be a part of or are functioning in (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

As part of satisfying one's need to belong, cognitive processing occurs simultaneously when students engage in interpersonal interactions and experience affective responses associated with those interactions (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). These interpersonal experiences influence cognition, particularly in the way people think and categorize those interpersonal experiences. When college students in general are placed in circumstances, conditions, or contexts that require them to cognitively question and process their own perceptions of how they fit in, if they matter, who they are, etc., then the need to belong is consequently affected.

Due to their multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds, a salient aspect of multiracial and multiethnic students' college experiences is the process of navigating group boundaries across different microsystems (e.g., peer cultures, such as monoracial student organizations, classrooms, friends/social circles). Within these microsystems, racial identity is questioned and negotiated which may prompt them to consider how they belong in those spaces (Renn, 2004). Deconstructing these group boundaries (i.e., criteria for inclusion or exclusion) requires cognitive flexibility and may often elicit emotional responses from an individual. The extent to

which an individual develops a level of belongingness to another person or group may impact the way that person feels and processes information about the other person or group.

Information regarding in-group members (those one has the strongest connections to) tends to be cognitively stored in a complex manner, reflecting "the individual person as a cognitive unit of analysis." (Pryor and Ostrom (1981) as cited in Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 503). Information pertaining to out-group members tend to be cognitively organized based on attributes (i.e., preferences or traits). Baumeister and Leary (1995) stated, "social bonds create a pattern in cognitive processing that gives priority to organizing information on the basis of the person with whom one has some sort of connection" (p. 503). Therefore, people tend to classify out-group members simplistically and dichotomously while in-group members are categorized more complexly.

Cognitive patterns created by in-groups and group membership impact individual and group behaviors and performance (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Certain expectations or duties within groups can bias information processing and memory functioning for in-group and out-group members. In-group members who tend to have a higher sense of belonging generally engage in favorable actions that may serve in the best interest of the group (also known as group-serving) (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Interactions with others in a group can lead to forming social attachments and fulfilling the need for relatedness, thereby influencing the various ways in which someone cognitively and affectively processes belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Evident in this body of research is the important interactions between cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements in people's experiences of belongingness.

Tied to these complex understandings of how sense of belonging is experienced, are the ways scholars have researched the construct. Historically, empirical studies centered on

developing measures for sense of belonging have not been conducted systematically nor have they been consistent methodologically (Goodenow, 1993; Strayhorn, 2012; Tovar & Simon, 2010). The term itself has been operationally defined in numerous ways, which impacts how empirical research decisions are made and how the research is employed.

Despite these methodological concerns, useful measures have been developed more recently to study and measure sense of belonging within higher education contexts. Although there are several quantitative measures, two measures that have been influential to better understand sense of belonging as a construct important to human motivation, development, and learning: Hoffman et al.'s (2002-2003) Sense of Belonging Scale (SOBS) and Bollen & Hoyle's (1990) empirical investigation of the Perceived Cohesion Scale (PCS). While sense of belonging is one of two dimensions of perceived cohesion, it is an important subscale of the PCS that many scholars in higher education have used to understand sense of belonging. While many of the existing studies on sense of belonging in college with monoracial and monoethnic students have been conducted using these quantitative measures (e.g., SOBS, PCS), other studies have used a mixed methods or a qualitative approach. Some of these are highlighted in more detail in the next section.

2.3   MONORACIAL AND MONOETHNIC STUDENTS' SENSE OF BELONGING IN COLLEGE

Research within higher education indicates that a multitude of factors influence students' sense of belonging in college. These factors include interactions with others, such as faculty and peers (Hoffman et al., 2002-2003; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Velasquez, 1999), involvement in co-

curricular activities (Maestas et al., 2007), residing on-campus (Berger, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Maestas et al., 2007), cultural factors (Museus & Maramba, 2011), and perceptions of the racial climate and diversity experiences on campus (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Chavous, 2005; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Locks et al., 2008; Maestas et al., 2007). In addition, inherent in many of these studies, social identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, faith, etc.) and intersections of these social identities play a key role in sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012).

Whether studies in higher education have focused on a single monoracial group (i.e., Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Strayhorn, 2008, 2012) or a racially diverse sample (i.e., Johnson et al., 2007; Locks et al., 2008; Maestas et al., 2007), findings consistently show that certain social, academic, and environmental factors are critical for satisfying the need to belong. Higher levels of sense of belonging tend to be experienced when students were engaged in academic and co-curricular activities or organizations, lived on or near campus, experienced less hostile campus racial climates, and positively interacted with faculty and diverse peers. Furthermore, research also indicates cultural factors (e.g., cultural validation, connection to cultural heritage; Museus & Maramba, 2011) and racialized contexts (e.g., campus racial climate; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Locks et al., 2008) in college are integral to monoracial and monoethnic minority students' sense of belonging and other learning and development outcomes in college.

Studies show that many of these students are closely tied to communities prior to coming to college, and maintaining ties with these communities can facilitate college adjustment and success (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Museus, 2014; Museus & Maramba, 2011). When students experience "tension that results from

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incongruence between their cultural meaning-making system and new cultural information that they encounter in their environment" (Museus, 2014, p. 191), i.e. *cultural dissonance*, various developmental and educational outcomes can be negatively impacted (e.g., difficulties in their adjustment to college, decreased motivation, lack of involvement in activities, and lower sense of belonging) (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Museus & Quaye, 2009).

Experiencing cultural dissonance is a common reality for many students of color at PWIs as they often have to navigate dominant cultures and values on campus that may be dissimilar to their own cultural experiences, beliefs, identities, and values. Many students who have been historically marginalized may not necessarily have access pre-college to linguistic, educational, or cultural competencies (i.e., cultural and academic capital) that would have set them up for success in college. Tierney (1999) contends that many of these students are often not well positioned for success if they are expected to undergo *cultural suicide* by cutting off their prior cultures and communities to successfully integrate into the dominant mainstream campus culture. This notion of cultural suicide emerged in the earliest models of college student success in higher education (e.g., Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theory of college student success. However, emergent scholarship over the past couple of decades, such as Tierney and others, have challenged this expectation of students' assimilation or integration into existing dominant cultures on campus and stressed the need for institutions to take initiative to cultivate more culturally relevant, responsive, and engaging climates and cultures on campuses that value and validate diverse students' identities and experiences, to expand in their philosophies, policies, and practices to better support their students' success and development (Museus, 2014; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado et al., 2012).

Tierney (1999) argued that in supporting historically marginalized students' membership and engagement on campus, the notion of *cultural integrity* is important to consider, not cultural suicide. Cultural integrity refers to educational "strategies that engage students' racial/ethnic backgrounds in a positive manner toward the development of more relevant pedagogies and learning activities" (Tierney, 1999, p. 84). Cultural integrity is an essential approach that affirms racial and ethnic minorities' cultures on campus, which has been linked to an increased likelihood of degree attainment (Tierney, 1992). Museus's (2014) culturally engaging campus environments model also postulated that creating meaningful, relevant, and responsive spaces and climates on campus that validate these students' cultural affiliations contributes to fostering equity, inclusivity, and support for these students.

As part of the institutional environment, the campus racial climate and subcultures play a fundamental role in shaping racially and ethnically diverse students' college experiences and outcomes (González, 2002; Guffrida, 2003; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Museus, Lâm, Huang, Kem, & Tan, 2012a; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Engaging in racial and ethnic subcultures often provides an environment for students of color to connect with others who validate their cultural identities and experiences. It also cultivates their connections to the institution throughout their time in college (Museus et al., 2012a).

Research has further demonstrated that aspects of the campus racial climate negatively influence students' sense of belonging and other outcomes, aspects including white privilege (e.g., diversity convenience that sanctions support for diversity only if it serves white students); lack of institutional commitment to diversity; presence of racial tension, bias, or discrimination; exclusion of students, faculty, or administrators of color; lack of culturally relevant and engaging practices and programs; and lack of curricula or physical representations reflecting experiences

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of people of color, among others (González, 2002; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992, 1994; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). González (2002) deemed the scarcity of culturally relevant and engaging practices, policies, and structures leads to "cultural starvation" for Chicano/a students and other marginalized students of color, which can lead to cultural isolation. Often times, in response to a negatively perceived campus racial climate and experiences of racial marginalization or discrimination (e.g., overt racism, racial microaggressions), students (and educators) create what are known as academic and social *counter-spaces* (e.g., student organization, study group, informal peer group) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), which can be transformed into and considered subcultures on campus. Counter-spaces are safe spaces (i.e., emotionally, physically, socially comforting, trusting, secure, and supportive) where students and educators who are marginalized actively come together to exchange support and validation of one another's identities, experiences, and mutual interests (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Normalizing and validating diverse students' expectations, attitudes, values, and feelings as they transition to campus and throughout their time on campus is necessary to fulfill the need to belong (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus, 2014; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). As defined by Rendón (1994), validation is the "intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class agents (i.e., faculty, student, and academic affairs staff, family members, peers) in order to: (1) validate students as creators of knowledge and as valuable members of the college learning community and (2) foster personal development and social adjustment" (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011, p. 12). According to validation theory (Rendón, 1994), validation occurs in and out of classroom contexts and promotes the development of students' capacity to learn, their confidence, their

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self-worth, and their self-efficacy, among other key qualities that foster positive experiences and outcomes.

Academic, interpersonal, and cultural validation are important types of validation that many research studies have shown to be positively linked to learning and development outcomes (e.g., retention, sense of belonging) for diverse undergraduate students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008; Rendón, 1994). Academic validation by external agents (e.g., professors, peers, advisors, family) fosters students' self-efficacy by boosting their confidence as autonomous learners (e.g., faculty offering encouraging and motivating advice on pursuing a certain major, a peer taking extra time to study with a student). Interpersonal validation pertains to external agents supporting the cultivation of healthy, positive social adjustment, as well as the personal development of students (e.g., faculty refer to students by their names, peers supporting one another through study groups). Cultural validation involves affirming, valuing, and engaging students' cultural identities, experiences, and values (e.g., advisor actively listening and empathizing with a low-income, first-generation student of color at a PWI, faculty offering ethnic studies courses reflective of students' cultures, student affairs educators encouraging cross-racial interactions and dialogues about marginalized experiences among students).

Studies with diverse, marginalized student populations have illustrated that academic, interpersonal, and cultural validation is critical to their learning, development, and success in college (Martinez Aleman, 2000; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2008; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). More specifically, the validation of these students' own expectations, attitudes, values, and feelings that they bring to campus is associated with higher levels of belongingness and success in college (Dee & Daly, 2012; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Museus & Quaye, 2009;

Rendón, 1994; Rendon & Muñoz, 2011; Strayhorn, 2008, 2012). Furthermore, a small body of research has recently examined the critical relationships between campus climate, validation, and sense of belonging (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013; Museus, 2014), offering insight for enhancing diverse learning environments for students of color. According to Hurtado and Guillermo-Wann (2013), validation was an essential mediator between campus climate and sense of belonging in college, sense of belonging and validation being positively related. Moreover, Museus's (2014) culturally engaging campus environment model supports this notion by suggesting validation, campus climate, and subcultures on campus as key influencers on sense of belonging and other educational outcomes. Incorporating the concept of validation into campus philosophies, structures, and practices could improve circumstances for students who experience cultural dissonance and isolation (Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus, 2014; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011; Strayhorn, 2012). While this is a new area of research, there are other existing studies that have offered insightful data on the factors influencing monoracial and monoethnic students' sense of belonging, as well as information on key educational and developmental outcomes associated with sense of belonging.

In their quantitative study with 143 Filipino American students at one institution, Museus and Maramba (2011) empirically showed the association between cultural factors and sense of belonging. Surveys were distributed with questions measured on a four-point Likert-type scale pertaining to demographic information, students' perceptions of the campus climate, sense of belonging, ethnic identity, and cultural congruence. The variables that were examined in the study were pressure to commit cultural suicide and connections to cultural heritage. In addition to these two variables, a key mediating variable was introduced into the model: ease of students' cultural adjustment. As did similar studies (i.e., Hurtado and Carter, 1997, Hurtado and Ponjuan,

2005, and Maestas et al., 2007), the authors included questions from Bollen and Hoyle's (1990) subscale of sense of belonging to measure their outcome variable, sense of belonging. These included the extent to which students "(a) felt 'part of' the campus community, (b) felt that they were 'a member of' the campus community, and (c) felt a sense of belonging to the campus community" (Museus and Maramba, 2011, p. 242).

According to their findings from the structural equation model, a higher sense of belonging was correlated with a greater ease of adjustment to campus cultures. Ease of cultural adjustment on campus was found to have a strong, negative association with pressure to commit cultural suicide, i.e., when students held increased levels of perceived pressure to commit cultural suicide, their adjustment to the cultures on campus were more challenging. Furthermore, ease of cultural adjustment was positively associated with connections to cultural heritage; thus, students experienced an easier adjustment to campus cultures when they sustained connections with their cultures of origin.

A sub-group of studies focused on understanding the experiences of Latino/a students' sense of belonging on campus also support these findings (i.e., Hurtado & Carter, 1997, Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005, and Strayhorn, 2008, 2012). Results from a quantitative, longitudinal cohort study conducted by Hurtado and Carter (1997) show how experiences in the first two years of school influenced Latino/a students' sense of belonging by their third year in school. The authors examined the college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate in relation to Latino/a students' belongingness among a sample of 272 Latino/a college students attending 127 colleges and universities. Survey data from four federal and institutional data sources were collected in four waves of data collection across three years and analyzed using structural equation modeling. In the second year of school, the authors found that these students'

perceptions of the campus racial climate were more hostile when their transition to college was difficult. For Latino/a students, the authors stated that familial ties, ease of separation, managing resources, and cognitive mapping/know how were key aspects of the transition to college. Results additionally revealed that lower levels of sense of belonging were linked to hostile perceptions of racial climate on campus in their third year of school. Also associated with sense of belonging was engagement in academic discussions around their courses and membership and participation within specific organizations while in school (e.g., religious, social, or communal).

Membership on campus can facilitate co-curricular and curricular involvement in college and interactions with others on campus, which can in turn impact various desirable outcomes, such as persistence, civic-mindedness, identity development, and sense of belonging. Astin (1999) defined student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). An abundance of research supports that being involved produces optimal behaviors and outcomes in college (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Astin stated, "a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students" (p. 518). Investing physical and psychosocial energy into activities of interest and interacting with other people creates a mental, emotional, social, and physical connection to those activities and people, which may instill a sense of belonging.

As membership and involvement within organizations or activities on campus is a key factor that fosters sense of belonging, it is important to consider the relevance of valuing and validating activities and norms that differ from dominant mainstream norms. For historically marginalized students who often find themselves in contexts on campus where they are expected

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to function within and adopt the dominant values and cultural mainstream norms of the institution, academic and social integration can be challenging (Hurtado and Carter, 1997). Thus, ease of adjusting to and through college relies on connections to pre-college communities and spaces on campuses that validate their cultural values and norms (Hurtado and Carter, 1997; Locks et al., 2008; Museus and Maramba, 2011).

Paralleling Hurtado and Carter's (1997) results, studies by Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) and Strayhorn (2008, 2012) confirmed these findings among Latino/a college students. Hurtado and Ponjuan's longitudinal study of two years found that numerous factors contribute to sense of belonging in college in their sample of 370 Latino/a college students. Multiple regression analyses indicated higher levels of belonging were linked to perceptions of a less hostile (or positive) racial climate on campus, living on campus or with their parents, interacting with diverse peers, having taken diversity-focused courses, and being involved in academic support programs. Two studies conducted by Strayhorn showed similar findings. In one of the studies, Strayhorn (2008) analyzed data from a quantitative secondary data set from the 2004-2005 *College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ)* with a total sample of 589 Latino (n=289) and white (n=300) college students attending four-year institutions. According to the results from nested hierarchical linear regressions, the overall model was significant with academic grades, time students spent studying, and interacting with diverse peers, all positive predictors of Latino/a students' sense of belonging. A second qualitative study conducted by Strayhorn (2012) with 31 Latino/a undergraduate students validated findings from the first study by Strayhorn (2008), showing Latino/a students' interactions with diverse peers as an important factor in their sense of belonging, which is lower than that of their white peers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and themes were identified through the use of constant comparative analysis

(Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Because many of the Latino/a students in the study were also working while attending school, were the first in their family to attend school, and came from low-income backgrounds, they experienced academic, social, and financial challenges at times that limited their involvement and engagement on campus. These factors influenced their lower levels of sense of belonging. As a result, these students were likely to develop skills that helped them navigate norms within college environments, some of which may differ from what they were accustomed to in their cultures of origin and pre-college life.

Centered on understanding experiences of belonging among racially diverse students, Maestas et al. (2007) found comparable social, academic, and environmental factors that influenced sense of belonging. The authors conducted a two-year longitudinal study with 421 students that stemmed from a larger study called The Diversity Democracy Project, which included ten public universities. Since the interest of the study was to examine students' experiences of belonging at a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI), the authors gathered data from only one of the ten institutions. The sample comprised of 58% white students, 33% Hispanic students, and 9% other racial minority students (i.e., African Americans, Asian and Pacific Islander, and American Indian). Nested hierarchical regression models showed that the following factors were significantly correlated with sense of belonging: paying for financial expenses related to college, involvement in academic support programs, interest in the students' development by faculty, involvement with a sorority or fraternity, engagement in campus leadership, living within campus housing, social interactions with individuals from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, demonstrating support towards affirmative action, and exhibiting positive behaviors associated with diversity (Maestas et al., 2007). While their research had sample limitations in that their numbers for African American, Asian and Pacific Islander, and

American Indian students were low, the results still implied the significance of various factors across multiple contexts on racially diverse students' sense of belonging.

Similarly, another study by Locks et al. (2008) examined sense of belonging in the second year of college in relation to diversity-related experiences among 2,346 white students and students of color (69% white, 17% Asian American and Pacific Islander, 8% Hispanic/Latino/Chicano, 4% African American or black, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native). Using structural equation modeling, the authors found various direct relationships and indirect relationships that highlighted key factors that contribute to fostering sense of belonging. Higher sense of belonging in the second year was directly associated with frequent positive interactions with diverse peers in college, perceptions of lower levels of racial tension on campus, more time spent socializing, and not living with parents in their first year of school. The authors also found positive interactions with diverse peers to mediate the positive association between hours spent socializing and sense of belonging. Furthermore, interactions with diverse peers prior to college affected students' interactions with diverse peers in college and, thus, their sense of belonging. This study highlighted sense of belonging to be a key element to students successfully transitioning to college and showed interactions with diverse peers and campus environments to be important influences on students of color and white students' sense of belonging.

Collectively these studies highlight the significance of certain factors that influence monoracial and monoethnic students' sense of belonging in college. Interactions with diverse peers, membership within clubs and organizations while in school, residential status (i.e., living on campus), campus racial climate, ease of adjustment to and through college, social identities, and involvement in academic support services (i.e., faculty interactions) have been consistently

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identified as key contributors to sense of belonging in college for monoracial students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Locks et al., 2008; Maestas et al., 2007; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Strayhorn, 2008, 2012). In addition to identifying the factors that influence sense of belonging, a few emerging scholars have also begun to examine the influence of sense of belonging on postsecondary outcomes, including intent to persist, achievement, personal and social well being, meaningful relationships, and academic and co-curricular engagement (Anhallen et al., 2006; Hausmann et al., 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). One common area of interest for scholars is the connection between sense of belonging and student persistence. While studies have found aspects of academic and social integration to influence outcomes such as persistence (Nora & Cabrera, 1993; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004), there is limited research assessing sense of belonging (the psychological aspect of academic and social integration) as an independent predictor of student persistence and retention (Hausmann et al., 2007).

In a longitudinal experimental study by Hausmann et al. (2007), growth curve modeling was used to examine sense of belonging as a predictor of intent to persist in a sample of 365 African American and white full-time, first-year, non-transfer students attending a large, public PWI. The survey measured various areas of interest, including social integration, peer support, academic integration, parental support, sense of belonging, financial challenges, commitment to institution, and intentions to persist. Students were randomly assigned across three groups, one being a group where sense of belonging was enhanced and the other two being control groups. The group with enhanced sense of belonging were given gifts and materials with the institution's logo and sent letters from the institution's administrators to enhance their connection to the institution. In one of the control groups, students received gifts from their psychology professor

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that did not possess institution colors or logos. The other control group did not receive anything. The growth curve model allowed the authors to group the data over time for the same group of individuals in order to examine a change over time for the variables as well as identify the factors that influence this change.

Results from their study indicated that over the academic year students' sense of belonging and intent to persist declined. However, the authors found this decline to be extremely small with students still demonstrating a strong desire to persist by the end of the school year. For those in the enhanced sense of belonging group, their sense of belonging declined over time at a slower pace than those who were in the two control groups. The two control group students' sense of belonging declined at the same rate as each other. The findings indicated that higher levels of sense of belonging at the beginning of the academic year were related to peer support, interacting with peer groups and faculty, and parental support. As highlighted in the various other studies (e.g., Hurtado & Carter, 1999 and Museus & Maramba, 2011), these factors have been depicted as significant influencers in how students develop sense of belonging in college. Furthermore, results from Hausmann et al.'s (2007) study confirmed that sense of belonging was a significant predictor for intent to persist among African American and white college students when background variables such as race, gender, financial difficulty, SAT scores, and other predictors of persistence (i.e., integration variables and support variables) were controlled. One important implication gleaned from this study was that investing in practices that showed students the institution values them (by creating school pride and fostering institutional commitment) affected students' sense of belonging and their intent to persist in school.

While the Hausmann et al. (2007) study did not focus on examining the influences of social identities on sense of belonging, a part of valuing students and making them feel

connected to various aspects of an institution is understanding how students' social identities may influence their sense of belonging. This is particularly essential for racially and ethnically diverse student populations. Studies on sense of belonging among monoracial student populations have shown that one's social identities and intersections of their different social identities (e.g., social class, race and ethnicity, sexual identity, gender) do relate to one's sense of belonging in college.

In a study by Ostrove and Long (2007), the authors used correlational analyses to conclude sense of belonging was significantly associated with social class within their sample of 324 undergraduate students (267 white, 37 mixed heritage, 8 Asian American, 6 black, 4 Latino/a) attending a small, liberal arts college. Social class was classified in two ways: subjective class background (self-reported social class category growing up) and objective class background (family income, parents' education and occupations). Hierarchical multiple regression and linear regression analyses found sense of belonging to be a mediator between social class and outcomes such as academic adjustment, social adjustment, academic performance, and quality of experience at college.

A national qualitative study by Strayhorn (2012) conducted with self-identifying gay men of color attending predominantly white institutions and historically black colleges and universities offered insights into the complexities of gender, race, and sexual identity intersections and their influence on sense of belonging. Through one-on-one semi-structured interviews, Strayhorn found that striving to satisfy their need to belong led these gay men of color to cognitively and emotionally process various aspects of their identities in connection with others (e.g., forming new relationships, dissolution of previous relationships, interacting with peers and faculty possessing homophobic beliefs, and resolving conflicts and tension). Constant

(re)evaluation of their experiences and identities occurred due to negative experiences based on homophobia and racism on campus. In seeking out ways to fulfill their need to belong, there were times where these students engaged in unhealthy behaviors, eliciting negative effects, such as depression or loneliness. Other times, many of the students in Strayhorn's (2012) study found supportive spaces and got involved on-campus in activities and organizations related to their racial, gender, and/or sexual identities (e.g., gay pride events, ethnic and gay student organizations); as a result, they described feelings of support and acceptance, which propelled them into feeling higher levels of belonging.

Consistent findings in research on monoracial college students demonstrate the influence of intersecting multiple social identities and other social, academic, and environmental factors on sense of belonging. An underlying point in this body of research is that race and ethnicity are influential to students' sense of belonging in college in different ways. First, at a micro-level, racial and ethnic identities are social identities that influence the way students experience college and a lens through which they perceive and interact with others, as well as understand and express themselves. For example, evident in Museus and Maramba's (2011) study, cultural heritage was a key factor in the transition to college and experiences of belonging in college for Filipino Americans. Strayhorn's (2012) study with gay students of color also highlighted how salient race and ethnicity had been in students' experiences of belonging whereas negatively charged racial and ethnic instances had decreased sense of belonging. This ties into the second implication that the campus racial climate is a vital factor for how racially and ethnically diverse students experience sense of belonging on campus. As shown through the studies that were discussed in this section, sense of belonging was directly linked to campus racial climate (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Locks et al., 2008; Strayhorn, 2012). Race

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relations among those on campus, compositional diversity (number of diverse students or groups represented at an institution), racial discourse, and institutional practices that support various racial and ethnic student populations through curricular or co-curricular domains are among a few important avenues by which campus racial climate is shaped. Presumably, cultivating a campus racial climate that is inclusive, validating, and equitable for all students will foster sense of belonging for these students, but more research is needed with student populations that are often overlooked that are known to influence racial and ethnic dynamics on campus (e.g., multiracial and multiethnic students, international refugee students). For students with intersecting racial and ethnic identities, their experiences impacting belonging may be affected by similar factors found in the body of research on monoracial students' belongingness in college. Yet, given the complexities of multiracial and multiethnic identities, there may also be unique factors influencing their sense of belonging in college. The next two sections discuss what is known about mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging, identities, and experiences in college.

2.4 MULTIRACIAL AND MULTIETHNIC STUDENTS' SENSE OF BELONGING IN COLLEGE

In the extant scholarship on sense of belonging in higher education, mixed race and multiethnic students have either been excluded from data reporting due to a small sample size or have been lumped within a broader racial group for cross comparative analyses (Johnson et al., 2007). Outside of this body of research, only a small subset of mostly qualitative studies have examined sense of belonging with this population; however, they are limited in their scope of

understanding specifically how these students develop and experience institutional or contextual belonging, what factors specifically contribute to it, and what outcomes it impacts. These existing studies primarily focus on belongingness to one's racial and ethnic identity and groups, and as such it is unclear how mixed race and multiethnic students experience sense of belonging to the institution or in different campus contexts. Nevertheless, what this body of research offers is a deeper look into students' sense of belonging in relation to their racial and ethnic identities and communities. Gleaned from these studies is that sense of belonging to racial and ethnic groups is linked to their racial and ethnic identity formations Anhallen et al., 2006; Bettez, 2010; DaCosta, 2007; King, 2008; Renn, 2004) and having a sense of belonging to their racial and ethnic communities is crucial to their overall success and development in college (Hyman, 2010; Renn, 2004). This research can serve as a helpful foundation for better understanding how mixed race and multiethnic college students conceptualize and come to understand belongingness in relation to their own mixed heritage. Because racial and ethnic identity as well as engagement in racial and ethnic subcultures are factors linked to college students' sense of belonging, this review of the research provides important insights.

Findings from this subset of qualitative studies indicate that the multiracial and multiethnic individuals' identity claims and expressions were fluid and shifted across racial and ethnic groups (Anhallen et al., 2006; Bettez, 2010; DaCosta, 2007). As they navigated in and out of various racial and ethnic groups as insiders or outsiders, their sense of belonging to their racial and ethnic identities and groups also shifted at times, given various factors. Some major contributors to how they navigated groups and group boundaries, as well as how they understand their own racial and ethnic belonging, were their physical appearance, family, choice of partner in relationship, intersecting social identities (e.g., mixed religious, transracial adoptee, gender,

race, sexual orientation), immigration status or citizenship, and their peers, among others (Anhallen et al., 2006; Bettez, 2010; DaCosta, 2007; King, 2008; Renn, 2004).

Bettez's (2010) qualitative study conducted with six self-identifying mixed race women attending a large, public institution located in the southeastern region of the U.S. offered an understanding on the epistemology of belonging (i.e. the construction of knowledge related to belonging), particularly in relation to one's racial and ethnic self-understandings. Individual interviews and two focus groups were implemented to collect data on the women's lived experiences related to race. Findings included in the publication were from data that specifically pertained to mixed race issues and how the women came to understand their racial and ethnic belongingness and expressed their identities.

Interview data from the mixed race women affirmed that belongingness was linked to mixed race identity. The women in the study emphasized their identities were in constant in flux and shifted across contexts over time, which impacted how they experienced belongingness to certain racial and ethnic communities. As this occurred, navigating the intersectionality of their gender and races influenced the extent to which they felt they belonged to certain racial groups and in certain spaces. More specifically, the author found that their physical appearance, estrangement from family due to racial prejudice, experiencing dissonance because one parent felt threatened by how the mixed race women identified, feeling different than extended family members, racial politics, their peers, and feeling different based on external assumptions by others have all been interacting factors that dynamically influenced how these women came to understand their racial and ethnic selves and experienced belongingness to their racial or ethnic identities and communities.

Physical appearance, in particular racial ambiguity, was a key factor in how the mixed race women were perceived by others, resulting in these women having to evaluate, question, and challenge what it meant to belong to specific racial groups and contexts. Additionally, negative encounters (e.g., perceived as an outsider or other, racial prejudice) with extended family, peers, or others forced many of these mixed race women to redefine their identities, reconsider their existing relationships with these people, and intentionally consider the race(s) of those they chose to be in romantic relationships with. In these circumstances, many of the women's processing of who gets to belong and what criteria define belongingness often deconstructed monoracial race categories and challenged traditional racial and gender politics and hierarchies (Bettez, 2010).

Similar findings were obtained in DaCosta's (2007) qualitative study on multiracial community activism and individual development and experiences (i.e., racial and ethnic belonging to one's mixed heritage), which involved in-depth interviews with 62 participants who had a heightened consciousness of mixed race identity and topics. Approximately two thirds of the sample was multiracial identifying with two or more monoracially-constructed categories while one third of the participants were monoracial. Fifty-six of the participants had earned a college degree, one did not have a college degree, and five were still in college at the time the study was conducted. The author analyzed data by conducting thematic analysis.

DaCosta (2007) found that physical appearance, parents, choice of friend or lovers, and dress were the key influencers in how students processed racial and ethnic belonging to their mixed heritage. The incongruence between how one physically looked and the culturally defined criteria one should embody to be an insider of a certain racial or ethnic group was a common experience. The author found the question "do I look [*race or ethnicity*] enough?" was often

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asked by multiracial individuals as they shifted in and out of different racial and ethnic spaces, which ultimately affected their sense of belonging in those racial and ethnic spaces. DaCosta explained that for multiracial individuals who felt a sense of belonging to multiple racial and ethnic groups and did not view themselves as looking mixed enough, their belongingness to multiple communities was often questioned and not acknowledged by others. An important related point was the concept of being an "other" carries different meanings across different contexts. In one context, an individual may be marked as "other" while in another context the characteristics that defined that otherness in the first context become the qualities that foster and sustain belonging in the second context (DaCosta, 2007).

Furthermore, how one dressed and racially or ethnically expressed oneself was tied to how multiracial individuals navigate cultural cues set forth to define membership to particular racial and ethnic communities. Subtle or overt verbal or nonverbal expressions and dress were cues that mixed race individuals had to consider. Many of the multiracial individuals in DaCosta's (2007) study acknowledged that these were means by which they had to show their authenticity in order to belong.

In addition to physical appearances and dress, parents play a role in how mixed race individuals experience racial and ethnic belongingness (DaCosta, 2007). When these multiracial individuals felt their sense of belonging being questioned or challenged by others in a racial or ethnic space because of their mixed heritage, these individuals found themselves refraining from referring to the parent(s) whose heritage was threatening their belonging to that group.

DaCosta (2007) found that friends or romantic partners were also key influencers in shifting one's feelings, meanings, and choices to belong. Intentional consideration of a partner's race and race belongingness was enacted because of the saliency and complex nature of

intersecting racial and ethnic backgrounds. Often this intentional consideration was salient because either the partner had gone through similar racialized experiences or because others would take an interest in or judge one's choice in partner as an indication of that person's racial or ethnic belongingness or loyalties to a particular community. Conveyed within individuals' accounts of their experiences was the recognition of race-based power structures and relations, privileges associated with being white, racial oppression as essential in how they understood their belonging, their partner's belonging, and their children's identities. Though DaCosta did not specifically discuss these individuals' thoughts on dual minority or multiple minority relationships or identities in relation to belonging to racial and ethnic communities, others (e.g., Guevarra, Jr., 2012) have identified that the sociohistorical and politicized racialized experiences for different racial and ethnic groups influence interracial couples' experiences within their communities and their children's identities.

DaCosta (2007) also brought up the notion of belonging to "being multiracial" or belonging to a "multiracial community":

> Multiracial community is best understood as a cultural category people use to *develop* collective identity and think about relationships to others. In their negotiations with each other (and within themselves) over the meaning of being multiracial and what they do and do not share with other mixed race people, the notion of a multiracial collective identity takes shape. Yet in this process two seemingly contradictory impulses are at work. At the same time as they elaborate a sense of shared groupness, multiracials are deconstructing the basis upon which racial membership has been erected. (DaCosta, 2007, p. 147)

According to DaCosta, having a shared multiracial position is not always enough to represent a group identity for mixed race individuals. Because someone identifies as mixed race, connecting with other mixed race individuals does not mean there is an automatic multiracial community; commonalities and group understandings must be constituted in a meaningful way. In DaCosta's study, some commonalities that contributed to creating a multiracial community include racially

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and ethnically mixed individuals feeling connected by a shared ancestry, having similar shared experiences based on being placed into the positions of having to choose an either/or identity rather than embracing their multiple identities authentically, or experiencing the concept of otherness in one's own family (i.e., being considered different or an outsider in one's own family due to members in the family sharing the same racial or ethnic background) (DaCosta, 2007).

In relation to mixed race experiences and connections with others, DaCosta (2007) describes the concept of *hierarchy of relatedness* as

> a continuum defined by poles of proximity and distance that follows dominant understandings of race. In this hierarchy, one feels more a sense of belonging, affinity, and closeness with those who are of their same mix, where "same" is defined in racially and ethnically specific terms. (DaCosta, 2007, p. 145)

When multiracial individuals made an intentional effort to find commonality with one another, they connected based on racially or ethnically charged issues related to their unique experiences of mixedness (e.g., growing up in an interracial family, dating, others asking "what are you?"). Multiracial individuals' desire for community and an interest in exploring commonality stemmed from the wanting to connect with people who shared similar racialized experiences as understood through monoracial conceptions of race. When mixed race individuals connected with members from the same mixed ancestry, there was an unspoken understanding and feelings of safety and comfort with one another. These multiracial individuals viewed themselves as having unique experiences related to their mixed race identities that varied from their own parents and other monoracial individuals. DaCosta pointed out that while the similarities provided comfort and a safe space in which multiracials felt a sense of belonging, these individuals did not necessarily create community based solely on their shared status as racially or ethnically mixed people.

In another study by Anhallen et al. (2006), the relationship between racial and ethnic sense of belonging and exclusion, racial and ethnic identification, and physical appearance was

also identified among 50 mixed race Japanese-European Americans via a mixed methods inquiry. Quantitative results showed relationships among certain variables were significant, and qualitative results offered more insights as to how these individuals perceived belonging and exclusion in relation to their mixed race identities. Since various racial and ethnic communities have their unique histories and experiences in the U.S., focusing on a specific sample of mixed-race individuals in this study gleaned more information about multiracial Japanese-European Americans' experiences that influence racial and ethnic belonging and identity. The authors developed a questionnaire with 108 items, which were based on content from pilot interviews with five graduate multiracial students. The three researchers conducted independent thematic analysis and engaged in consensus building. Themes from the interviews included multiracial identities, factors that influenced identities, and other mixed race related experiences. A seven-point Likert scale survey was then created based on these themes, which captured information relevant to belonging and exclusion, racial and ethnic identification, and physical appearance. Two short-answer questions were developed to collect qualitative data from participants (Anhallen et al., 2006).

Analyses were implemented in the study to explore relationships between racial and ethnic identities, physical appearance, belonging, and exclusion (Anhallen et al., 2006). Significant correlations indicated there was statistical significance between Japanese identity and Japanese physical appearance, Japanese sense of belonging, and Japanese sense of exclusion. Significant correlations also showed similar associations for the European identity, with European identity found to be significantly related to European physical appearance, European sense of belonging, and European sense of exclusion. The only out-group (between an ethnic

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minority identity and out-group sense of exclusion) correlation found was a negative correlation between Japanese identity and multiracial exclusion.

From the qualitative portion of the study, findings indicated students conceptualized various meanings of belonging and exclusion (Anhallen et al., 2006). These meanings were two-fold, in that individuals constructed their responses from intrapersonal and interpersonal perspectives. Individual meanings, as the authors note, referred to individuals' perspectives of how they viewed themselves, their experiences, their choices, and personal characteristics. Individual meanings of belonging pertained to community participation, self-understanding of their ethnic identity, and personal comfort. Social meanings referred to individuals' perception of self in relation their shared experiences or values (or not) with others and how others treated them. Social meanings of belonging alluded to feelings of value and acceptance from a group of reference, reciprocal relatedness, shared experiences, and cultural history or background. In terms of exclusion, the authors found that many of the responses were tied to more racially charged feelings than with belonging. Meanings of exclusion included not being familiar with one's history and culture, lack of personal relations or involvement with a particular reference group, feelings of invisibility and being an outsider from a reference group (e.g., through subtle looks from others), and experiencing negative encounters such as racism, discrimination, and stereotyping. Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings of the Anhallen et al. (2006) study suggested that mixed race individuals have multifaceted identities that concurrently develop independently and that exclusion was an essential factor impacting racial and ethnic belongingness.

Collectively, these studies indicated that mixed race and multiethnic students' identities and racial and ethnic belonging were influenced by a number of factors (e.g., physical

appearance, friends, family, group criteria such as boundaries, cultural requirements, and membership) and are complex and dynamically integrated (Anhallen et al., 2006; Bettez, 2010; DaCosta, 2007). With mixed race and multiethnic individuals navigating multiple memberships across different racial and ethnic groups, these complexities are bound to influence these individuals' attitudes, sense of self, values, and their degree of affiliation, among other outcomes (Tajfel, 1981), particularly in higher education contexts (Renn, 2004). While this information is useful in understanding how belonging interacts with students' self-understandings racial and ethnic identities, there is a scarcity of research on understanding mixed race and multiethnic students' institutional and contextual sense of belonging in college. Studies that have examined sense of belonging in college with samples of multiracial and/or multiethnic students tend to exclude them from data reporting due to smaller sample sizes or lump these students within broader racial group cross comparative analyses (Johnson et al., 2007).

In a study by Johnson et al. (2007), the authors examined how elements of the college environment correlated to sense of belonging across a racially diverse sample of 2,967 first-year college students, including African Americans (4.9%), white/Caucasians (77.3%), Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) (9.9%), Hispanics/Latinos (3.3%), and multiracials/multiethnics (3.6%). The students in the study were recruited from the 2004 National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP) and represented geographic diversity within the U.S. Most of the 34 institutions were large, public, flagship universities with predominantly white students. Student samples from each institution comprised of both a random and full sample that were involved in living-learning programs on campus and an equally sized sample of students who were living in residence life but were not involved in living-learning programs (the comparison group). Matching between the comparison group and those

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participating in living-learning programs took into account education level, race and ethnicity, and gender.

Students completed an electronic survey comprised of 258 items covering topics such as sense of belonging, academic and social transitions to college, academic and social support through residence hall climates, racial climate on campus, interacting with diverse peers, and faculty interactions. Sense of belonging was measured using concepts of belonging stemming from Bollen and Hoyle's (1990) work on perceived cohesion as well as concepts from Hurtado and Carter's (1997) and Hurtado and Ponjuan's (2005) research on understanding Latino/a students' sense of belonging to campus. In Johnson et al.'s (2007) study, the following items were included: (a) "I feel comfortable on campus," (b) "I would choose the same college over again," (c) "My college is supportive of me," (d) "I feel that I am a member of the campus community," and (e) "I feel a sense of belonging to the campus community." (p. 529)

Results showed that students' perceptions of the different college contexts in which they functioned influenced their sense of belonging in college. The authors conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine racial and ethnic group differences in sense of belonging followed by five hierarchical multiple regressions for each of the racial groups included in the study. The independent variables used to predict sense of belonging included: (1) student background characteristics; (2) college structural characteristics; (3) college environments; (4) perceptions of the transition to college; and (5) perceptions of the campus climate. Post-hoc tests were also implemented on specific variables. Results from the ANOVA indicated there were statistically significant differences in sense of belonging between the racial groups.

According to the post-hoc tests, the authors found that multiracial racial students expressed lower sense of belonging in comparison to white students and higher sense of

belonging in comparison to students of color. The regression analyses showed that college environments were a significant predictor for sense of belonging. In particular, a significant predictor for multiracial students' sense of belonging was their perception of residence halls as an academic support for them. Furthermore, the regression analyses indicated students' perceptions of the campus racial climate (for all racial groups except Hispanic/Latino) and a smooth social transition to college (all racial groups) were also significant predictors of sense of belonging. According to Johnson et al.'s (2007) study, there were important aspects of the college experience that were linked to college students' sense of belonging. For multiracial and multiethnic students, in particular, how they perceived the campus racial climate and academic support through residence halls, as well as whether they had experienced a smooth social transition were key indicators for these students' sense of belonging in college.

Insights from this study, among others mentioned above, offer a foundation for further research on mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging in college, such as for the present study. They demonstrate the need for more qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods inquiries into how mixed race and multiethnic students' experience belongingness in college, as little is known about sense of belonging (e.g., institutional belonging, contextual belonging) beyond racial and ethnic belongingness. Exploring other factors and dimensions of development (i.e., social, affective, cultural, cognitive) that may play a role in mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging in college and identifying the impact of belongingness on postsecondary education outcomes are a couple of important areas within this niche of research that have yet to be fully examined. Though there may be a dearth of studies directly investigating institutional and contextual sense of belonging in college of mixed race and multiethnic students, there is a solid base of extant multiracial scholarship in higher education that highlights mixed

race students' identity development and general college experiences, which also serve as a useful lens for this study.

2.5 MULTIRACIAL AND MULTIETHNIC IDENTITIES AND EXPERIENCES IN COLLEGE

Much of what exists within the multiracial literature in higher education related to is primarily connected to racial and ethnic identity development and campus peer cultures. In this body of research, sense of belonging is either examined as a factor influencing racial and ethnic identity development or examined as racial and ethnic belongingness, implying it is only partially assessed within the context of race and ethnicity. Nonetheless, this extant scholarship is useful because it provides deeper insights into the elements of identity development that may be influential in cultivating institutional and contextual sense of belonging and important contexts that influence mixed race and multiethnic students experiences in college.

2.5.1 Multiracial and multiethnic identities

Research in the area of multiracial and multiethnic identity development suggests that these individuals' racial and ethnic identity claim(s) may shift over the course of their lifetime, across different contexts, and across various monoracially-, multiracially-, and multiethnically- constructed categories (Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008; Renn, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Root, 1990; Wijeyesinghe, 2012). Because these students' general experiences, interpersonal interactions, and identity formations are complex and fluid, recognition,

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acknowledgement, acceptance, and validation of their multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds in monoracial spaces can be questioned and tested due to their interactions with those around them. While some multiethnic individuals may either identify as monoracial or multiracial, the multiple ethnic backgrounds they identify with add another layer of complexity when interacting with others and striving for belongingness and acceptance. The fluidity of their identities creates uniqueness in these students' development, which varies from monoracial students. This often results in mixed race and multiethnic students having to (re)negotiate aspects of who they are among peers and in the classroom based on racialized experiences (Kellogg & Lidell, 2012; Nishimura, 1998; Renn, 2004; Root, 1992a; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Shih & Sanchez, 2005; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Various racial and ethnic identity models have evolved over time to explain the development of multiracial and multiethnic identities, which are discussed below.

Scholars have identified four major groupings of identity paradigms that explain how mixed race people's identities have generally been studied (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009; Thornton, 1996). First is the *problematic approach* that offers the notion that multiracial people were unable to fall into the monoracial norm and categories, which socially positioned these individuals to be marked by psychological distress due to having to manage a mixed race status in a racially segregated society (e.g., marginal man theories in the 1920s and 1930s) (Rockquemore et al., 2009; Thornton, 1996). Second is the *equivalent approach*, which emerged in the 1960s and highlighted the pressure for both mixed race and monoracial individuals to identify with a single racial category (e.g., one-drop rule) (Rockquemore et al., 2009; Thornton, 1996). These findings were supported by identity models such as Erikson's (1968) identity development and Cross's (1995) Nigriscence model. Third, the *variant approach* of the 1980s and 1990s emphasized the importance of mixed race experiences as uniquely separate from the

experiences of monoracial groups. Central to this approach was studying the psychological and developmental dimensions of mixed race people's needs and experiences. During these decades, scholars stressed that mixed race people could construct and maintain an integrated identity that valued their multiple heritages (e.g., Poston's biracial identity development model, 1990; Root's anthology, 1992). Lastly, the most recent *ecological approach* validates the fluidity and context-dependent nature of identity formations, demonstrating that the varied ways mixed race people may express and affiliate their identities is not linear. The focus within this approach is not necessarily a single outcome but, rather, the dynamic process between systems, geography, contexts (e.g., cultural, regional, situational) and the people that influence identity formations and claims (Renn, 2004; Rockquemore, 1999; Root, 1997, 2003). Examining the macro-level in conjunction with micro-level processes, contexts, and development leads to a more holistic understanding of multiracial individuals and communities. In this approach, theorists assume that "privileging any one type of racial identity over another (i.e., multiracial over single-race identity) only replicates the essentialist flaws of previous models with a different outcome" (Rockquemore et al., 2009). Applications of this theory to mixed race experiences began in the 1990s with work by Root (1990, 1996) and have continued to date; however, the initial ecological framework dates back to work by Bronfenbrenner (1979). As seen through the evolution of these conceptual approaches, scholars have thought very differently about multiracial people's identity formations over time. Specific identity formation models pertaining to multiracial individuals are discussed below to offer a clearer depiction of these approaches.

Original models of identity development (e.g., Erikson, 1968) were based on the notion that individuals went through progressive, linear phases of development to achieve a single identity outcome (or end state). When applied to multiracial people, this linearity proved to be

problematic. Early monoracial identity development models were not able to fully capture the experiences that influence mixed race and multiethnic students' identity development in ways that accurately reflected such students' complex experiences and identity affiliations. These models placed multiracial and multiethnic individuals into narrow, systematic classifications, which were not necessarily applicable to them.

Initial stage-based models that attempted to explain multiracial identity development categorized multiracial individuals under one, single identity outcome, forcing them to reject a part of their ancestry (Kerwin-Ponterotto, 1995; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990). Some examples of these multiracial identity development stage-based models include that of Kerwin-Ponterrotto's (1995) six-phased model that was based on the human development phases *preschool, entry to school, preadolescence, adolescence, college/young adulthood, and adulthood*; Kich's (1992) model that highlighted three stages of transformation, including *initial awareness of differentness, acceptance by others, and achievement of biracial or bicultural identity*; and Poston's (1990) theory of biracial identity development based on Cross's (1995) monoracial African-American identity development model that included five phases: *personal identity, choice of group categorization, enmeshment/denial, appreciation, and integration*. These integrated multiracial identity models were challenged when scholars began specifically focusing their research efforts to better understand the experiences of multiracial people in more complex ways (Renn, 2000, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Root, 1990; Wallace, 2001; Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

Because it has been recognized that many multiracial and multiethnic individuals did not identify with a single racial or ethnic identity, contemporary models have shied away from discussing racial and ethnic identity development from a linear perspective. As a result, fluid-

based identity development models were generated to better explain what mixed race and multiethnic individuals experience in relation to their racial and ethnic identities (Renn, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Root, 1990; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). The fluid nature of racial and ethnic identity refers to individuals self-defining themselves across one or multiple monoracially- or monoethnically-constructed categories at different times or simultaneously across various contexts.

Root's (1990) racial identity development theory contends that individuals' self-definitions are critical to explaining different identity patterns in relation to racial and ethnic identities. Root (1996) identified the experience of four types of *border crossings* across various contexts that multiracial and multiethnic people experience:

> (a) having both feet in both groups or being able to hold and merge multiple perspectives simultaneously, (b) choosing situational ethnicity and race or consciously shifting racial foreground and background in different settings, (c) deciding to sit on the border claiming a multiracial central reference point, and (d) creating a home base in one identity and making forays into others. (Root, 1996, p. xxi)

Border crossings are influenced by broader societal and social influences that are important to how mixed people (re)evaluate and (re)negotiate their identities.

In the context of college, Renn (2000, 2004) has furthered this work by identifying five identity patterns that represent how mixed race students racially self-identify. The author also explained the complexities of these students' racialized experiences on campus from an ecological perspective. The study comprised of 56 college students across six campuses with geographic (different regions of western U.S.), enrollment size (small to large), and institution type (public, private) diversity. Data was collected through four procedures, including individual interviews, campus focus groups, archival data on campus, and written responses. Building on Root's (1990) work, four of the five identity patterns aligned with Root's border crossings:

monoracial identity, multiple monoracial identity, multiracial identity, and *situational identity.* A fifth identity pattern - *extraracial identity* - emerged as well.

As Renn (2004) explained, monoracial identity is when individuals self-identify with one identity and explore others. An example of this identity pattern includes "I am white" or "I am a Pacific Islander." The pattern of multiple monoracial identity refers to individuals who associate with multiple groups and fuse multiple perspectives into their identities. "I am black and Asian" is an example of this pattern. The multiracial identity claim means students position themselves on the border, claiming their reference point as multiracial. The multiracial identity pattern included those individuals that actually refer to their identity being a mixed one as an identity claim. Examples of this include "I am mixed race," "I am biracial," or "I am multiracial." The situational identity pattern has been the most interesting pattern for many scholars conducting multiracial research. In this identity pattern, individuals consciously or unconsciously shift their identities depending on context (i.e., level of comfort, authentic self-identification, expectations from others, reactions to microaggressive situations, at home versus school). An example of this identity pattern from one of the participants in Renn's study included, "There have been times when I know I'm Indian, and times that I know I'm white, and times that I know I'm mixed." (p. 226). The fifth pattern that emerged in Renn's study that had not been identified by Root (1990) in her model is extraracial identity. Extraracial identity represents those individuals who are "deconstructing race or opting out by refusing to identify according to U.S. racial categories" (Renn, 2004, p. 67). This pattern has been identified by other researchers such as Kilson (2001), who referred to this as *raceless identity,* and Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002), who labeled this as *transcendent identity*. An example of this identity pattern is when someone states that they

are not comfortable identifying with any race as they find it destructive, so they opt out of racially identifying all together.

A qualitative study by Chaudhari and Pizzolato (2008) conducted at a large, public and a smaller, private (predominantly white) institution with a sample of 22 self-identifying multiethnic students revealed similar identity categories as in Renn's (2004) study: *monoethnic, multiple monoethnic, multiethnic, situational, and extraethnic*. The authors found that these ethnic identity claims were influenced by cognitive evaluations and induced feelings (e.g., mattering, acceptance) from interactions with others. The interacting forces between interpersonal, intrapersonal (psychological), and cognitive domains were key in explaining how and why students made particular ethnic identity claims across various contexts. For example, students in the study who experienced feelings of isolation or cognitive dissonance (e.g., the incongruence between one's perception of their ethnic identity versus external perceptions of how others viewed their ethnic identity) sometimes found themselves making public identity claims that were not congruent with how they felt privately or viewed themselves.

Another key study by Brunsma, Delgado, & Rockquemore (2013) depicted a complex "identity matrix" for 231 black-and-white biracial young adults to better understand the sociological processes that interplay during multiracial people's identity formations. The authors deconstructed mixed race identities to not only consider racial identity but also to consider the intersectionality between these racial identity expressions and five components of identity: political identity, social identity, cultural identity, formal identity, and physical identity. Of interest was whether biracial individuals adopted "different identities depending on the space, choosing a Biracial social identity, a black political identity, a white cultural identity, etc." (Brunsma et al., 2013, p. 15). Sources of data for this study included a quantitative measure

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(*Survey of Biracial Experience* from Rockquemore and Brunsma's original study in 2008) and qualitative interviews. The quantitative survey data was utilized to empirically determine an identity matrix and any patterns associated with it. Two primary variables were examined in the quantitative portion of the study: racial identity and how multiracial people identified in relation to the five identity components. The results from the quantitative analysis showed that the highest racial self-understanding was biracial as 57.6% of participants identified with this identity. Quantitative data revealed that biracial was also the primary racial identity expression across all five identity components. The second most common racial identity expression across all five identity components was black. In terms of identity matrices, the authors noted that 42% of the identity matrices were unique to the individual, implying there was a high amount of variation within the black-and-white biracial group in how they racially identified across each of the identity components.

A qualitative inquiry approach was used by Brunsma et al. (2013) to further gain insights into how these biracial students evaluated and negotiated the different aspects of their identities and what influenced their decisions about certain facets of their identities. Findings show that participants in the study were often positioned in a "liminal third space" (Brunsma et al., 2013, p. 9) where they found themselves on the outskirts of racial norms due to their mixed race background.

Physical identity and social identity were found to be intertwined with one another in their study (Brunsma et al., 2013). For example, social spaces were contexts where individuals who had racially ambiguous physical appearances often were asked "what are you?" that enabled them to be placed in that liminal third space and propelled them to negotiate and re-evaluate their racial identities. Fitting in based on physical appearance was a factor influencing how students

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viewed themselves and others in social spaces. This notion of fit has been described as an important aspect of sense of belonging, as well as mixed race and multiethnic racial and ethnic identity development. For multiracial individuals, there are often expectations that are present based on what one should look like or how one should act based on particular racialized norms or stereotypes. In these situations, according to the authors, mixed race individuals may reposition their racialized understandings of their own identities, at times challenging current notions of monoracially-constructed racial categories and hierarchies. Other aspects of their identities (such as cultural, political, and formal identities) all showcased similar fluidity in terms of how students internalized and externally racially represented themselves.

In summary, Brunsma et al. (2013) depicted a multifaceted matrix with numerous identity combinations across different dimensions. They claimed that multiracial identity should be "understood both structurally and agentically" because the "liminality of their physical, political, social, cultural and formal identities enables a more multifaceted toolkit for deployment" (Brunsma et al., 2013, p.19). This identity matrix is an important advancement in the field of multiraciality because it deconstructs the complexities that go beyond even multiple racial and ethnic identities. Furthermore, this study indirectly highlights elements of belonging, such as how people feel privately or publicly in different domains of their lives and how their claims are made about different facets of their identities.

Amidst all of this research, contexts are very important to consider in the development of these various identity patterns. Theorists studying multiracial experiences have referenced an ecological perspective as a means to understand the influences and interplay of broader contexts in mixed race and multiethnic people's identity development. In general, the ecological model explained how individuals function across multiple contexts or systems (e.g., Bronfenbrenner's

microsystems, mesosystem, macrosystem, 1979) and shed light on the multiple influencers that affect an outcome of interest (i.e., racial and ethnic identity formation). In relation to multiracial students, research using this framework has found that the following influences are significant in fostering identity development in college: peer culture and dynamics, interactions with others, epistemic orientations, family background, identity politics on campus, group statuses within society, presence or lack of cultural knowledge, physical appearance, cognitive development, cultural attachment, racial ancestry, immigration status and citizenship, student involvement in co-curricular and curricular activities, and perceptions of racial climate on campus (Renn, 2004; Root, 2002; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). This, in turn, may influence belongingness for mixed race and multiethnic students. For example, Root (2002) used an ecological framework to better understand how multiracial individuals' identities formed and were negotiated across various contexts and identified multiple contextual influences (e.g., regional and generational history of race and ethnic relations; family functioning, including socialization and traits and aptitude; community attitudes; and phenotype).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model has been used by Renn (2000, 2004) to describe mixed race students' identity development and experiences specifically in college. Integral to this model is the person-process-context-time framework. From this perspective, an individual's development is dynamically influenced by various interacting contexts and across time. Microsystems referred to proximal processes that were important settings for college students' development and interact with one another to create mesosystems (e.g., interacting curricular, co-curricular, family microsystems) (Brofrenbrenner, 1979; Renn, 2004). Exosystems are contexts that indirectly influence the developing individual (e.g., institutional administrators and policy makers, financial aid policy). The macrosystem is the sociocultural environment that

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broadly influences the individual (e.g., historical events or cultural understandings of race, ethnicity, and gender).

Renn (2004) explained that the extent of congruence or incongruence across and between these systems or settings is a key factor in multiracial identity development. Renn describes congruence as "the extent to which the messages and developmental forces present in different settings are similar and convergent or contradictory and divergent...the degree of congruence has the potential to either enhance or inhibit developmental processes" (Renn, 2004, p. 44). Incongruent messaging across and within settings is a common experience that multiracial and multiethnic students constantly have to face, which can interplay with all aspects of their development and collegiate experiences. The ecological model is a useful framework to gain insights into both individual and broader influences on development and demonstrates many different intersectionalities among social identities and contexts.

Wijeyesinghe (2012) used intersectionality theory as another lens offering clearer insights into understanding the development and diverse experiences of multiracial and multiethnic populations. The framework of intersectionality integrates the interplay of social identities into explanations of any sort of development. Wijeyesinghe's revised version of her original Factor Model of Multiracial Identity (FMMI) adopted the lens of intersectionality to create a newer model called the Intersectional Model of Multiracial Identity (IMMI). The IMMI is based on the following assumptions: (a) the interplay of various factors influence choice of racial identity that shifts based on one's experiences over time; (b) all choices of racial identity are legitimate and valid; the individual can identify with some, all, or none of their multiple heritages without experiencing negative affect (e.g., dissonance, confusion, alienation, anxiety); and (c) the

intersectionality between race and ethnicity and other social identities may play a role in how a mixed race person racially creates and enacts that identity (Wijeyesinghe, 2012).

In the revised model, Wijeyesinghe (2012) used a galaxy graphic to demonstrate the complex and dynamic interactions and interrelations between various factors and the process of fluid racial identity choice and experience. One's "personal galaxy," as described by Wijeyesinghe, develops across time as people encounter new experiences and move in and out of different contexts. For college students, the constant exposure and immersion in many settings as well as life circumstances results in one's personal galaxies constantly evolving. Some key factors represented in the IMMI as influential in multiracial people's racial identity choices include early experiences and socialization, spirituality, geographic region, cultural attachment, situation, generation, racial ancestry, social and historical context, global experiences, other social identities, and physical appearance. Many of these factors identified by Wijeyesinghe have been found to be equally influential in the works of other scholars in the field of multiraciality. For mixed race and multiethnic college students in particular, various aspects of college shape their identities. Two key dimensions of the college context - peer cultures and identity politics on campus - are discussed next.

2.5.2 Peer culture and dynamics

Renn and Arnold (2003) highlighted that "campus peer culture encompasses the forces and processes that shape individual and collective life on campus in terms of identity, group membership, acceptable discourse, and desirable behaviors" (p. 262). Peer culture and dynamics on campus is a vital part of a college student's experience. It requires physical, mental, emotional, social, and cultural capacities as well as spaces where mixed race and multiethnic

students may experience circumstances in which their racial and ethnic identities and sense of belonging may be challenged (Renn, 2000). In a study with 24 multiracial students attending three institutions, Renn (2000) discussed the importance of space and peer culture in students' in racial identity. Findings showed that psychological and physical space was an important factor in their racial identity formations. As students navigated different peer cultures on campus (e.g., academic, residential, co-curricular) and boundaries of monoracial cultural groups, Renn found physical appearance, cultural knowledge, and participation in legitimizing activities were important aspects that marked these boundaries. These aspects affected how students saw themselves in relation to these defining elements and how others perceived them in those spaces. In turn, public spaces (e.g., student organizations) were important contributors to how students privately and publicly claimed and embraced their identity. It was found that the need for space (social, physical, psychological) for multiracial identity development was important for the students in Renn's study.

Another study by King (2008) also had similar findings when examining identity development processes for multiracial/biracial bisexual female college students. Physical appearance and cultural knowledge emerged as key elements of monoracial peer cultures (e.g., identity-based groups) that multiracial students found to be challenging as they made meaning of their multiracial bisexual identity. King found that students experienced challenges (e.g., questions about racial identity, conflicted about which student organization to join) and support (e.g., supportive spaces) stemming from peer cultures on campus that impacted their identity.

Renn (2004) indicated that peer culture is a critical context where mixed race students often experience feelings of being valued and accepted or excluded and questioned, resulting in these students considering if and how they belong as they navigate racialized norms and group

boundaries within peer culture. This often results in these students' forced marginalization to constantly question and (re)negotiate aspects of their identity on campus, among peers, and in the classroom (Kellogg & Lidell, 2012; Nishimura, 1998; Renn, 2004; Root, 1992a; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Shih & Sanchez, 2005; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). According to Shih and Sanchez (2005), often this questioning occurs through having to deal with challenges around "conflict between public and private definitions," "justifying identity choices," "forced choice dilemmas," "lack of role models," "conflicting messages," and "double rejection" (pp. 572-573). A qualitative study by Kellogg and Lidell (2012) with 14 multiracial college students sheds more light on this constant negotiation and validation of identities and socialization processes by having explored student perspectives on critical moments they experienced that shaped their racial identities. Using an interpretivist paradigm, the authors collected data through various sources, including interviews, diaries, material artifacts, and focus groups. Their findings resulted in four categories for the critical incidents students interpreted as shaping their multiracial identities – *confronting race and racism, responding to external definitions, defending legitimacy,* and *affirming racial identity*. Among these findings, engaging with others influenced how they balanced external perceptions about their racial ambiguity, encountered racism, and interacted with other students who shared similar experiences.

Johnston and Nadal (2010) pointed out how multiracial students can also experience a unique form of racial microaggressions denoted as *multiracial microaggressions.* Multiracial microaggressions occur in the interpersonal realm and are defined as "daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, enacted by monoracial persons that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights towards multiracial individuals

or groups" (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 126). Johnston and Nadal's taxonomy of multiracial microaggressions highlighted five ways multiracial microaggressions are enacted.

The first type, *exclusion or isolation*, is when a multiracial individual "is made to feel excluded or isolated based on their multiracial status" (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 133). In these types of experiences, individuals often experience questions as to their authenticity (not racially or ethnically "enough"), experience perpetuation of monoracial norms, and may be perceived and treated as inferior to monoracial people. A second type of multiracial microaggression is *exoticization and objectification*, where a multiracial individual is "dehumanized or treated like an object" (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 133). When a multiracial person is asked the question "what are you?" or is deemed as a mediator between racial communities, their mixedness is objectified. The exoticization of mixed race people on issues of beauty and sexual objectification (e.g., you're so exotic, mixed race babies are beautiful) are also examples of this type of multiracial microaggression. A third way multiracial microaggressions are enacted is the *assumption of monoracial (or mistaken) identity*. Mixed race individuals are "assumed or mistaken to be monoracial (or a group they do not identify with)" (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 133). An example of this would be when a multiracial person's monoracial mother is viewed as their nanny or when someone else proclaims the multiracial person has a monoracial ancestry without knowledge of their mixed heritage. The fourth type of multiracial microaggressions is the *denial of multiracial reality*, which "occurs when a multiracial person is not allowed to choose their own racial identity" (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 133). Here, others consciously deny multiracial individuals the opportunity to authentically claim and express their mixed heritage. This type of multiracial microaggression closely aligns with experiencing an assumed monoracial identity; however, as Johnston and Nadal (2010) state, it is different because the

person perpetuating the microaggression does so knowing the student's mixed heritage. Lastly, *pathologizing of identity and experiences* "occurs when multiracial people's identities or experiences are viewed as psychologically abnormal" (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 133). Examples of this would include stating a mixed race person's existence was a mistake or that they are confused about their identity (Johnston & Nadal, 2010).

Microaggressive attitudes and behaviors can produce negative affect at times, and negative affect, as stated before, has been linked to decreased levels of belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). For college students, multiracial microaggressions are often enacted through peer cultures on campus in academic or social spaces (e.g., self-identifying mixed race, Asian-and-white student is excluded from monoracial Asian student organization because they are perceived as "not Asian enough" based on their racially ambiguous physical appearance). These multiracial microaggressions stem from the broader systemic issue of *monoracism*. Monoracism is defined as "a social system of psychological inequality where individuals who do not fit monoracial categories may be oppressed on systemic and interpersonal levels because of underlying assumptions and beliefs in singular, discrete racial categories" (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 125). This oppression based on monoracial paradigms has implications at all levels of society, whether it is individual, institutional or organizational, and systemic. In higher education, monoraciality inherently trickles into the ways institutions are structured (e.g., monoracially-constructed identity centers in multicultural student affairs, monoethnic studies programs) and how they employ campus initiatives to support their students, ultimately influencing identity politics on campus and cultures (Daniel et al., 2014; Renn, 2004).

2.5.3 Identity politics on campus

Multiracial and multiethnic students in college challenge current notions of macro-level processes at postsecondary education institutions that are currently driven by systemic monoracial norms. Inherently internalized by systems, institutions, and people in the U.S, monoracial norms have kept multiraciality on the outskirts of the national racial landscape as well as of postsecondary institutions (Daniel et al., 2014). This monoraciality is constantly enacted in society in various forms and at different individual, organizational, and institutional levels through monoracial privilege or multiracial macro- and microaggressions (Daniel et al., 2014; Johnston & Nadal, 2010). In higher education, monoraciality may influence the campus racial climate (Museus, Yee, & Lambe, 2011) and how peers engage in diverse interactions, which are key factors influencing sense of belonging for students of color (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Literte, 2010; Maestas et al., 2007; Sands & Schuh, 2004).

Recently researchers have begun to highlight how singularity is the norm by which categories are constructed (not only race but also gender and sexuality, among others), which has implications for mixed race individuals and communities (Daniel et al., 2014; Renn, 2004). An example widely used to illustrate this point in relation to multiracial people is the U.S. Census designations that inherently imply that multiracial people should categorize themselves according to monoracial categories instead of also having the flexibility to categorize themselves with a multiracial collective or on their own terms (Daniel et al., 2014). Data collection procedures on campus are also driven by this single-race paradigm in that these monoracially-constructed race categories are used on evaluation forms or built into research efforts as a means to capture the race data of students (Kellogg & Suniti Niskodé, 2008; Renn & Lunceford, 2004). While students are typically asked to mark one or more races, those racial categories are

nonetheless monoracially-constructed. This presents challenges for multiracial and multiethnic students for two reasons. First, this monoracial paradigm diminishes the complexities involved in multiracial and multiethnic identities and experiences and may play a part in how students view themselves and their experiences of belonging (Daniel et al., 2014; Kellogg & Suniti Niskodé, 2008). Second, data collected on race and ethnicity is used on campus to allocate resources and invest in particular programs, services, or structures intended to support specific student populations. These monoracial norms often result in leaving mixed race and multiethnic students on the periphery of campus research, academic, and student affairs initiatives intended to support diverse students.

Exclusive by its very nature, monoraciality is a systemic barrier that multiracial students consistently have to face in higher education, particularly at PWIs. The physical and mental spaces on campus in which these students function are inherently driven by single-race or monoracial paradigms, which may present some unintended challenges, particularly for cultivating sense of belonging (Literte, 2010; Sands & Schuh, 2004). For example, most institutions are comprised of monoracial subcultures on campus, such as monoracially-designed identity centers, ethnic studies, and monoracial and monoethnic student organizations, that are often not inclusive or engaging of mixed race or multiethnic students' needs. Identity-based spaces on campus are important because they have a large impact on multiracial students' perceptions of the campus racial climate as well offer positive spaces for student development and learning. Because of the numerous benefits associated with identity-based spaces on campus, ensuring campuses are more intentionally inclusive and engaging in ways that offer equitable opportunities and resources for mixed race and multiethnic students may mitigate some of the

challenges mixed race and multiethnic students face and foster spaces that promote sense of belonging.

2.6   RACE AND ETHNICITY

Root (1992b) indicated that studying the experiences and identities of multiracial and multiethnic people requires grounding one's understandings in the sociohistorical context of multiraciality and relevant conceptions of race and ethnicity to better inform the study.

2.6.1   Racial formation theory

Omi and Winant's (1994, 2014) theory of racial formation provides a comprehensive conceptualization of race and racism. Race is widely recognized and defined as a social concept influenced by historical, cultural, and political forces (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Omi & Winant, 1994, 2014). It is a fluid concept susceptible to change across contexts given historical, political, and social pressures. According to Omi and Winant (2014), race is "a concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies" (p. 110). Race is "a matter of both social structure and cultural representation" (Omi & Winant, 1994, pp. 55-56).

In racial formation, social structures and people are organized and characterized through racial categories that can be (re)created, embodied, transformed, and diminished (Omi & Winant, 1994, 2014). Changes on U.S. Census forms since the late 18th century and into the 21st century are a clear example of how race is socially and politically constructed and how racial

classifications can shift based on sociopolitical circumstances and community activism. For instance, at the federal level, the separation of Asian and native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander categories and the addition of "mark one or more boxes" on the 2000 U.S. census were more recent adjustments resulting from community activism. Furthermore, current emerging national trends in U.S. Census data show that some communities, which are not yet federally recognized (e.g., Arab and Latino/a), have been stigmatized on the basis of racial signifiers, and many in these communities are pushing to have a racial designation. In their article about the U.S. Census Bureau's race data collection, Pew Research Center writers Krogstad and Cohn (2014) highlighted that "many communities, including Hispanics, Arabs and people of mixed race, have said they're unsure of how to identify themselves on census forms." Presently, Latino/a is categorized as an ethnicity with Hispanic origin, and Arabs fall under the white racial category according to federal designations. These institutionalized structures of race are being challenged in the present day and may shift come the next U.S. Census given communities advocating for their own representation and changing sociopolitical circumstances (i.e., policies affecting citizenship status for some racial and ethnic populations). Omi and Winant (1994, 2014) stated that the process of racial formation is tied to the perpetuation of hegemony by which racial dynamics and categories are given meaning, organized, and represented in daily experiences and social structures.

2.6.2   Critical mixed race studies

Inherent in this line of thinking is that race and racism are embedded in the fabric of American society and its systems, which is also supported by the emerging critical mixed race studies (CMRS). CMRS is another relevant framework when considering issues of race (e.g., racial

inequality, social justice) and related concepts such as multiraciality, multiethnicity, and monoraciality. This framework is vital to understand in examining the experiences of a population of people identifying with multiple racial and ethnic identities because it provides the proper historical, social, and cultural contexts to understand their experiences.

CMRS, an emerging line of scholarly discourse grounded in racial formation theory and critical race theory (another framework enabling critical analyses of racial power structures that evoke institutional racism), entails perspectives pertinent to understanding mixed race and monoraciality from a critical lens grounded in mixedness. Key areas of focus for CMRS include interraciality, multiraciality, multiethnicity, and transracial adoptions (Daniel et al., 2014). CMRS recently emerged based on the accumulating critical mass of studies and publications centered on mixed race over the past three decades. Daniel et al. (2014) explained that CMRS considers the sociohistorical contexts and the economic, political, and cultural processes that shape multiracials' identities and experiences, racial consciousness, and social positioning in society. CMRS also emphasizes race as a social construct, the intersectionality of race and ethnicity among other social identities, and the critical examination of the dominant conceptions of race that have been institutionalized in the U.S.

Central to critically understanding mixed race issues are implications of sociohistorically oppressive strategies, such as the anti-miscegenation laws (laws banning legally banning interracial relations and marriages between whites and communities of color) and the hypodescent rule (one-drop rule), which have resulted in institutionalizing monoraciality as a norm within the public consciousness of society (Daniel et al., 2014; Pascoe, 2009). Although the mixing of races has always been an inherent part of the racial fabric of the U.S., it has historically been legally and morally tabooed in order to maintain white privilege and supremacy

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in society (Daniel et al., 2014; Pascoe, 2009). In efforts to maintain white privilege against those who were of mixed race, the hypodescent rule was enforced to socially construct boundaries between the racially dominant majority (white European Americans) and people of color. Through this one-drop rule, racially mixed people of color were not given the option to self-identify with an identity other than their minority identity. This had implications for these individuals' economic conditions and access to education, in that access to property, education, and so on were often restricted for these individuals. The overarching concept at the foundation of the hypodescent rule is monoraciality, a concept that is entrenched within U.S. society:

> Monoraciality, along with rules of hypodescent, has suppressed multiracial identities through macro-aggressions and mezzo-aggressions involving institutions and organizations respectively that structure the behavior of actors in the political and cultural economy…the rule has also sustained micro-aggressions in the sphere of interpersonal relations where individuals are perpetrators. (Daniel et al., 2014, p. 13)

The historical enactment of hypodescent rules has consequently maintained these aforementioned monoracial biases that still seep into modern day society and contemporary views of race (i.e., maintenance of monoracially-constructed racial categories for monoracial communities' economic and political gains).

In their publication, Daniel et al. (2014) described communities of color as having maintained monoraciality by *rearticulating* hypodescent rules to preserve their own monoracial identities in order to gain economic and political advantages (i.e., distribution of resources). According to racial formation theory, rearticulation refers to these communities perpetuating the same concepts of hypodescent but applying new rationales to maintain those ideas for their benefit. When communities of color preserve their monoracial identities, inequitable opportunities for multiraciality identity formations are created on "egalitarian or antiracist…critical premises" (Daniel et al., 2014, p. 13). In general, monoracial norms or a

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singular racial paradigm in the U.S. places self-identifying multiracial people in the position of always having to perceive themselves in relation to multiple monoracially-constructed categories (Daniel et al., 2014). This either/or premise takes away the fluid, complex, and dynamic nature of multiracial identity formations. For multiracial and multiethnic students attending PWIs, the pervasiveness of monoraciality and white privilege are inherent at these types institutions that have historically marginalized multiracial and multiethnic student populations (Renn, 2004). This may have implications for how they experience sense of belonging in college. These structural barriers can be found through monoracially-constructed programs, spaces, and policies at institutional and interpersonal levels. Hence, acknowledging monoraciality, as the norm that exists within macro-level and micro-level processes and structures, is essential when conducting research with mixed race and multiethnic populations.

Furthermore, in addition to recognizing the historical experiences of multiracial people in the U.S., it is important to understand the implications of how mixed race and multiethnicity is understood in public discourse in modern day society. While people with mixed ancestry have always been in existence, the increasing visibility of multiracial and multiethnic populations in the U.S. has drawn much debate on the subject. A spectrum of views exists on how the growth of the mixed race populations will influence the public's social consciousness about race and race relations. On the one end of the spectrum, there is the viewpoint that multiracial identities can enable us to transcend racial categories and eliminate oppression, where multiracial people are viewed as racial bridge builders (Morning, 2005). Alternatively, there is a prevailing perspective that racial lines become even more emphasized, resulting in the reproduction of racial hierarchies and the reification of race. Over time, such broader discourses on multiraciality have emerged in public contexts and in higher education (e.g., affirmative action). As such, recognizing these

views as a part of how multiraciality and multiethnicity are currently conceptualized and debated in the U.S. is important for any study involving multiracial and multiethnic individuals.

2.6.3 Ethnicity

In addition to race, ethnicity is another essential concept of the present study that must be conceptualized. Ethnicity is a dynamic construct that refers to groups of people that are socially constructed based on various commonalities such as religion or faith, physical appearance, ancestry, nation of origin, history, language, cultural authenticity, traditions, attitudes towards ethnic group, and social networks, among others (Guevarra Jr., 2012; Moya and Markus, 2010; Spickard & Burroughs, 2000). While ethnicity is a distinct concept from race, race and racism are significant factors in many ethnic group formations and interethnic relations in the U.S. Historically, ethnic groups have been racialized due to dominant racial norms in the U.S. (Pierce, 2000). As such, ethnicity cannot be fully understood outside the context of race and racism in the U.S. (Pierce, 2000). Like race, ethnicity is a fluid concept that can vary based on sociohistorical contexts, one's development and experiences, and shared social meanings with others (Bernal & Knight, 1993; Keefe, 1992; Phinney, 1990, 1992; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Rotheram & Phinney, 1987; Tajfel, 1981; Uba, 1994). Ethnicity is agentic and allows groups and people to intrinsically and autonomously connect based on common interests and cultures. According to Spickard and Burroughs (2000), three factors contribute to ethnic group formation: shared interests, shared institutions, and shared culture.

Early works on ethnic identity development were primarily based on understanding ethnicity from a linear perspective (e.g., Phinney, 1990), which is limited in accounting for multiethnic backgrounds. Phinney (1990) outlined a three-phase model of ethnic identity

development: (1) *unexamined ethnicity*, (2) *ethnic identity search/moratorium phase*, and (3)

achieved ethnic identity. The first phase, unexamined ethnicity, is when individuals have not yet

explored their ethnicity. In the second stage, ethnic identity search/moratorium phase, individuals

explore their ethnicity in relation to cultural knowledge, values, beliefs, behaviors, expectations,

and membership. The third phase, achieved ethnic identity, involves individuals' commitment to

their ethnic group (Phinney, 1990; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Rotheram & Phinney, 1987).

Affiliating with specific ethnic groups entails complex cognitive and affective processing (i.e.,

self-concept of knowledge, emotions, and attitudes towards the ethnic group[s]) (Tajfel, 1981;

Uba, 1994). Uba (1994) described ethnic identity:

> a schema that (a) engenders general knowledge, beliefs, and expectations that a person
> has about his or her ethnic group; (b) functions as a cognitive, information processing
> framework or filter within which a person perceives and interprets objects, situations,
> events, and other people; and (c) serves as a basis for a person's behavior. (as cited in
> Ibrahim, Ohnishi, & Sandhu, 1997, p. 36)

For mixed ethnic individuals, the cognitive and affective processing is often complicated by

having to navigate external expectations, beliefs, membership criteria, and attitudes across

multiple ethnic groups.

Three common processes that members of an ethnic group experience are self-

identification as an ethnic group member, sense of belonging, and attitudes towards an

individual's ethnic communities (Phinney, 1992). Self-identification is distinct from ethnicity in

that the former is a subjectively designated ethnic label that individuals use to describe their

ethnic identity whereas ethnicity is a broader "objective group membership" (Phinney, 1992, p.

158). While the process of self-identification itself is a common experience among ethnic group

members, how the different components (e.g., sense of belonging, meaning making of their

ethnic identity, attitudes towards their ethnic group) of ethnic identity are experienced and the

extent to which self-identification of ethnic identity is processed varies individually and contextually. Also, essential to the formation of ethnic identity is sense of belonging (Moya and Markus, 2010; Phinney, 1992). Developing a sense of belonging to one's ethnic community relies on various aspects of group dynamics; cognitive evaluation of expectations beliefs, values, behaviors; and affective experiences. For many racial and ethnic minorities, a strong ethnic identity is tied to increasing self-esteem and decreasing feelings of anxiety (Kerwin, Ponterroto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993), developmental aspects that have been tied to sense of belonging. Lastly, positive and negative attitudes towards one's ethnic group interact with the process of developing a sense of belonging to help formulate an ethnic identity.

A broader understanding of ethnic identity stems from Ortiz's (2000) study with college students that identifies ethnic identity as comprised of two dimensions: (a) content and (b) salience. Content describes beliefs, attitudes, membership, and behaviors that are shared by a particular ethnic background while salience depicts the extent of the significance of that content to the individual. For multiethnic people, the content and salience of their multiple ethnic ancestries may be more complex than for monoethnic people as multiethnic people have to (re)create, (re)evaluate, and navigate multiple ethnic groups' criteria (i.e., beliefs, memberships, expectations, and behaviors) (Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008). The fluidity and dynamic interactions of multiethnicity in the conceptualizations of ethnic identity and ethnic community formations and interactions are elements that have been examined by scholars outside of higher education (e.g., Guevarra Jr., 2012), but limitedly in higher education with college student populations (e.g., Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008). Linearity and singularity has primarily been the

driving characteristics in understanding existing broader conceptualizations of ethnicity and ethnic identity, particularly in relation to college students.

As research continues to expand on race and ethnicity, appropriate sociohistorical contexts as well as relevant racial and ethnic theoretical concepts must be thoughtfully considered when conducting research with multiracial and multiethnic people. Racial and ethnic mixedness in the U.S. society has its own unique history, political influences, socializations, and cultural dynamics that drive how race and ethnicity are understood in contemporary society. The present study acknowledged this in its considerations around race and ethnicity.

3.0   METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how mixed race and multiethnic college students experienced sense of belonging in college, particularly by identifying what factors contributed to their sense of belonging and investigating how race- and ethnicity-related factors influenced their sense of belonging in college. The research questions of the study were:

1. What factors influence mixed race and multiethnic college students' sense of belonging in college?

2. How do race- and ethnicity-related factors influence mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging in college?

This chapter highlights the methodological approach and rationale, data collection methods and analysis procedures, and data verification techniques.

3.1   OVERALL APPROACH AND RATIONALE

For the purposes of this study, qualitative inquiry was selected as a viable mode of research to explore the factors contributing to these students' sense of belonging and how race- and ethnicity-related factors influence their sense of belonging in college. A qualitative approach to this study was designed to depict a more complex, detailed student-centered understanding of the factors influencing their sense of belonging in college. Grounding one's understanding of

belongingness in the student-perspective is an essential component to researching this construct among college student populations (Bettez, 2010; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Regarding multiracial individuals, Bettez (2010) and DaCosta (2007) emphasized the act of discourse plays a key role in how one understands and expresses one's identities and experiences around belonging, and therefore, it is important to capture a multiracial individual's own account of their experiences. In the present study, one-on-one interviews were conducted with 11 self-identifying mixed race and multiethnic full-time undergraduate students attending a predominantly white public university in the eastern U.S.

3.1.1   Qualitative paradigms

Qualitative research is an important style of inquiry within various social science disciplines such as education, social work, and health services, among others (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). It is a mode of research that is grounded in exploring the lived experiences of humans and complex social phenomena (Creswell, 1998, 2007, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Creswell highlights qualitative inquiry as a practical approach to research when exploring a specific topic or variables of interest that are undefined, developing theory, and conceptualizing constructs. Furthermore, while various genres and typologies of qualitative research exist, this study adopted a constructivist paradigm using two research strategies: phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) and grounded theory via constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The constructivist, or interpretivist, paradigm is grounded in understanding how individuals come to understand and interpret their own experiences and contexts (Glesne, 1999). This paradigm is a keystone in qualitative research to comprehend participants' meaning making of a particular topic being

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studied (Creswell, 2013). To employ the constructivist paradigm, phenomenology was a key research strategy that was used for data collection and analysis for this study. Phenomenology, a commonly used research approach in education (van Manen, 1990), focuses on exploring people's lived experiences as expressed in their own voices (Moustakas, 1994; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). A philosophical premise of the phenomenological strategy is that individuals offer subjective perspectives on a phenomenon or an experience that is common across people (Creswell, 2007). For this study the shared phenomenon being examined were the experiences of belonging and not belonging in college.

Another central strategy to the design of this study was a grounded theory approach via constant comparative analysis and open and axial coding techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Grounded theory approach is a data discovery process (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). It is an approach used to extract thematic patterns from the qualitative data as a means to understand and explain a concept in-depth and potentially generate a theory based on that data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Constant comparative analysis was used to identify emerging patterns related to the factors contributing their sense of belonging and how race- and ethnicity-related influenced their belongingness in college.

3.2   DATA COLLECTION METHODS

3.2.1   Sample and site

3.2.1.1 Sample

The sample of participants in the research study comprised of 11 full-time self-identifying multiracial or multiethnic undergraduate students. All participants met two eligibility criteria to participate in the study: (a) a full-time undergraduate student enrolled in a minimum of 12 credits with the exception of seniors enrolled part-time in their last term prior to graduation, and (b) self-identified with two or more races and/or ethnicities. Appendix A outlines the background information for all participants under their self-selected pseudonyms. The majority of the sample self-identified as female (N=9), with two students who self-identified as male. Two students in the sample reported they were the first in their family to attend college. A variety of academic majors and minors were represented among the participants (i.e., linguistics, biology, English, finance, emergency medicine, among others). The sample encompassed all class years (4 first-year students, 4 juniors, 2 sophomores, and 1 senior). One student in the sample (Somoan) was a transfer student, who transferred from one of the smaller sized branch campuses of the multiple campus university system.

Race and ethnicity related information presented in this table was obtained from the demographic form and interview. Given that the constructs of race and ethnicity and racial and ethnic self-identities are always evolving characteristics across time and contexts (DaCosta, 2007; Omi & Winant, 2014; Renn, 2004), I made intentional considerations and decisions around how to best represent the racial and ethnic affiliations of multiracial and multiethnic individuals when conducting data analyses and reporting the data. Because of multiple variations in how

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multiracial and multiethnic individuals conceptualize and express their racial and ethnic identities, I determined how to best summarize and report the race and ethnic data from the mixed race and multiethnic students after the data was collected, during the data analysis phase. To ensure their racial and ethnic identities were authentically represented, I displayed the race and ethnicity information exactly as students provided it on the demographic form (e.g., capitalization of certain letters, commas, slashes).

It is important to note that at the outset of this study, considerations were also made regarding how race and ethnicity were defined and how race and ethnic data was interpreted and represented during recruitment, as this has been shown to influence how a multiracial and multiethnic sample can be acquired (Root, 1992b). As recent research on race indicates different meanings in how race is conceptualized, classified, and enacted (i.e., racial ancestry, racial identity) (Johnston et al., 2014; Morning, 2009, 2011), this study left it up to participants to self-affiliate with being mixed race or multiethnic. In particular, since mixed race and multiethnic students may describe, self-identify with, and experience their identities in ways that may be differ from dominant race classifications (i.e., U.S. Census monoracially constructed categories) or affiliate with racial or ethnic communities that are not federally recognized (DaCosta, 2007), limiting criteria to only dominant monoracially-constructed categories may be restrictive, as well as misinterpreted and misaligned with the authenticity of one's multiracial and multiethnic experiences and identities (Root, 1992b). The study included individuals who (1) self-identified with or referenced two or more U.S. federally designated monoracially- (e.g., African American, Native American/American Indian, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, white) and monoethnically- (e.g., Hispanic) constructed categories, and/or (2) described, self-identified with, or experienced multiple racial and/or ethnic identities that varied from dominant race

classifications (i.e., biracial, self-developed term for one's mixed racial or ethnic identity – Mexipino, Gerafrican, etc.) or affiliated with racial or ethnic communities that were not federally recognized (i.e., Latino, Arab). Multiethnic students in the study included those who identified as having mixed ancestry from more than one ethnic group whether formally recognized by the federal government or not (e.g., Eritrean, Korean, Jamaican, Samoan, Scottish, Dominican). An individual with a multiethnic background may either identify as multiracial (e.g., Amber in this study who ethnically identified as Jamaican and Irish and racially identified as black and white) or monoracial (e.g., Bob in this study who ethnically identified as Nigerian and Guyanese and racially identified as black). In this study, Bob was the only student who was considered monoracial and multiethnic. All other participants were multiracial and multiethnic.

3.2.1.2 Site

Located in a mid-sized majority white metropolitan area in the eastern United States, the research site Academia University was a large, predominantly white public university. The university is a degree-granting institution, offering baccalaureate and above and is part of a larger multiple campus university system. The compositional or structural diversity (racial and ethnic composition) of undergraduate students at the institution also similarly reflected the local region's population racial demographics. Nearly 77% of the undergraduate student population was white. Marginally over 7% were Asian, 5% were black or African American, nearly 3% were two or more races, over 2% were Hispanic/Latino, over 1% of students comprised of race/ethnicity unknown, and less than 1% of students were Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. No American Indian or Alaskan Native undergraduate students were reported to be attending the institution. Females represented just over half of the undergraduate student population at the institution. Slightly over 3% of the undergraduate student body held a non-

resident alien status, which is described as a person who does not have citizenship or is not a national of the U.S. and is in the U.S. temporarily or holds a visa.

In addition to the compositional diversity of the institution, it is also imperative to consider other aspects of the racial and cultural context of the institution (e.g., compositional diversity of students, faculty, and staff, campus racial climate, race relations, racially-based student services on campus, racial and ethnic subcultures on campus) and regional area students are functioning in, as it is a vital dimension that has been shown to shape experiences on campus, such as sense of belonging, identity development, among others for students of color (Hurtado et al., 2012; Museus et al., 2012b). In the present study, all of the mixed race and multiethnic students were acutely aware of Academia University being an elite PWI through their own perceptions and experiences of white privilege, class privilege, and/or monoracism on campus. Furthermore, students were conscious about the low percentage of racially and ethnically diverse populations in the geographical region of the institution, which also shaped their perceptions of the racial climate on campus and locally.

Through institutional programs, activities, and resources, the racial and cultural context on campus is shaped, and influences how college students experience and perceive support, validation, and acceptance on campus. Below, I describe an array of institutional practices and resources at Academia University for the reader to get a better understanding of what the institution offers to its students. I do not report here any institutional program assessment information, only a description of these institutional programs and resources, as the intent of the study was to gather students' perspectives and not data from the institutional perspective. Academia University offers a variety of student support and engagement activities and resources in both academic and co-curricular contexts; however, it seemed among the participants in this

study that the awareness about and utilization of these opportunities and resources varied across students. In the co-curricular domain, the institution created a university-wide initiative intended to support students' social and personal development, career preparation, residential life, and academic engagement. In addition, Academia University provides career services, counseling services, support for international students, first-year initiatives, life skills development, and academic programs, among other services. In the curricular realm, advising services, tutoring and writing services, faculty engagement, ethnic studies/curriculum, collaborations with student life programming, and other academic support services are also offered. Critical to note here is that race- or ethnic- related institutional programs, services, activities, and resources at this institution are generally designed based on monoracially-constructed categories (i.e., monoracial or monoethnic identity-based student organizations, monoethnic studies curricula), which can be non-inclusive and not engaging of many multiracial and multiethnic students' unique developmental needs around racial and ethnic intersectionality. Additionally, no known specific multiracial or multiethnic focused programs or curricula are formally offered through Academia University.

In summary, the racial and cultural contexts within the institution and locally in the geographical region must be taken into account for the present study because they are potential hubs where students can build meaningful relationships and foster a sense of belonging in college. In particular for multiracial and multiethnic students in a predominantly white context, race and ethnicity are salient factors that influence many aspects of their learning, development, and sense of belonging in college. As such, for this study, I acknowledge the importance of the racial and cultural context of Academia University as a salient aspect of students' experiences around belongingness in college.

3.2.2   Data collection

3.2.2.1 Sampling strategies

The sample and research study site were chosen based on a convenience sampling strategy. Convenience sampling is a method of sampling by which the sample or study site is chosen based on the ease of accessibility and proximity. It is important to note, when using a convenience sampling strategy, the sample is not representative of the entire population one is studying, resulting in limited generalizability of the findings. Nonetheless, in the present study, this strategy allowed for examination of a specific phenomenon (e.g., sense of belonging) in the context of one higher education institution among a particular group of students. More specifically, criterion sampling, a strategy of purposeful sampling, was used for recruiting the 11 students for this study, meaning students met specific eligibility criteria to participate in the study. Additionally, a snowball sampling strategy was used for recruitment as a result of the initial response rate. These techniques were chosen to ensure a sufficient number of mixed race and multiethnic students were represented in the study.

3.2.2.2 Recruitment

The recruitment for the study occurred via academic (e.g., courses) and co-curricular settings (e.g., student organizations) avenues. A pre-established network of administrators, faculty, and staff at the institution were leveraged via email to begin recruitment for the study. In addition, recruitment flyers (Appendix C) were posted around campus and a recruitment email (Appendix B) was sent to cold contacts consisting of faculty, student affairs administrators and staff, and student organization leaders. Responses were received from a number of faculty members who agreed to either circulate the flyer with the study information themselves or allow me to recruit

in-person from their class. These faculty members represented a wide variety of academic departments (e.g., anthropology, education, psychology, linguistics, biological sciences). Furthermore, all student organizations received a recruitment email, with a few of them having responded back noting they circulated the research study information to their student membership listserv. All in-person recruitment occurred during a class session and was scripted with the same message (Appendix D) to ensure consistent recruitment messaging and practices. The script outlined the purpose of the study and invited students interested in participating to sign-up either on a sheet of paper that was circulated during the time of recruitment or to directly contact the primary investigator. Interested students were asked to specify their name, email address, phone number, year in school and to select a date and time for their interview. They were also provided with copies of the recruitment flyer, which provided the researcher's contact information. Furthermore, students were encouraged to pass the information to their peers as well.

3.2.2.3 Data collection procedures

The design of this research study was centered on subjective understandings and interpretations of one's lived experiences via the use of a qualitative in-depth interview strategy. Discourse is a critical way for mixed race and multiethnic people to create, redefine, and enact their racial and ethnic identities as well as to understand their sense of belonging (Bettez, 2010; DaCosta, 2007). According to Bettez (2010), these identities are expressed and created through discourse by allowing participants to speak about their own experiences, grounding the data collected in the participant's voice and perspective. Data was collected across a three-month span of time during the spring semester.

Two pilot interviews were conducted with eligible participants. Pilot interviews are helpful in determining if adjustments need to be made to the interview protocol prior to collection of data from other participants (Kvale, 2007). The purpose of the pilot interviews in this study were to collect preliminary data to establish whether the protocol was feasible and the data gathered was aligned with the purpose of the study. I analyzed the preliminary data from these two pilot interviews through open and axial coding techniques. Line-by-line analysis was conducted to identify emerging codes. As I examined the data in relation to the factors influencing sense of belonging, codes surfaced relating to the various dimensions of students' college experiences, such as academic life, co-curricular participation, residential status, social interactions, race and ethnicity, among others. Furthermore, I also examined the data for emotional reactions and behavioral responses. Initially, I compiled an exhaustive list of open codes (e.g., living on-campus, multiracial identity-situational identity, friends through academics, friends through residence hall, involvement in student organization, structural diversity in classroom, unaccepted, comfortable, disengage, among others). Codes were then organized into axial codes related to friendships, academic experiences, multiracial identity, sense of belonging, emotions, race, co-curricular involvement, and campus climate, among others. As a result, only minor adjustments were made to the interview protocol around condensing and restructuring questions for purposes of logical flow. Data collected from the two pilot interviews were included in the final data analysis.

The interview focus and questions were generated based upon existing conceptualizations and measures of sense of belonging and guiding theories of mixed race and multiethnic college students' identity formations in higher education scholarship. To establish trust with participants

(Seidman, 2006), the interview began with introductions and background questions. The audio-recorded one-on-one in-person interviews ranged from 40-90 minutes.

The interview utilized a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix E) with open-ended questions to ensure some focus and flexibility with the data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Seidman, 1991). Aligned with the research questions, the open-ended interview questions were intended to understand how multiracial and multiethnic college students' experienced sense of belonging in college, in particular, what factors contributed to their sense of belonging and how race- and ethnicity-related factors influenced belongingness. In order to capture how these students were experiencing or not experiencing sense of belonging in college, it was important to grasp what sense of belonging meant to them ("I'd like for you to think about what it means to have or experience a sense of belonging in college. How would you describe having a sense of belonging?" or "To what extent do you feel a sense of belonging at this institution? In what ways? " or "Could you describe in detail any experiences or interactions during your time at this institution where you felt like you belonged or didn't belong?"); thus, one aspect of the interview was focused on this.

Furthermore, as contextual influences are key indicators of fostering and understanding sense of belonging, some of the questions derived information regarding the various college contexts (e.g., physical environment, psychological, cultural, relational) in which sense of belonging may have become heightened for these students. This area of focus was intended to identify where and how these students were experiencing or not experiencing belongingness and why. This line of questioning narrowed in on how sense of belonging may have been experienced or not experienced in several aspects of their life while at the institution (i.e., co-curricular life, academic engagement, interactions with peers and faculty, residential experiences,

overall campus climate, family, and social identities). For example, students were asked "during your time here at the institution, what programs, services, or organizations have you been involved in and to what extent do you feel a part of those communities and cultures on campus?" and "in terms of your academic engagement, tell me more about your involvement in your classes and types of interactions you have with faculty." All of these questions comprised of probes, which dove deeper into better understanding what factors influenced those experiences of belonging or not belonging in the various contexts (e.g., type of co-curricular activities and organizations involved in, experiences of exclusion or inclusion during social interactions, university environment/climate, type of faculty or staff involvement, among others). Building on this, the questions also explored these students' cognitive evaluations, affective responses, and behavioral decisions associated with those experiences of belonging or not belonging on campus (e.g., "How did you feel?" or "What was your thought process and perspective behind that?" or "What did you do as a result?").

Additionally, the questions intended to explore how these students' multiracial and multiethnic identity factored into their experiences of belonging or not belonging in college (e.g., "Has race or ethnicity ever been a factor in your sense of belonging in college?" or "Have there been specific situations where your race or ethnicity has played a role in whether you felt like you belonged at the institution? Tell me about it."). Lastly, a portion of the interview asked students to describe what institutions could do to authentically support mixed race and multiethnic students' needs and experiences and promote their sense of belonging on campus (e.g., " What do you think the university can do to authentically support students' experiences around feeling connected, accepted, and included at the institution, particularly for multiracial or multiethnic college students?").

To ensure the semi-structured interview addressed the purpose of the study the interviewer made intentional efforts to follow-up, clarify, and verify information pertinent to the focus of the study and engaged in active listening over the course of the interview. According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009) the three ideal elements of an interview include interpreting, validating, and reporting. The interpreting and validating component is satisfied when the interviewer repeats the same questions indirectly in multiple ways to capture reliable responses from participants. In the present study, the interviewer purposefully probed where clarification was necessary to ensure the interpretation of the information provided was aligned with what the student intended to convey. Reporting is an ideal, which aims to collect enough self-reported data is collected in order to thoroughly and clearly represent what the participant intended to articulate. During the course of the interview, I intentionally attempted to remain open-minded, accepting, honest, aware of my verbal and nonverbal behaviors as well as intentional about using the participants' language when appropriate to demonstrate a shared language or understanding during the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

To assure confidentiality each participant was asked to select a pseudonym and will be referred to by their pseudonym throughout the remainder of the study and in any published work (i.e., presentations, publications, and conversations). No personal identifying information was collected to link the participant to their pseudonym and all data was physically stored in a locked cabinet as well as secured electronically through a password encrypted computer system. The raw data was managed and stored by the primary researcher. I received verbal consent for the audio recording of the interview and authorization from each participant to conduct any necessary follow-up as a result of inquiries that arose at a later time post-interview. Upon completion of the interview, participants received a $10 token of appreciation for their

participation in the research study. In addition to the one-on-one semi-structured interviews, participants completed a demographic questionnaire outlining information regarding background information (e.g., racial and ethnic background, age, gender) and other relevant information (e.g., education level, academic major, co-curricular involvement on- and off-campus, college generation status, immigration generation status) (see Appendix F).

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

The audio-recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and further examined to explore patterns and themes relating to mixed race and multiethnic college students' sense of belonging on campus. I transcribed six interviews, while the remained five interviews were transcribed using a transcription service. After the audio files were transcribed, all transcriptions were cleaned and verified by me to ensure the transcribed text aligned with the audio recording.

Constant comparative analysis using open and axial coding techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) were employed to construct coded categories to help identify any patterns and themes that emerged from the data. Furthermore, data from the demographic questionnaire was interpreted as a supplement to the interview data. During the data collection process, an iterative, ongoing cycle of data analysis occurred simultaneously to continuously refine my perspectives and coding. Data were coded for various factors that influenced students' sense of belonging, with a focused look on race and ethnicity, as well as emotions and behaviors associated with experiences of belonging and not belonging. For each of these major codes of interest (influencing factors, emotions, and behaviors) separate code lists were generated. As I collected new data across the three-month span of time, I constantly compared incoming

interview data by grouping data based on similarities and differences within and across interview data (e.g., data across participants, data within participant interviews, data to emergent categories). Data was constantly compared to (re)assess, refine, and identify similarly emerging codes until no new properties surfaced from the ongoing comparing and coding.

Using the open coding technique, I read through the transcripts line-by-line multiple times to identify units of data based on the meanings that surfaced from the text. This process was iterative where codes were created, deleted, refined, and collapsed into one another. I then established properties for these distinct categories and subcategories. It is important to note, that since some of the meaning units were representative of already existing constructs from current research, some codes were generated based on these existing constructs. Evident in the data were mixed race and multiethnic students' experiences of multiracial microaggressions based on Johnston & Nadal's (2010) taxonomy of multiracial microaggressions. I used this taxonomy to categorize the meaning units associated with each type of multiracial microaggression students experienced. Multiracial microaggression codes included exclusion/isolation ("excluded or isolated based on their multiracial status"; Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 133), exoticization/objectification ("multiracial person is dehumanized or treated like an object"; Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 133), assumed monoracial or mistaken identity ("multiracial people are assumed or mistaken to be monoracial [or a member of a group they do not identify with]"; Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 133), and denial of multiracial reality ("multiracial person is not allowed to choose their own racial identity"; Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 133). Additionally, another construct from existing scholarship that became a code in this study was cultural integrity, which stemmed from Tierney's (1999) research on cultural integrity. The code cultural integrity (or lack of) was described as the existence or nonexistence of culturally relevant,

inclusive, and engaging practices and strategies at the institution (e.g., engaging students' diverse backgrounds in a positive manner toward the development of more relevant pedagogies and learning activities) (Tierney, 1999, Museus, 2014). Lastly, the code situational identity was an additional construct adopted from Renn's (2004) ecological theory on mixed race identity development. Situational identity is the shifting of one's racial and ethnic identity claims and expressions either unconsciously or consciously. After all the data was collected and reviewed, I came up with a list of codes to use.

During the axial coding phase of data analysis I identified how codes were related to one another, similar as in the pilot study (e.g., axial codes related to multiracial identity, sense of belonging, campus racial climate, emotions, among others). Here, I combed through the interview data with the intention to classify connections between codes and sub-codes. The final inventory of codes and sub-codes was maintained in a codebook (see Appendix G for an abbreviated version of the codebook). Following this, I continued by systematically organizing and identifying themes and patterns that encompassed the emergent core categories to identify key factors contributing to students' experiences of belonging and emerging patterns illustrating the ways in which race- and ethnicity-related factors influenced their belongingness.

3.4   PROCEDURES TO ADDRESS TRUSTWORTHINESS

To validate the trustworthiness of the data analysis, a second coder with a professional background on multiracial college student development and experiences in higher education examined the data by coding 25% of the interviews for three major codes (i.e., multiracial microaggressions, emotions, and behaviors). The second coder was provided with a copy of the

draft codebook, which included the codes, definitions of the codes, and examples of those codes. I walked through the codebook and the goals of the coding process with the second coder to ensure we were consistently coding going forward. The second coder and I coded one transcript separately and came together to review this rendition to ensure we reached consensus on how and what we were coding. At this point only minor discussion points emerged at this point regarding collapsing certain codes. The primary investigator and second coder identified and determined a few codes from emotional reactions set of codes were characteristically similar enough to be consolidated. For instance, the emotional reaction codes, "upset" and "frustrated" were collapsed into the same code as they showed to be similar in nature within the context of students' interviews. A couple of behavioral codes (i.e., downplay, intervene/disrupt, questioning) were added as well. After the two coders completed the final coding of this set of transcripts, the primary investigator outlined the agreements and disagreements in a chart. The two coders reconvened to discuss each disagreement to reach a consensus. We reached a desirable inter-rater agreement for the following: multiracial microaggressions at 87%, emotional reactions at 79.5%, and behaviors at 81.4% inter-rater agreement. Interrater agreement was calcuated by taking the number of agreements for each code and dividing that by the total number of agreements for each code plus disagreements for each code (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Important in qualitative research is the authenticity and credibility of the collected interview data; thus, participants were invited to conduct member checks to address this (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Member checking is a technique used in qualitative research to verify the authenticity and validity of the interpreted data gathered by presenting the preliminary understandings of the data to the participants for their review. Two rounds of emails went out to

all 11 of the participants for member checking seven months and nine months after the close of data collection. Zero students responded to these emails. However, another technique employed to address the trustworthiness of the data was peer debriefing. Peer debriefing is a common technique used in qualitative research to strengthen the credibility of one's data by consulting with experts (Creswell, 2012). For this study I used peer debriefing during data analysis (e.g., during and after the coding process) with two colleagues. One colleague has expertise on multiracial college student development and student affairs administration, while the other is an expert in qualitative research methodology and psychology. It is important to note the colleague with the expertise on multiracial college student development and student affairs administration who assisted with peer debriefing was a different colleague than the second coder of the data. The intention of the peer debriefing process in this study was to determine if other experts would come to similar conclusions in examining the data. (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Creswell, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There was only one instance where one individual's perspective slightly differed from my interpretation of the data. After discussing the interpretation with one another in more depth we came to a consensus on it. As such, peer debriefing with these two colleagues offered credibility to the interpretations of the data.

Furthermore, memo-ing was conducted as a method to document reflections of the interview process and data analysis throughout the research study. In these memos, I wrote about my reflections regarding overall impressions from the interview (e.g., non-verbal expressions by participant, tone of voice, body language) as well as developing thoughts about the data and implications of this research (e.g., budding connections between codes, selecting and defining code labels, broader connections to contemporary research in higher education) (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Throughout the study, I referenced the memos I created to critically reflect on

fieldnotes from the interviews, my evolving thoughts on the data, and my positionality in the study. In qualitative research, the researcher plays a multifaceted role to ensure data is collected, managed, and analyzed with integrity. Rossman & Rallis (2003) stated a responsible qualitative researcher

- Views social phenomena holistically
- Systematically reflects on who she is in the inquiry
- Is sensitive to her personal biography and how it shapes the study
- Uses complex reasoning that is multifaceted and iterative.
  (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 3)

When working with multiracial individuals in research, DaCosta (2007) and Root (1992b) highlight the positionality of the interviewer as an "insider" or "outsider" in qualitative interviews is a key aspect of the research that must be considered. Coming from what Root called "a position of knowing", or a high level of familiarity or a shared understanding of multiraciality, is essential to ensuring a successful interview with multiracial and multiethnic individuals. Root also states researchers must take responsibility to reduce subjective bias that may influence one's interpretation of the data by implementing approaches that address trustworthiness.

In this study, I acknowledge my positionality as a self-identifying monoracial, multiethnic female. My race, ethnic, gender, and other social identities may have influenced participants' responses. Furthermore, my years of personal interest and professional experiences studying multiraciality and multiethnicity in higher education has contributed to my evolving knowledge base in this area. This is critical to take into account for this study because it may shape my perceptions of multiracial and multiethnic related experiences. As such, a heightened level of awareness was present when interacting with participants and analyzing the data.

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4.0   FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand the factors contributing to 11 self-identifying mixed race and multiethnic college students' institutional and/or contextual sense of belonging. In particular, this study explored the following research questions: (1) What factors influence mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging in college? (2) How do race- and ethnicity-related factors influence mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging in college? The main findings of the study include:

1. Monoracial norms at institutional and interpersonal levels was a barrier to mixed race and multiethnic students' institutional and contextual belonging in academic, social, and cultural spaces.

    a. Internalized perceptions of the campus racial climate induced belonging uncertainty. Aspects of the campus racial climate included: (a) low compositional diversity of multiracial and monoracial students of color, (b) limited culturally relevant and inclusive practices engaging mixed race students, and (c) monoracial and monoethnic subcultures.

    b. Multiracial microaggressions invalidated participants' multiracial and multiethnic identity, which reduced their institutional and contextual belonging in social and cultural spaces. Two specific behavioral strategies were adopted by students to manage their reduced sense of belonging: (a) accommodation to monoracial

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norms through situational identity and (b) resistance to conforming to monoracial norms by disengaging from the situation or disrupting the multiracial microaggression.

2. Friendships were socially and culturally validating contexts in which their sense of belonging was enhanced.

In this chapter, I begin by briefly providing relevant information that emerged from the data, which offers the reader contextual background that is helpful in better understanding the main findings of this study. This includes (a) the different ways students described experiencing belongingness in college, and (b) an overview of various factors that contributed to their experiences of belonging. First, students expressed experiencing sense of belonging in two ways: (a) institutional belonging and (b) contextual belonging. Second, in response to the first research question, data showed multiracial and multiethnic students described multiple academic, social, personal, co-curricular, residential, and environmental factors that contributed to their sense of belonging in college. These results are succinctly discussed in this chapter. I then move on to report the major findings of this study, pertaining to how race- and ethnicity-related factors influenced participants' sense of belonging. Results shed new insights into how the unique needs and experiences of multiracial and multiethnic students influenced their institutional and contextual belonging in college.

4.1   INSTITUTIONAL AND CONTEXTUAL SENSE OF BELONGING IN COLLEGE

Before discussing the main findings in detail, it is important to provide a brief overview of how students described the different ways they experienced belongingness in college. As participants

reflected on their college experiences, sense of belonging in college was discussed in two ways: institutional belonging and contextual belonging. Institutional belonging is described as students' sense of belonging to the overall institution. For instance, a few students talked about a strong level of pride in attending the institution, which contributed to feeling a sense of connection to the institution. Contextual belonging is described as students' sense of belonging within different contexts or situations in college. Instances of contextual belonging included experiencing a sense of belonging in an academic major/department, within one's social circles, when involved in a co-curricular activity or specific student organization, in their residence hall, among others. All participants, except one (Olivia), expressed that they experienced contextual belonging in various dimensions of their college life (e.g., academic, social, co-curricular), while only three participants expressed experiencing institutional belonging (Bob, Randall, and Victoria). For example, Randall spoke about having a sense of institutional belonging as well as contextual belonging within his co-curricular and academic experiences.

> Last year I didn't have a major. I didn't have a minor. I didn't have a 3.0. I wasn't in the business fraternity. I wasn't in this organization or that one. But now I feel like I belong even more to this school, because I am more secure and I am in so many more organizations. And hopefully by next year, I can say the same thing that I am getting involved even more.

His experiences of sense of belonging in the co-curricular (e.g., involvement in business fraternity) and academic (e.g., identifying a major and minor) context were an important facilitator of his sense of belonging to the overall institution. This notion of institutional belonging and contextual belonging is not surprising, as it similarly aligns with how sense of belonging is examined in different ways within existing scholarship on sense of belonging in higher education (Hausmann et al., 2002-2003; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Locks et al., 2008; Maestas et al., 2007; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Strayhorn, 2012). It is important to note that

within this chapter, when evident in students' examples, I distinguished between institutional and contextual belonging.

4.2 MULTIPLE FACTORS INFLUENCING SENSE OF BELONGING IN COLLEGE

Data depicted that numerous factors were influential in enhancing or hindering their sense of belonging in college. Findings are consistent with existing literature in higher education on factors influencing monoracial undergraduate students' sense of belonging in college (e.g., Hagerty, Williams, & Oe, 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Locks et al., 2008; Maestas et al., 2007; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Strayhorn, 2012). Supporting this extant literature, specific academic, social, personal, co-curricular, residential, and environmental factors emerged as important contributors to students experiencing institutional belonging and/or contextual belonging in college. Furthermore, findings also add to this scholarship by identifying uniquely reflected racial and ethnic factors in mixed race and multiethnic students' experiences of belonging in college. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the multiple factors influencing participants' sense of belonging.

It is essential to note here that not all of the factors were found to be independent from one another, rather many overlapped as students' experiences in college are fluid and intersecting across different campus contexts. For example, students developed friendships, a key contributor to sense of belonging in college, via co-curricular avenues (i.e., student organizations) and through their academic major/departments (i.e., through smaller classes). Though not visually depicted in Figure 1, in reporting the data, I made an effort to discuss these overlapping factors, as that was the reality of many of the student experiences. Furthermore, across all of these

influential factors, students' social identities (i.e., mixed race and multiethnic identity, class identity, gender identity, among others and intersections of these social identities) were salient aspects of their experiences around belongingness. Because of this, social identities were not discussed as a separate sub-section, but were discussed when relevant across the different sections.

Figure 1: Factors Influencing Multiracial and Multiethnic Students' Sense of Belonging
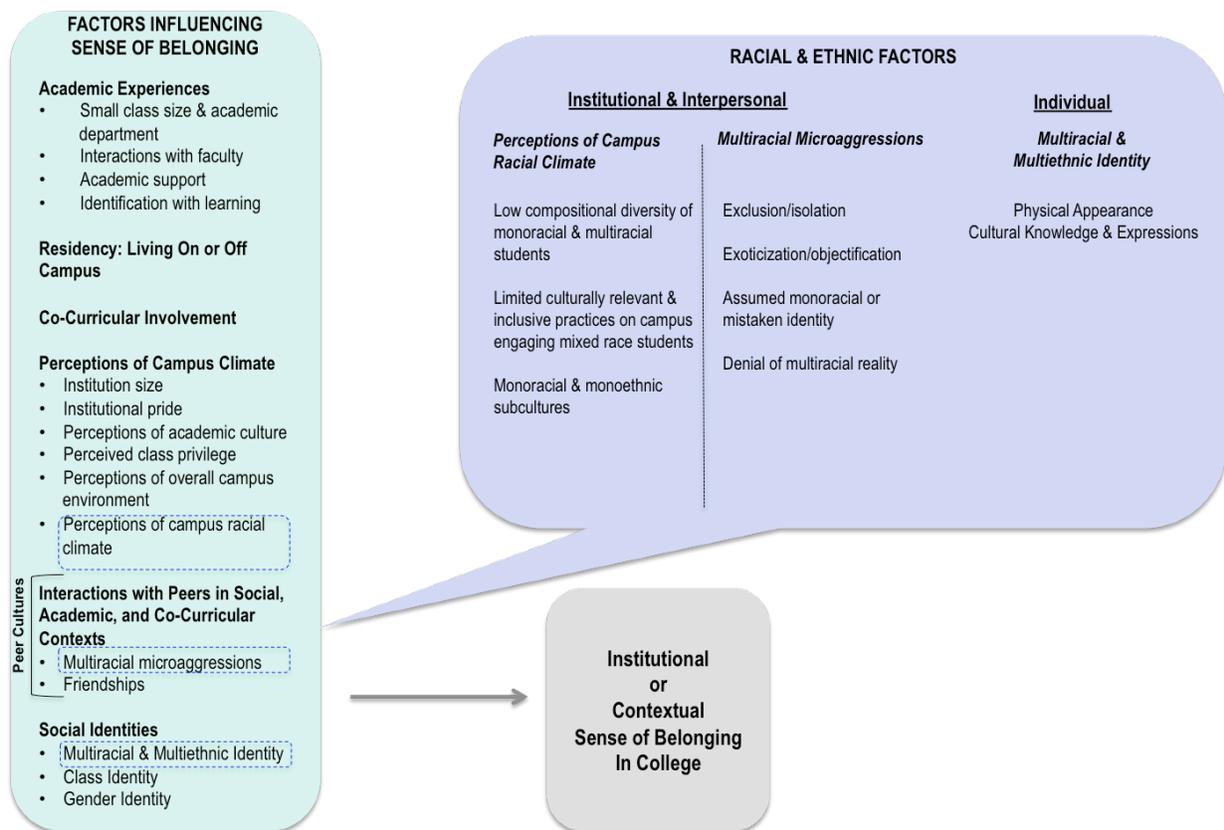
4.2.1 Academic experiences

In the context of students' academic experiences, four aspects emerged as prevalent factors in students' sense of belonging within academic contexts: (a) small class size and academic department, (b) interactions with faculty, (c) academic support, and (d) identification with learning. Six students reported small class size and academic department was influential in their sense of belonging in and out of the classroom context, as it provided students increased opportunities to interact and build meaningful relationships with faculty and peers as well as created a comfortable space to ask questions and engage in discussions. Nine students stated the quality and nature of interactions with faculty were important influencers for their experiences of belonging in academic contexts. A key aspect of students' interactions with faculty that shaped their experiences of belongingness (or lack of) was academic and cultural (in)validation. Validation through interactions with faculty was characterized by approachability and friendliness of faculty, faculty member's demonstrated interest in students' academic and professional pursuits, and feeling encouraged, cared for, and supported by faculty. When participants received validation, positive emotions (e.g., comfort, motivation, encouragement, belief, feeling important and cared for, feeling they mattered) were elicited, in turn, promoting a sense of belonging in those academic contexts. On the contrary, some participants identified moments where they felt academically or culturally invalidated in their interactions with a faculty member, producing feelings of discomfort, isolation, anxiety, and disrespect (e.g., Gerafrican stated faculty members were condescending; Sophia discussed a faculty member who stereotypically threatened her). In turn, this negatively impacted their institutional and contextual belonging in an academic context.

Receiving academic support from in or out of class agents (i.e., family, academic support organizations and services, advisor) was another vital facilitator of multiracial and multiethnic students' sense of belonging at the institution. Six students discussed the importance of these sources of support in their academic experiences. In particular, results indicated the significance of students' finding trustworthy individuals and spaces that fostered their self-efficacy and motivation to succeed in college as autonomous learners. Furthermore for some students, identifying with what they were learning was also another fundamental factor for them to feel a sense of belonging in the academic contexts they functioned in. Participants' personal drive and connection with what they were learning was an important source of motivation in their educational experiences (e.g., Rachel pursuing a Spanish major as a means to stay connected to her Nicaraguan ethnic heritage; Elysse personally enjoying learning).

4.2.2   Residency: Living on or off campus

Five students reported residential status (i.e., living on or off campus) was a contributor to their institutional and contextual belonging in college. For two of the three students who talked about living off campus, they described being less involved and engaged in campus activities due to not living on campus and having other obligations such as family or a job, which reduced their belongingness in social and co-curricular contexts. Conversely, living on campus gave students the proximity to resources, people, classes, and co-curricular opportunities, which tended to enhance their sense of belonging. Seven of the students who lived or are currently living on campus in university housing discussed having interactions with their resident assistant (RA) or peers on their residential hall floor, which helped them develop meaningful relationships, and thus feelings of belongingness in those residential settings. However, not all of the students had

positive experiences in their residence hall that enhanced their sense of belonging (Olivia and Elysse).

4.2.3   Co-curricular involvement

Within the co-curricular realm, opportunities to explore personal and academic interests were also important in how students experienced sense of belonging in those co-curricular contexts. The majority of the students sought out programs such as study abroad, student organizations, and activities geared towards their interests. Involvement in these co-curricular activities fostered these students' contextual belonging in those settings, as it offered them spaces in which they received academic and cultural validation and developed a sense of connection to opportunities that fulfilled their interests.

4.2.4   Perceptions of campus climate

Additionally, how students perceived the campus climate was essential. Participants identified six major aspects of the campus climate as influential in their institutional and contextual belongingness: (a) institution size, (b) institutional pride, (c) perceptions of academic culture, (d) perceived class privilege, (e) perceptions of the overall campus environment, and (f) perceptions of campus racial climate. Eight students identified the size of the institution as a contributor to their sense of belonging to the institution. Four students (Bob, Randall, Sophia, Victoria) felt the large size of the institution was beneficial because it provided increased opportunities to meet people and access to a multitude of resources and opportunities to get involved in co-curricular and academic-related activities. Four other students (Amber, Amanda, Elysse, Somoan) felt the

institution was too large, making it difficult to interact with people comfortably often resulting in a feeling of isolation.

A second component of the campus climate students perceived as influential in their belongingness to the institution was institution pride. For three students (Bob, Randall, Victoria), their institutional pride generated feelings of belonging to the institution, which was grounded in their pride in recreational sports and/or the prestigious reputation of the institution. Moreover, perceptions of the academic culture on campus was another salient facet of the campus climate that a few students discussed. Students, such as Sophia, Bob, and Randall, talked about vulnerabilities stemming from a challenging academic adjustment, feeling intelligently inferior, and dealing with racist stereotypes associated with not academically excelling (e.g., in major, in classroom, in a course). This negatively impacted how they felt about belonging in certain academic contexts at the institution.

Furthermore, perceived class privilege also emerged as important factor that hampered institutional and contextual belonging in social spaces. Four students (Amber, Olivia, Sophia, Victoria) were highly aware of the class privilege that existed on campus, whether they personally experienced it or observed classism on campus. Students stressed class privilege is an inherent aspect of the campus climate, which marginalizes low-income and first-generation college going students of color attending the institution. Olivia, Sophia, and Victoria emphasized this point with their personal experiences of classism with insensitive peers on campus, which negatively impacted their sense of belonging to the institution and within social contexts on campus. This was due to two reasons: (a) they were hindered from being able to get involved in activities they otherwise may be interested in getting involved with and (b) they received differential treatment from others (e.g., judgment made about financial affordability to get

involved in activities) which induced negative feelings and perceptions of how they fit in or were valued at the institution (i.e., feeling "different" or "sub-par" among their peers due to their class identity).

A total of nine students shared that their perceptions of the overall campus environment was important to their institutional and/or contextual belonging in academic or co-curricular contexts. Of the nine, three participants indicated certain aspects of the overall campus environment (i.e., abundance of resources, opportunities, and friendly people) were favorable to them, which enhanced their sense of belonging; whereas, three other students expressed unfavorable perceptions of the overall campus environment (i.e., not supportive, unwelcoming), which hampered their sense of belonging. The final three students indicated both favorable and unfavorable aspects of the overall campus environment positively and negatively influenced their institutional and/or contextual belonging, respectively.

Students' perceptions of the campus racial climate was another major factor in how the majority of participants felt about belonging at the institution. Participants referred to various aspects of the campus racial climate affecting their views and feelings about what it meant to belong as a mixed race and multiethnic student at a predominantly white institution driven by monoracial norms. First, the majority of students (N=8) were acutely aware of the low number of racially and ethnically diverse students of color including the invisibility of multiracial and multiethnic students on campus. Second, students (N=6) indicated that there were limited culturally relevant and inclusive programs, resources, and curricula geared towards engaging and directly supporting multiracial students. Lastly, students (N=8) observed the existence of monoracial and monoethnic subcultures on campus. Data revealed students' perceptions of multiraciality being marginalized and excluded on campus resulted in them experiencing

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uncertainty about their institutional and contextual belonging in social, academic, and cultural spaces. This finding is discussed in more depth within the *Race- and Ethnicity-Related Factors Influencing Sense of Belonging in College* section.

4.2.5   Interactions with peers

Positive and negative interactions with peers also had an impact on multiracial and multiethnic students' institutional belonging and contextual belonging in social, academic, and co-curricular spaces. Negative experiences of multiracial microaggressions from peers reduced participants' institutional and contextual belonging in social interactions and cultural spaces. Positive relationships with friends were a constant source of emotional, academic, social, and cultural support in which they experienced sense of belonging.

Eight participants reported that multiracial microaggressions played a role in hindering their institutional and contextual belonging in social interactions and cultural spaces. Encounters with racial discrimination through multiracial microaggressions often invalidated students' multiracial and multiethnic identity, which negatively influenced their sense of belonging at the institution. Four types of multiracial microaggressions, as outlined in Johnston and Nadal's (2010) taxonomy, emerged from the data: (a) exclusion or isolation, (b) exoticization and objectification, (c) assumed monoracial or mistaken identity, and (d) denial of multiracial reality (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). Though multiracial microaggressions occurred across social, residential, academic, and co-curricular contexts, they primarily impacted students' sense of belonging through social interactions with peers and in cultural spaces of co-curricular contexts.

While for the majority of participants, multiracial microaggressions reduced sense of belonging, it is also important to make note of the three students (Bob, Randall, and Victoria)

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whose institutional belonging or contextual belonging in social or cultural spaces was not impacted by multiracial microaggressions. Bob, a monoracial (black), multiethnic (Guyanese and Nigerian) student, expressed ease in navigating monoracial norms, given his monoracial status as a self-identifying multiethnic black individual. He stated his belonging was not negatively affected because he did not experience multiracial microaggressions like other students. For Randall (a self-identifying African American and Italian biracial individual), though he was consciously aware that others were enacting multiracial microaggressions (e.g., objectification – "what are you?"), he explicitly stated that they did not bother him or affect his institutional or contextual belonging, as he felt the intentions of multiracial microaggressions were not malicious in nature nor racially discriminatory to him. While proud of his biracial identity, he felt other aspects of his college life (e.g., academics, professional interests, co-curricular involvement in business fraternity) were critical influencing factors on his sense of belonging, not race-related factors. Regarding Victoria's experiences, her racialized identity and experiences have been shaped by her immersion in a predominantly black community (home neighborhood, high school) her entire life, which affected how she self-identifies (black) and how she interpreted multiracial microaggressions. While she acknowledges her multiracial status, her sense of belonging was not influenced by multiracial microaggressions because the racial lens by which she defined her experiences was affiliated with being black. She made this point evident as she described both pre-college and in college experiences. Experiences of how multiracial microaggressions reduced mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging in college are discussed in more depth in the *Race- and Ethnicity-Related Factors Influencing Sense of Belonging in College* section.

Furthermore, all 11 of the participants also reported the positive influence of supportive relationships with friends in which participants' sense of belonging was enhanced. Factors such as having mutual academic and social interests, receiving identity support through authentic acceptance and interpersonal and cultural validation from like-minded others and others with similar experiences, and having a safe emotional relational space (sense of comfort, feelings of mattering) heightened their sense of belonging in their friendships. Students reported that having mutual academic interests with peers and receiving encouragement, support, and validation in their academic pursuits from friends was an important facilitator of feeling a sense of connection to others and a contextual belonging in academic contexts (e.g., Randall expressed the value of formulating bonds with friends in his cohort via his classes and business fraternity; Amber's friends showing continuous support and belief in her academic success validated her abilities and confidence). Additionally, for the participants who experienced racial marginalization and discrimination that negatively affected their sense of belonging, friendships served as a vital social and culturally validating informal counter-space to those negative experiences. Students reported developing important interpersonal bonds with friends who were like-minded (e.g., perspective-taking abilities, empathetic), had similar or relatable experiences (e.g., able to understand and relate to experiences of being different in the context of a PWI, able to relate to experiences as a multiracial individual), and provided identity support and a safe emotional relational space. This is discussed in more depth within the next section.

4.3   RACE- AND ETHNICITY-RELATED FACTORS INFLUENCING SENSE OF

BELONGING IN COLLEGE

Participants in the study described different ways in which race and ethnicity critically factored into how they experienced sense of belonging in college (or not) at institutional, interpersonal, and individual levels. These findings offer new insights into how uniquely reflected racial and ethnic factors affected multiracial and multiethnic students' sense of belonging. Table 1 outlines the race- and ethnicity-related factors.

Table 1. Race- and Ethnicity-Related Factors Influencing Multiracial and Multiethnic Students' Sense of Belonging in College

Race and Ethnicity Factors Influencing Sense of Belonging		
Perceptions of Campus Racial Climate	Low compositional diversity of monoracial & multiracial students of color	
	Limited culturally relevant & inclusive practices on campus engaging mixed race students	
	Monoracial & monoethnic subcultures	**Institutional or Contextual Sense of Belonging**
Multiracial Microaggressions	Exclusion/isolation	
	Exoticization/objectification	
	Assumed monoracial or mistaken identity	
	Denial of multiracial reality	
Mixed Race & Multiethnic Identity	Physical appearance Cultural knowledge & expressions	

4.3.1   Perpetuation of monoracial norms: A barrier to belonging

Results indicate the perpetuation of monoracial norms at institutional and interpersonal levels impacted mixed race and multiethnic students' institutional and contextual belonging in academic, social, and cultural spaces. At an institutional level, participants observed a campus

racial climate in which multiraciality was often excluded or marginalized due to the pervasiveness of monoracial norms. Perceptions of three aspects of the campus racial climate influenced their belongingness: (a) underrepresented: low compositional diversity of multiracial and monoracial students of color, (b) underserved: limited culturally relevant and inclusive practices engaging mixed race students, and (c) monoracial and monoethnic subcultures. These perceptions of the campus racial climate were internalized by participants and elicited emotions of alienation, isolation, and discomfort. As a result, multiracial and multiethnic students experienced uncertainty about their institutional and contextual belonging in social, academic, and cultural spaces. Furthermore, at an interpersonal level, encounters with racial discrimination through multiracial microaggressions invalidated students' multiracial and multiethnic identity in various contexts (e.g., social, cultural, academic, residential), which reduced their sense of belonging to the institution and in social and cultural spaces. Results revealed participants often emotionally and cognitively processed the incongruence between the perpetuation of monoracial norms stemming from the multiracial microaggressions and their multiracial identity and experiences. Data showed mixed race and multiethnic students used two specific behavioral strategies to manage their reduced sense of belonging.

4.3.1.1 Perceptions of the campus racial climate and belonging uncertainty

Participants' awareness of multiraciality being underrepresented and underserved on campus produced feelings of belonging uncertainty. As students consciously considered how and where they fit in and were accepted at the institution, they expressed that mixed race students and monoracial students of color were noticeably numerically underrepresented in the student demographic and multiracial students were underserved in campus spaces, activities, and curricula. Furthermore, participants described the prevalence of monoracial and monoethnic

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subcultures as a barrier for many of them as they navigated the campus environment. As a result mixed race and multiethnic students felt marginally positioned within the student population and within institutional commitments towards engaging diversity on campus. These feelings of marginalization induced belonging uncertainty in relation to their overall belonging to the institution. When students are marginalized their sense of belonging at the institution can be challenged depending on how congruent or incongruent the environment or context one is functioning in is with the students' expectations, experiences, position, and beliefs (Strayhorn, 2012). In this study, multiracial and multiethnic students' perceptions of multiraciality being underrepresented and overlooked had them questioning how accepted, welcomed, and valued mixed race students and their experiences were, which impacted their institutional belonging and contextual belonging.

Underrepresented

Eight students expressed feelings of discomfort, isolation, and alienation stemming from their perceptions of the low compositional diversity of monoracial and multiracial students of color. Many of the students brought this up in relation to one of their racial or ethnic heritages being underrepresented at the PWI and the invisibility of mixed race and multiethnic students in college. Bob shared,

> Racially, I guess you always get the feeling that you're not supposed to be here 'cause the majority of this campus is like white. Just seeing a lot of white people, you don't always feel welcome, 'cause some of them really aren't used to seeing black people or different people in general, people in different races.

Sharing a similar sentiment, Somoan, a self-identifying multiracial black-and-white student expressed, "Anytime I'm somewhere [on campus] and it's only Caucasian people, it's pretty awkward; but you have to push through it...My strongest sense [of not feeling belonging in

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college] is definitely in a room full of just white people. I just feel so isolated and alienated." Others also used phrases such as "invisible" and "don't know where I fit" in relation to being underrepresented among the student demographic at the institution.

Participants also reported feelings of isolation stemming from the minimal presence of other mixed race students on campus. For instance, Gerafrican stated, "it's just that it's [the mixed race and multiethnic students on campus] such a small community, it's really hard to have a voice." As Gerafrican shared about her experiences at the institution, she described being conscious about how the small percentage of multiracial students at the institution diminishes opportunities for her and other mixed race students to have a voice and to experience a sense of belonging to the institution in relation to the broader student population because they are marginalized. Another student, Rachel realized the chances of her meeting other mixed race students she can relate to is slim and felt sad and isolated at the institution as a multiracial individual.

> I don't really foresee meeting other people besides my one friend whose like, who can identify like me. I just don't really see it. It's kind of depressing. I don't really think about it a whole lot but when I do I'm just kind of like, "yeah, there's not really anyone" [sad tone of voice].

The lack of diverse racial and ethnic representation on campus may be invalidating for many monoracial and multiracial students of color, as it can directly impact how one views themselves within the macro-level racial context of college and how one feels about belonging to the institution or in different microsystems (e.g., academic setting, residence hall, co-curricular student organization). In this study, multiracial and multiethnic students expressed low compositional diversity of monoracial students of color and multiracial students on campus was a key source for their belonging uncertainty.

Underserved

Six participants described the exclusion of multiraciality from existing campus practices, spaces, and curricula was an influencing factor in them experiencing belonging uncertainty at the institution. Students' responses were grounded in having reflected on their own needs and experiences related to belongingness at the institution and perceptions of the campus racial climate. Observed was the absence of social, academic, and cultural spaces, services, curricula, and activities on campus that normalized and validated mixed race students' identities, needs, experiences, and histories. This exclusion of multiraciality prompted students to feel overlooked, inadequately served, and unimportant within institutional commitments intended to engage racial and ethnic diversity. This induced ambiguity about how they as multiracial and multiethnic students fit in and were accepted and valued at the institution overall.

Somoan noted there were a lack of social and cultural spaces on campus in which multiracial and multiethnic students could come together to connect and share their experiences about being mixed race in order to foster a sense of relatedness and belongingness in those contexts and to the institution overall.

> I think they need to do something about multiple ethnicities and multiracial...It would be nice to have a club where we could all discuss this and meet other people like yourself. Even though there's so many, there's no setting which we can come up to each other and be like "oh you know this what I dealt with" etc.

Somoan stressed the significance of fostering interpersonal connections where one's identities and experiences as a multiracial person are validated and offering spaces in which students can develop a sense of relatedness, which may reduce belonging uncertainty in these micro-level contexts.

Similarly, another student, Olivia, a third-year self-identifying mixed race, black-and-white student, also expressed that multiracial experiences are often ignored and underserved in

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social, cultural, and academic spaces on campus. This was marginalizing and alienating for her as she often felt she had to question how she belonged in social, cultural, and academic spaces that were ignorant to and not inclusive of her experiences as a multiracial person.

> I feel like acknowledging them [mixed race students] would be the best way. We're not even remembered. I feel like something simple as like a culture fair where it's just like mixed race students showing both of their cultures and how they interact with each other would be great. Just something. Anything. There's so many events that are cultural that force you to pick one and I'm just like can we just celebrate everything at the same time.

She went on to explain that the observation of the exclusion of multiraciality extended beyond the social and cultural realms of the institution into the academic sphere as well.

> I feel like we need just like a class of history of races or ethnicities or something that is inclusive as to issues on mixed race. Because I know a lot of mixed race couples just alone go through a lot of flak because they're mixed race. And just educating about the negativity that usually surrounds it so that they're aware that it's still an issue today...Just an acknowledgment that this happened and that it's still subtly going on today. I know a lot of people will argue that the race issue needs to occur first because there's many issues just with race. And I'm like well; if there's so many issues with race, can we just talk about people who don't identify as one? And it's kind of hard to ignore it because give it like two more generations and pretty much everyone is going to be mixed.

Olivia's example, along with other participants (Amanda, Amber, Sophia), brought up the point that dialogues about race and racism that embrace and are inclusive of multiracial histories and experiences may help reduce their (multiracial and multiethnic students) belonging uncertainty. It was suggested that a formal educational venue for others would allow for acknowledgement of the realities of contemporary race and mixed race issues and serve as a resource for students to better understand and name their own experiences.

In addition to providing spaces that encourage interpersonal connections among multiracial students and formal education about mixed race experiences and histories, was also the importance of offering appropriate resources to support multiracial students. This support may help these students in navigating racialized barriers at the institution that may be hindering

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their sense of belonging at the institution and learn how to authentically embrace their whole selves in campus contexts. Sophia shared,

> They could have not just a class but even an organization or some sort of information available to students on how do you balance being multiracial and how can you put that into your academics, and your social life, and things like that? What does that mean for you as a student? Because people who are one race don't really think about how can I put every part of myself into everything. So that's been something I've been trying to deal with – how I can contribute to certain situations with all of myself and not, you know, leave like a thought that I have or whatever out just because I feel like other people won't understand. I'm just thinking how to tell multiracial students or just biracial students how they can contribute each part of who they are.

Drawing from her own experiences at the institution, Sophia's struggles of being marginalized as a mixed race student at the institution and not having helpful resources and supportive spaces that validate her mixed race identity evokes a sense of belonging uncertainty, both in terms of institutional belonging and contextual belonging within academic and social settings.

Rachel, was another student who also made a similar point about enhancing resources on campus to foster mixed race students' sense of belonging on campus. She stated, "A counselor who is multiethnic or a few different multiethnic counselors with different ethnicities that are combined...they could just have a specialization I guess in like identity crisis or something like that." Rachel felt providing the services of a counselor who is specially trained to better respond to mixed race and multiethnic students' needs is an optimal way to enhance mixed race students' sense of belonging at the institution, a student population which she and others have recognized as overlooked and underserved on campus. As seen in the aforementioned examples, participants stated the lack of formal opportunities to foster interpersonal connections with other multiracial and multiethnic students and the lack of academic, social, and cultural activities, resources, and spaces engaging multiraciality (e.g., histories, heterogeneity of identities and experiences,

understanding multiracial identity development) were aspects of the campus racial climate they felt brought on belonging uncertainty at the institution.

Monoracial and monoethnic subcultures on campus

The prevalence of monoracial and monoethnic subcultures on campus (e.g., monoracially-designed physical spaces, identity-based student organizations, informal monoracial or monoethnic peer groups) required participants to consciously evaluate how they as multiracial and multiethnic individuals fit (or not) in or were accepted on campus based on the norms of monoraciality that inherently shaped these subcultures in social and cultural spaces. As students cognitively and emotionally processed the congruence between self and their racialized institutional environment, they often evaluated that fit based on the cues they received stemming from monoracial privilege prevalent on campus. Monoracial norms defined many of the racial and ethnic subcultures in social and co-curricular spaces they accessed and tried to immerse themselves in.

Sophia, a first-year self-identifying mixed race student, stated in her experiences around adjusting to the racial realities of the PWI, she has observed the segregation of racial and ethnic subcultures on campus, which produced doubts about how she belonged within those spaces.

> Some things I don't like, the area that I came from was really mixed. There wasn't a lot of racism in the area that I grew up in. And not that I feel like there's a lot of racism here, but it is sort of segregated in my own opinion. I feel like as a mixed child that I don't know where I fit in at because I see the different races or different cultures all split up into different areas and I feel like since I don't look the same as some people, I feel like they don't think like I fit with them and stuff. Maybe that's just my own perception of it, too, just because it's a different environment than where I grew up in. It wasn't segregated as much.

Apparent in her example was the internalization of the observed monoracial norms that shaped racial and ethnic subcultures at the institution. In particular, the way she processed these

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environmental cues was by evaluating characteristics of her multiracial identity (i.e., physical appearance) against monoracial criteria defining segregated social and cultural spaces on campus. As such, she was unsure of how she fit in or belonged at an institution with such pervasive monoracial and monoethnic subcultures. Similarly, other students also spoke about comparing one's multiracial status (i.e., physical appearance, how one claimed and expressed their racial identity) against the norms of these existing monoracial and monoethnic subcultures, which became a source of triggering belonging uncertainty in relation to their institutional belonging and/or contextual belonging in social and cultural contexts (e.g., identity-based student organizations, informal social interactions with peers).

Gerafrican illuminated her perceptions of a racial hierarchy associated with the monoracial subcultures on campus, highlighting the prevalence of institutional racism through white privilege and monoracial privilege. She expressed,

> White or Asian and then me. [hierarchical demonstration with hands] [sighs] I came in the first day, I was expecting something along the lines of that, because that's usually how my life rolls. And people stared and so on, but eventually it was like, "it's that girl again". And then the other minorities also...I would go in there [university cafeteria] and usually there was a lot of white people and usually there was a lot of Asians and then there was the African-American and black tables. And then there was my group of people [her friends]. There was everything. Usually, that's how it is. Everyone kind of sticks to their own race usually.

Here, Gerafrican described a hierarchy of racial privilege (white and monoracial) shaped by monoracial subcultures that make up the campus racial climate at the institution. According to her perceptions, this hierarchy of racial privilege tends to position mixed race individuals inferior to whites and monoracial minorities on campus and has always been a racial reality her entire life. At the institution, others' perceptions of her racial ambiguity (i.e., staring at her) triggered her to recognize these monoracial politics as a part of the campus context she was functioning in and prompted her to feel doubt in experiencing belongingness among those subcultures.

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Strayhorn (2012) highlights sense of belonging is intensified in certain contexts, particularly in considering the congruence (or lack of) between students' own values, identities, and experiences and the contextual norms and values of the environment they are functioning in. For mixed race and multiethnic participants, monoracial and monoethnic subcultures were critical contexts in which they evaluated and navigated racial marginalization and exclusion of multiraciality. This induced belonging uncertainty due to asynchrony between multiracial status and monoracial norms shaping the campus racial climate.

4.3.1.2 Multiracial microaggressions: Invalidation of multiracial identity and reduced institutional and contextual belonging in social and cultural spaces.

As mixed race and multiethnic students navigated these monoracial and monoethnic subcultures and the overall campus environment, they often encountered racial discrimination through multiracial microaggressions in multiple aspects of their college lives (e.g., social, residential, co-curricular, academic) at an interpersonal level, which tended to reduce their sense of belonging. Four types of multiracial microaggressions emerged from the data that negatively affected eight participants' institutional and contextual belonging in social interactions and cultural contexts: (a) exclusion or isolation, (b) exoticization and objectification, (c) assumed monoracial or mistaken identity, and (d) denial of multiracial reality (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). While multiracial microaggressions occurred across social, residential, academic, and co-curricular contexts, they primarily impacted students' sense of belonging through social interactions with peers and in cultural spaces of co-curricular contexts. Traversing the barrier of socially constructed monoracial norms in these various contexts was challenging for many of the participants as their racial authenticity was constantly questioned and challenged by others based on their physical appearance (i.e., racially ambiguous) and cultural knowledge or expressions.

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Experiences of exclusion or isolation stemmed from the invalidation and questioning of their authenticity, the perpetuation of monoracial norms and biases, and an inferior status and treatment of mixed race students, which alienated and isolated students (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). Students also described experiences of feeling exoticized or objectified by others at the institution, which affected their feelings of how they were perceived, respected, and validated by others at the institution, all critical elements of sense of belonging. The most common experience across these participants was being asked the question *what are you*, which often invalidated their mixed identities and belongingness in those situations. Other ways students were exoticized or objectified included exoticization by partners they were dating and expectations for them to be racial bridge builders or mediators between racial communities.

Moreover, students recalled circumstances where others misidentified their multiracial identity by projecting a monoracial identity label on them without knowledge of their multiracial status (i.e., "are you adopted?"; "you're the white girl"). While some of these students experienced this type of multiracial microaggression before coming to college, some also continued to experience it while in college. Additionally, participants experienced instances where others consciously denied them the opportunity to authentically claim (i.e., "oh, you're not really black") and express their mixed heritage (i.e., "oh you don't act black"), ultimately impacting how they felt about belonging in social and cultural spaces among certain people or groups. Denial of a multiracial reality multiracial microaggression closely aligned with experiencing an assumed monoracial or mistaken identity; however, as Johnston and Nadal (2010) stated, it is a bit different because the person perpetuating the microaggression does so knowing of the students' mixed heritage.

Evident within participants' experiences of multiracial microaggressions hindering sense of belonging were the affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of sense of belonging. Results show in situations where multiracial microaggressions evoked emotional distress, students consciously evaluated monoracially-based external messages from peers that questioned and invalidated their racial authenticity as a multiracial and multiethnic person. As such, they processed how those external cues aligned (or not) with their internal feelings about belonging in certain social and cultural spaces based on their private racial and ethnic identity affiliations. Consequently, this resulted in mixed race and multiethnic students deploying two primary types of behavioral responses to manage their reduced sense of belonging, in which their racial and ethnic identity played an integral role.

The first behavioral strategy used by some participants (N=7) was the accommodation to existing norms by shifting their racial and ethnic identity claims/expressions as a means to strive for belonging in social and cultural contexts. A second behavioral strategy adopted by some participants (N=7) was the resistance to conform to monoracial norms by disengaging from the situation (physically leaving the space, ignoring it) or verbally disrupting the multiracial microaggression (standing up for oneself, engaging in humor through jokes). Resisting to conforming to monoracial norms often stemmed from the pride they held in their multiracial identity. It is essential to note, six of the eight participants (Amber, Amanda, Elysse, Gerafrican Somoan, and Olivia) engaged in both types of behavioral patterns across different situations in which their sense of belonging was hampered by multiracial microaggressions. Furthermore, Sophia only engaged in resisting conformity to monoracial norms and Rachel only engaged in shifting her racial identity to accommodate to monoracial norms. Figure 2 outlines how the four

types of multiracial microaggressions influenced participants' sense of belonging by depicting the affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects.

Figure 2. Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Elements of Multiracial Microaggressions Influencing Mixed Race and Multiethnic Students' Sense of Belonging in College

MULTIRACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

Exclusion/Isolation: "Made to feel excluded or isolated based on their multiracial status"*
Question Authenticity; Perpetuation of Monoracial Norms; Perceived and Treated as Inferior to Monoracial People

Exoticization/ Objectification: "Dehumanized or treated like an object"*
"What are you?"; Sexually Exoticized; Racial Bridge Builders

Assumed Monoracial or Mistaken Identity: "Assumed or mistaken to be monoracial (or a group they do not identify with)"* *Misidentification based on Monoracially-Constructed Racial Categories*

Denial of Multiracial Reality: "Not allowed to choose their own racial identity"*
Racialized Expressions; Forced to Choose

*Johnston & Nadal (2010), p. 133

Affective Reactions

Judged
Upset/Frustrated
Uncomfortable
Isolated
Alienated
Annoyed
Indifferent (situational)

Cognitive Processing

Evaluate peer group norms and culture
Question and assess one's fit as mixed race and/or multiethnic in monoracial norms and cultures
Conscious decision-making of behavioral responses

Behavioral Responses

Accommodation to monoracial norms through situational identity: shifting of racial and ethnic identity claims and expressions (conscious or unconscious)

Resistance to conforming to monoracial norms: (a) disrupt the multiracial microaggression (i.e., empowered to stand up for oneself, humor [laughs about it, makes jokes]), and (b) disengage in the situation (i.e., physically leaves the space)

Sense of Belonging (Institutional & Contextual)
Not feeling accepted, welcomed, respected or valued
Alienated or isolated

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Social identities such as race and ethnicity, among others, have been found to be important factors influencing sense of belonging (Museus & Maramba, 2011; Strayhorn, 2012). In this study, it was found that students' racial and ethnic identity played a critical role in how they behaviorally reacted in a particular situation in which multiracial microaggressions impeded their sense of belonging (institutionally and contextually in social and cultural spaces). The notion of consciously or unconsciously shifting how one claims and expresses their mixed heritage, also known as situational identity (Renn, 2004), was a type of identity expression many participants engaged in to fit in and feel a sense of inclusion and acceptance from others in cultural spaces in the co-curricular sphere and social interactions (formal and informal) within different college contexts. Research shows engaging in the situational identity pattern entails cognitive flexibility and understanding of one's emotions and is a common identity expression pattern for multiracial and multiethnic students in college (Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008; Renn, 2004; Root, 1996). Much of this existing research confirms that multiracial and multiethnic racial and ethnic identity formations are fluid and dynamic. Results from this study extend our understandings of this in relation to multiracial and multiethnic students' sense of belonging in college, as participant data provided a clearer depiction of the functionality of students' fluid racial and ethnic identities in managing their reduced institutional and/or contextual belonging.

Furthermore, in addition to embracing the fluidity of one's racial and ethnic identity by shifting how one claimed or expressed their identity, how students embraced and affiliated with their racial and ethnic identity also provided impetus for participants to engage in other types of behaviors that showed resistance to accommodating monoracial norms. For example, Sophia described why she did not feel a sense of belonging in certain cultural spaces defined by

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monoracial norms due to feeling excluded and isolated, resulting in her making a conscious decision not to engage in them.

> I think it's weird because they have these organizations like [black student organization], [Caribbean and Latin American student organization], and things like that. But I haven't joined any of those, because I don't feel like I really belong in any of them because it's so grounded in a full ethnicity or a full race. It's been very weird for me...I feel like people are, "You don't look like us. You don't belong here." So that's been another thing for me just because I don't know what I look like. I'm all different races. I don't look like one race so it's been very difficult for me to feel like I could go to those and feel completely welcome and completely belong in those groups.

Socially constructed monoracial norms and messages tended to inform how group culture and criteria for inclusivity and belongingness were defined and enacted by identity-based student organization members to accept or not accept certain students. As seen with Sophia, like others, students' physical appearance and cultural knowledge and expressions were key characteristics that often elicited these types of multiracial microaggressions, which invalidated multiracial students' identity and hampered their sense of belonging in those spaces. While physical appearance was a critical factor in Sophia's conceptualization of what it meant to belong in those spaces, her choice not to engage also stemmed from her pride in and strong affiliation with identifying as multiracial. Sophia's own perceptions about what it meant to belong in those social and cultural contexts was shaped by monoracial norms, which was not congruent with how she identified or her racialized experiences. This made her feel unaccepted, invalidated, uncomfortable, and alienated. Hence, not engaging in those student organizations was a conscious choice Sophia made to manage her reduced sense of belonging.

Another student, Elysse spoke about a number of instances where multiracial microaggressions reduced her institutional and contextual belonging in social interactions and cultural spaces, which prompted her to behaviorally respond differently across situations. She stated, "I identify as multiracial. I'm not one or the other." Nevertheless, in situations where her

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sense of belonging was reduced within the realm of identity-based student organizations due to exclusionary and isolating multiracial microaggressions, Elysse behaviorally responded by adopting a monoracial identity to accommodate to the socially constructed monoracial norms that shaped the boundaries of these cultural spaces.

> I feel like clubs are really exclusive in a sense...When I'm with one of the clubs I'm in, a lot of them are self-identified as being African-American or black. And you know at the same it's like "hey me too". So I'll try to accentuate that aspect, you know, really like say, verbally say like, "Look hey I'm like one of you guys" kind of thing.

Adapting to these monoracial norms created by the African American and black student organizations was a behavioral tactic she recognized she had to engage in to fit in and feel culturally accepted and validated by them. Embracing her African American or black identity was a catalyst to adapt in this situation in order to try to satisfy her desire to belong. She went on to describe a specific instance with an African student organization on campus where she had to navigate those monoracially constructed race dynamics.

> It was a club for African student organization...I was like, hey, you know, like, that's me too. So they just kind of totally wrote me off when I went up. It was during the activity fair. You go up to the table and you ask and they're just completely like, "Why are you here? Why?" And I'm like, "Well, I'm African too." And they were not having any of that. It wasn't really a conversation and that's like the sad part, because, I'm interested obviously. I came up to talk to you, but it's just kind of like, they just kept talking among themselves in the back. And I was just looking at a flyer and signing up for the email list, and I was like so, "What do you guys like focus on? What do you guys do?" And they were just like, "We like get together" and just turned back. I was like "okay, bye". I felt a little just, I won't say angry, but just a bit perturbed, because I know that they were judging me on how I looked and not necessarily who I was. That got me a little angry.

This a clear example of Elysse's authenticity being questioned based on her racially ambiguous physical features and cultural knowledge, causing her to emotionally experience negative feelings (i.e., anger, judgment, agitation). The inferior status and treatment of her being mixed race prompted her to react by justifying her identity and belongingness to the group. In this particular context, Elysse shared her challenges with the incongruence between how others

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perceived her African identity based on her physical appearance as well as group boundaries shaped by monoracial norms and her internal affiliations to being African. She received external cues from members within this student organization about the group's racial politics around accepting, welcoming, and validating students who may not necessarily fit their mold of what it means to be African (e.g., physical appearance) and belong to an organization geared towards African cultures. As such, she consciously verbally claimed a monoracial identity as a means to justify her identity in front of others and showcase that she belonged in that context according to the standards defining the space she was striving to belong in.

Elysse also expressed experiences of exclusion and isolation in other contexts, such as in her residence hall. She spoke about her peers showing racial prejudice towards her due to her routine of personal care. "I have coconut oil on my hair and people [peers at the institution] are just like, "What? What are you doing? You look crazy." And it's just like, "Do you have to say that?" Due to these experiences of multiracial microaggressions generating feelings of discomfort, isolation, alienation, unacceptance, and being judged, she does not feel a sense of belonging at the institution. As such, in addition to shifting her racial and ethnic identity claims/expressions, she also sometimes isolated herself and disengaged from social interactions with peers.

> Everyone thinks I'm weird. I feel like I don't belong kind of in a sense where it's just like, I can't be myself. You know they always say, "oh, we want this to be your second home" and you know I wanted to be too so I can feel comfortable you know get the stuff I need to get done. But it's really hard sometimes because if you can't feel comfortable, then you just kind of want to stay in your corner.

Compounded together these experiences of exclusion and isolation, along with other types of multiracial microaggressions (objectification and assumed monoracial identity or mistaken identity) invalidated her multiracial and multiethnic identity, which negatively affected

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Elysse's institutional and contextual belonging in various contexts. Not feeling authentically

accepted and validated as a multiracial person (i.e., could not express her multiracial identity,

experienced cultural isolation from differential treatment when she expressed her racial and

ethnic preferences through identity claims and certain actions) triggered her sense of belonging

to be hindered, both institutionally and in different contexts. As a result, she adopted both types

of behavioral strategies as a way to manage her reduced sense of belonging.

Likewise, Somoan also shared her sense of belonging at the institution was often

inhibited due to multiracial microaggressions invalidating her multiracial and multiethnic

identity in various social interactions with her peers and cultural spaces. As she consciously

considered who she was in those spaces (self-identification and how others' perceived her), what

it meant to belong in those spaces, and how she should deal with those situations, she also

showcased varied behaviors across different contexts.

> I feel a lot of times I have to choose half of me and I find that annoying. It's really weird.
> A lot of times, a black group they want to know what I am and they'll say "oh, so you're
> black". And that kind of upsets me, 'cause I'm like "no, I'm multiracial". I don't like
> having to choose. I'm not two parts, I'm just me. ...It took that "aha" moment like "Oh I
> don't have to choose. This is me", you know? Probably when I started dating my
> boyfriend this happened 'cause that's when a lot of stuff came up. Where I kind of had to
> sit and think like "Who am I? How do I want to deal with this? Do I want to deal with
> this?"

For Somoan, self-identifying as multiracial is extremely important to her. When peers at the

institution denied her that opportunity by forcing her to choose a single race identity or labeling

her based on monoracially constructed categories, she felt upset, judged, and annoyed. She

cognitively evaluated how to balance the incongruence between external monoracial norms and

her private feelings and conceptualizations of being multiracial and belonging in different social

and cultural spaces on campus. As a result, she sometimes disrupted the multiracial

microaggression (denial of multiracial reality and exclusion) by verbally justifying her multiracial identity in those spaces.

In addition to verbally disrupting the multiracial microaggression by feeling empowered to stand up for her multiracial identity, there were times where she deliberately disengaged in situations when she was marginalized as the only multiracial person in a particular context. She spoke about feeling unwelcomed and alienated by peers due to being the only biracial and "light-skinned" student in a black student engineering organization, so she stopped participating in it. Furthermore, Somoan also shifted the way she expressed her racial and ethnic identities in order to manage her reduced sense of belonging in cultural spaces within the co-curricular context where she often experienced exclusion and isolation.

> I love doing clubs. I'm in [Caribbean and Latin American student organization], the Latin American club. I was in [African American and black student organization]. I feel being mixed is kind of weird, because you're like a part of everything but then you're not. It's just a weird thing. It's awkward to deal with everyday. For example, when I went to [black engineering student organization], which is the African American engineering club, everyone is usually, most everyone there is straight African American, which is basically half of what I am, but I'm not. I always – it's just hard to fit in sometimes. They know your African American, but you're also white. So, I don't know if you have ever seen the movie Selena. The dad says "you have to be more Mexican and more American". That's how I feel. So when I'm around my black friends, I have to be more black than them, but when you're around your white friends, you have to be more white than them. It's a little difficult. I've learned to just try to figure out who I am really, but there are always people who question your loyalties especially in this time with everything going on. So it can be difficult [to belong].

While Somoan maintained a strong internal sense of self around her multiracial identity, she still chose to shift her racial identity claims and expressions to adhere to monoracial norms that were prevalent in the spaces she was functioning as a way to try to belong.

As seen through the aforementioned examples, participants, like Elysse, Somoan, and others, intentionally processed their emotions and thoughts about self (internal and public racial self-identification), others (enacting multiracial microaggressions), and context (campus racial

climate and peer culture driven by monoracial norms) in relation to feeling (or not) a sense of belonging. In line with Strayhorn's (2012) core elements, this cognitive and emotional processing required them to make meaning of how they belonged (in situations where their multiracial and multiethnic identity was invalidated) and what to do in managing their reduced sense of institutional or contextual belonging (accommodate to or resist conforming to monoracial norms). As such, the need to belong essentially became a motive for some multiracial and multiethnic students to adopt certain behavioral strategies in situations where multiracial microaggressions were enacted.

Data showed it was primarily in contexts where socially constructed monoracial norms were sanctioned that multiracial and multiethnic students experienced cognitive and emotional distress in relation to their sense of belonging at the institution. Participants' internalization of the (in)congruence between the monoracial norms and their multiracial status stemmed from (a) perceptions of the campus racial climate (marginalization and exclusion of multiraciality), and (b) interpersonal experiences of multiracial microaggressions through their interactions with peers in social and cultural spaces within different microsystems (e.g., residence hall, academic classroom, social circle, co-curricular student organization). Strayhorn (2012), among other scholars (e.g., Hurtado & Carter, 1997), suggest that sense of belonging can become salient (hindered or enhanced) in certain contexts, especially if they are part of a marginalized student demographic at the institution. For these participants, it was within spaces and interactions (mainly social and cultural) where monoracial norms were perpetuated that their sense of belonging was hampered. Nonetheless, results also showed that friendships served as a vital source of emotional, social, academic, and cultural support and a context in which their sense of belonging needs were satisfied.

4.3.2   Friendships: Context for validation and enhanced belonging

As the majority of participants faced the hurdles of racial marginalization and discrimination as a source of triggering belonging uncertainty and hindering sense of belonging, friendships functioned as a critical social and culturally validating informal counter-space to those experiences, in which sense of belonging was enhanced. Research has shown that formal and informal social and academic counter-spaces (e.g., identity-based student organizations, study groups with other students of color) are often formed by students of color (and sometimes educators) as a tactic to mitigate negative experiences such as microaggressions and other forms of racism in order for students to connect with others who have similar experiences to find emotional, social, and academic comfort (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). These types of counter-spaces tend to generate positive benefits (e.g., trusting relationships with peers, validation of experiences, nurturing learning environment) for marginalized students of color (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Multiracial and multiethnic students in this study expressed that receiving identity support and having a safe emotional relational space through their friends were essential characteristics that enhanced their belongingness in their friendships. Identity support was provided through a reciprocated, supportive relationship in which multiracial and multiethnic students felt culturally validated and authentically accepted and understood (not judged by others). Participants connected with friends who had relatable experiences (i.e., others who could relate to their experiences of being different) and were like-minded (i.e., empathetic, perspective taking). Furthermore, a safe emotional relational space within their friendships encompassed having a sense of comfort and feeling that they mattered and were cared for by others, all important elements of satisfying the need to belonging (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1985; Strayhorn, 2012).

Elysse shared,

> A sense of belonging for me would be having a close-knit group, not even a group, just like a friend that has a profound relationship. You can talk about things when you have that one anchor...Talking to other mixed race students here, my sister, and my friends in other universities - it's always a never-ending battle between identity. You can have your own identity and you can be sure of yourself, but people are still not sure of you. So in that sense, yeah, it's a kind of like, if you're mixed race or something or multiethnic, it's more of a struggle. Because you want people to see like look, I am who I am and I can be whatever you want me to be in any category. Yeah, so I would say that it's of kind of difficult.

Here, Elysse mentioned that a friendship is an important context for her to experience sense of belonging because it gives her an outlet to engage in meaningful conversations with others who affirm her identity and validate her experiences as a multiracial person. She spoke about the struggles of having to balance external definitions and internal experiences of being mixed race in college and how receiving support from the friends who could relate to her was valuable in providing identity support and a safe emotional relational space. For mixed race and multiethnic students in this study mattering was an essential component of their friendships that made them feel accepted, respected, important, supported, and validated by their friends. Mattering is a known to be a critical factor in promoting sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012) and comprises of multiple characteristics (e.g., feeling respected, others believe in one's success and positive well-being, feeling cared for by others) (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1985).

Similar to Elysse, and other participants, Gerafrican also felt a sense of belonging at the institution through her friends as well and specifically discussed the value of her specific friendship with multiracial students at the institution. She stated,

> A lot of them [mixed race students] were on my floor freshman year. It was really easy [to feel a sense of belonging] because the girl I was talking about before, she's half Irish and half Jamaican, Caribbean, and she's a really unique race that it sticks out so much. I can blend with the Spanish people or many other races, but in general for her she doesn't fit in anywhere, and so she's this little matchstick, they [people at the institution] call her.

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And so me and her can really understand how it's hard to feel accepted in general, but you have to know that we're all the same inside and that's all that really matters.

She expressed the ease of relating to other mixed students with whom she has interacted. In particular, her friendship with another multiracial student provided her with an outlet to discuss unique experiences associated with being mixed race, particularly as students at a PWI driven by monoracial norms. This allowed her to feel a sense of relatedness to her friend based on similar experiences of multiracial microaggressions (i.e., physical appearance playing a factor in how she and her friend were perceived and treated by others). In this context, her friend was a source of emotional and social support by providing validation to Gerafrican in relation to her racialized experiences as a multiracial person. This sense of connection to her mixed race friend and other students with relatable experiences enhanced her sense of belonging in those friendships.

It is important to note that, while many of the participants specifically spoke about their relationships with other mixed race friends being a source of social and cultural validation for their multiracial identity and experiences, students also mentioned their sense of belonging was enhanced in relationships with friends who generally were able to understand and relate to their experiences of being different in the context of a PWI. Students highlighted a desire to connect themselves with diverse others who were open-minded and empathetic, as that provided a space for them to have meaningful cross-racial interactions, bond over mutual interests and similar experiences, and have discussions about race and racism in ways that valued diverse experiences and perspectives. Research has found that interactions with diverse others is associated with positive outcomes such as cultural and racial awareness, openness to diversity, enhanced social self-concept, sense of belonging, among others (Chang, Denson, Saenz, & Misa, 2005; Locks et al., 2008; Strayhorn, 2012). For participants whose sense of belonging was negatively affected by the racial marginalization and discrimination, they stressed how essential it was to have these

friendships as social counter-spaces in which they could intentionally engage in meaningful interactions with diverse others who were not close-minded and exemplified perspective-taking abilities. As such, their sense of belonging needs were satisfied through these interpersonal bonds with friends.

For instance, Gerafrican went on to share the importance of developing bonds with culturally diverse friends who had relatable experiences and who were like-minded, key characteristics that enhanced her sense of belonging within those friendships.

> [Feel a sense of belonging] Through my friends, because most of them are like me. Some of them are mixed and some of them think the way I do, which is like they're always culturally accepting and they can see from a different viewpoint...I love culture and everything, because my combination is interesting and I like learning about other people's culture as well. Different cultures within the university help me to understand myself better as well as understand the other students...As long as you find at least one other person that really understands you, then you will be fine. That's how I feel it is. And from there you can figure out if these other people will be accepting of who you are and be open-minded. I don't feel like anyone should be friends with someone who isn't open-minded because they won't be able to experience new things and so on...So [being] open-minded is being able to see something in someone else's eyes and be able to see their perspective and think about how they see it and why they see it that way and can you accept that. And not being so stubborn and thinking "this is the right way, this is the only way that will work"; but maybe, "oh there is a different path, maybe I should try seeing their path and their way, maybe that's better."

Gerafrican expressed the value of her friendships with open-minded students at the institution was grounded in being culturally accepted and engaging with others who have the ability to understand diverse perspectives. Feeling appreciation and reciprocity of respect for diverse thoughts and experiences were key elements of mattering, which enhanced her sense of belonging among her friends.

Amber, another student, spoke about her belongingness within her group of racially diverse group of friends. She explained her sense of belonging with her friends stemmed from

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feeling a sense of comfort when engaging in meaningful conversations about shared interests and their diverse experiences.

> I have friends that I have been friends with since freshman year. My mother always jokes and says we're like the little United Nations. We're all from different backgrounds and different places around the United States. I feel comfortable when I have people who just can focus on other things, our mutual interests. Or even if they can focus on our differences, but in a fun way where we can actually talk about things...With my group of friends, yeah, it [race and racism] comes up a lot because we are a very diverse little group.

A safe emotional relational space in which Amber was able to have stimulating discussions around mutual interests was an important element of her friendships that enhanced her sense of belonging in those relationships. Moreover, similar to Gerafrican and others, Amber went on to mention she feels a sense of comfort in engaging in meaningful conversations with her friends because of their ability to be empathetic and respectful of diverse thoughts and experiences.

In summary, for the multiracial and multiethnic participants in this study, friendships were a primary space in which students found a safe haven from their negative experiences of racial marginalization and discrimination, and as such where their sense of belonging was enhanced. As students faced the challenges of pervasive monoracial norms on campus both at institutional and interpersonal levels, students surrounded themselves with friends who understood and appreciated their identity and experiences as a multiracial and multiethnic individual. It was within their friendships they found an emotionally safe relational space where they could develop genuine relationships and community with others who were respectful, supportive, empathetic, meaningfully engaging, and authentically accepting of them; all elements that contributed to them feeling a sense of belonging in their friendships.

5.0   DISCUSSION

The present study explored the factors influencing multiracial and multiethnic undergraduate students' institutional and contextual sense of belonging, with an emphasis on race and ethnicity. This study supports and bridges existing scholarship on sense of belonging and multiracial college student experiences as well as offers new insights into how these students' unique needs and experiences affect their sense of belonging. Results revealed, among the various identified factors, the perpetuation of monoracial norms, fluidity of students' racial and ethnic identity, and experiences of multiracial microaggressions were uniquely reflected factors that impacted mixed race and multiethnic students' institutional and contextual belonging. Also, two key behavioral strategies were identified that students used to manage their reduced sense of belonging. Furthermore, students expressed their sense of belonging was enhanced in the context of their friendships, as they forged meaningful relationships with like-others who shared mutual interests, reciprocated respect for diverse thoughts and experiences, and validated their identities and experiences as a multiracial individual.

This study contributes to the scholarship by extending our understanding of *how* monoracial norms seep into the ways students understand and experience what it means to belong as a multiracial person at a PWI, both to the institution and within different contexts. Monoraciality was found to be a unique factor that negatively influenced many multiracial and multiethnic students' institutional and contextual belonging, at an institutional and interpersonal

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level. Findings demonstrate as students navigated their social position within existing systems of monoracial privilege on campus, they were faced with messages forcing them to internally and externally evaluate what it meant for them to belong based on certain criteria shaped by socially constructed monoracial norms (i.e., stemming from peer culture, lack of institutional validation of multiracial students' identities and experiences, societal and sociohistorical forces, among others).

It was found that students' multiracial and multiethnic identity was at the crux of how others' perceived and treated them and the way they made meaning of how to belong in certain social and cultural spaces. Students often evaluated their own multiracial status (i.e., racial and ethnic identity claims, physical appearance, cultural knowledge and expressions) in relation to the socially constructed norms of monoraciality they perceived in the environment and within different subcultures. This was both self-initiated through their own perceptions of the campus racial climate and enacted by others through the questioning of their racial authenticity (i.e., multiracial microaggressions) or the validation of it (i.e., friendships). As such, their sense of belonging was enhanced and hindered depending on the context and was found to be a motive to drive certain behaviors.

A key finding related to this that validates and expands on existing research, was that mixed race and multiethnic students' perceptions of key aspects of the campus racial climate (e.g., underserved, monoracial subcultures) stemming from the dominant monoracial culture and norms on campus was a source for triggering belonging uncertainty for many of the participants. While a few scholars (e.g., Guillermo-Wann, 2013 – identified aspects of campus racial climate; Johnson et al., 2007 – perception of campus racial climate as a predictor of sense of belonging) have suggested that mixed race students' perceptions of the campus racial climate are important

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for student' racial identity and general experiences in college, these studies have not fully examined how aspects of the campus racial climate may impact their sense of belonging in college. This study adds to this literature by shedding insights into what and how aspects of the campus racial climate triggered belonging uncertainty.

In particular, students' perceptions of multiraciality being marginalized and overlooked within the dominant monoracial and white cultures highlighted their acute awareness of the oppressive conditions they were functioning in as a multiracial student at a PWI. These observations of the campus racial climate induced negative emotions (i.e., alienation, isolation, discomfort, undervalued, unwelcomed), which resulted in students questioning how accepted, welcomed, and valued mixed race students and their experiences were in the broader context of the institution and within different contexts (i.e., academic, peer culture in social and co-curricular settings). When students do not perceive congruence between institutional culture, values, and norms and their own identities, experiences, values, and beliefs, their sense of belonging may be negatively impacted (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Strayhorn, 2012). In this study, this was apparent as participants shared feelings of uncertainty around how they fit in and were valued and accepted at the institution overall and within different subcultures.

What this finding indicates is that monoracial conceptions of race inherently embedded in the cultures and practices at an institutional level may have serious implications for mixed race students' sense of belonging, an area of research this study expands upon and should continue to be further explored. While monoracial cultures and norms may certainly be beneficial to racially and ethnically diverse student populations, multiraciality challenges these socially constructed monoracial norms found in the institution environment. As such, lower levels of sense of

belonging may be elicited for multiracial students, as seen through the students' examples in this study. Environmental factors, such as these monoracial norms, also have an impact on mixed race students' sense of belonging on an interpersonal and individual level.

Social connectedness and social acceptance are essential to experiencing sense of belonging. Research supports that the level and quality of interactions students of color have with their peers matters in how they experience social connectedness, sense of community, or sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Locks et al., 2008; Strayhorn 2012). For mixed race college students, the literature points to the importance of these peer interactions and peer cultures in their racial identity development and how they navigate monoracially constructed spaces on campus (King, 2008; Renn, 2004). Ample research shows mixed race students' general experiences, interpersonal interactions, and identity formations are fluid and complex (Chaudhari & Pizzolato, 2008; Kellogg & Lidell, 2010; Literte, 2010; Renn, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Root, 1990; Sands & Schuh, 2004; Wijeyesinghe, 2012). Recognition, acknowledgement, acceptance, and validation of their multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds in monoracial spaces may often be questioned in their interactions with those around them. When multiracial students develop relationships with others who may understand their experiences of being multiracial or generally marginalized (e.g., friends, faculty, family), positive outcomes (i.e., identity development) may result due to validation, respect, and mutual interests (King, 2008; Renn, 2004). Participants in this study expressed that both positive (friendships) and negative (multiracial microaggressions) interpersonal interactions with peers directly affected their institutional and contextual belonging.

In the context of participants' discriminatory experiences of different types of multiracial microaggressions, data pointed to reduced belonging stimulating participants' cognitive

processing of emotional distress, thereby affecting their behaviors. This finding adds new insights into how a unique form of racism – monoracism (multiracial microaggressions) – has a direct effect on mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging in social and cultural contexts. Results revealed students utilized two behavioral strategies as a means to manage their reduced sense of belonging: (a) accommodating to monoracial norms through situational identity and (b) resisting to conform to monoracial norms by disengaging in the situation or disrupting the multiracial microaggression. While research on multiracial identity development shows that resisting to identify in accordance to monoracial standards and self-determination (determining how one identifies independent of environmental or cultural norms) are important factors that influence situational identity (Renn, 2004), this study expands on this literature by pinpointing some of these behavioral responses as key behavioral strategies participants used to manage their hindered sense of belonging.

In navigating socially constructed monoracial norms through their social interactions with peers in different contexts (e.g., residence hall, academic classroom) and peer cultures of identity-based student organizations, participants' racial authenticity was often questioned based on their physical appearance and cultural knowledge and expressions. As seen in the examples of Elysse, Somoan, and others, this prompted them to engage in conscious evaluation and processing of their emotions, what it meant to belong in a certain space (in-group versus out-group, inclusion and exclusion criteria), who was sanctioning the criteria around belongingness, and how to behaviorally respond. When students accommodated to monoracial norms by shifting their identity claim or expression, they often did with the intention to strive to belong. It was a tactic that was embraced to gratify a need to belong in a certain context, typically in relation to monoracial identity-based student organizations or events. Furthermore, as students sometimes

felt emotional distressed from these multiracial microaggressions, some also chose to resist conforming to monoracial norms through disengagement from a situation by physically leaving or ignoring the multiracial microaggression to reduce the stress that was induced by multiracial microaggression. Others chose to resist conforming by verbally disrupting the multiracial microaggression. This was often done through humor (e.g., jokes, sarcasm) or standing up for oneself (pride in multiracial identity was a source of resilience). This finding is a critical contribution to extant scholarship, as it sheds new insights into key affective, cognitive, relational, and behavioral elements of sense of belonging in the context of multiracial microaggressions.

For most of the participants in this study, multiracial microaggressions negatively influenced their sense of belonging. However, it is important to also mention that three students did not experience a reduced sense of belonging as a result of these multiracial microaggressions for different reasons as previously discussed in the findings chapter. This implies there may be variations in the way mixed race and multiethnic students process multiracial microaggressions and the degree of influence it may have in how they felt about belonging in a certain social or cultural context.

For participants who felt their institutional and contextual sense of belonging was reduced due to monoracism at institutional and interpersonal levels, friendships served as key informal social and culturally validating counter-spaces for participants to experience an enhanced sense of belonging. Forming social attachments with others who validated their identities and experiences as a multiracial individual, could relate to being different at the institution, shared mutual interests, and showed reciprocated respect for diverse thoughts and experiences were integral elements of their friendships that enhanced their contextual belonging

among those friend groups. These conclusions support existing literature that illustrates positive peer interactions are associated with positive outcomes, such as identity development, sense of belonging, persistence, among others (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Locks et al., 2008; Renn, 2004; Strayhorn, 2012).

Abundant literature points to the fact that when one feels they matter, are accepted, valued, or needed, the experience of belonging becomes optimal and can propel positive behaviors and well-being (Bauemister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1954; Osterman, 2000; Strayhorn, 2012). Multiracial and multiethnic students in this study showed a desire to form and maintain relationships with others they felt a sense of relatedness to, which elicited positive emotions (e.g., accepted, mattering, welcomed, included, understood). As a part of those relationships, cultural validation of one's experiences and identity was an important catalyst for participants to feel belonging. Seen with Gerafrican and Elysse, among others, being able to relate to and confide in peers who could understand their experiences as a mixed race and marginalized individual was important for them. Friendships served as a space where students could find a safe haven from the experiences of monoracism (multiracial microaggressions, navigating monoracial subcultures, exclusion of multiraciality). Most of the multiracial and multiethnic participants in this study also reflected that social validation (i.e., mutual interests, reciprocal feelings of respect towards diverse thoughts and experiences) was an important catalyst in enhancing their contextual belonging with their friends.

Overall, what this finding indicates is the importance of fostering social and cultural support for multiracial and multiethnic students. Data pointed to students feeling congruence between their friends' and their own experiences, values, and norms, which bolstered students' sense of belonging in the context of their friendships. Furthermore, social and cultural validation

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seemed to play a key role in normalizing mixed race student experiences and was an integral element to feeling a sense of belonging for these participants.

Collectively, the main findings from the study illustrate that race and sense of belonging are inextricably linked for multiracial and multiethnic students. Multiraciality challenges dominant monoracial conceptions of race, and for these students their unique needs and experiences may have implications for how they experience sense of belonging, as seen through the findings of this study. Through their perceptions and experiences of racial marginalization and discrimination, participants were more likely to feel lower levels of sense of belonging. Findings offered deeper insights into important affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects that showed participants made conscious decisions on how to behaviorally react in response to managing their reduced belongingness in the context of some of these experiences. On the other hand, students exemplified higher levels of sense of belonging in the context of their friendships.

In summary, this study is relevant and responsive as it extends the conversations about sense of belonging to be more inclusive of multiracial and multiethnic students, a growing student demographic in higher education. Furthermore, the study bridges a gap that exists among different bodies of scholarship in higher education (sense of belonging and multiracial students' identity development and experiences), which is important to better grasp the realities of multiracial and multiethnic students' sense of belonging in college. In providing new insights into the unique factors that bear on mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging, this study also offers a foundation for educators and administrators to make strides towards transforming dominant climates and cultures on campus to be more equitable for all students.

5.1   LIMITATIONS AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations are important to note for the present study. Areas for future research are also discussed. First, as the researcher and interviewer in this study, I acknowledge my positionality as a self-identifying monoracial, multiethnic female. My race, ethnicity, gender, as well as personal and professional experiences with studying multiraciality and multiethnicity in higher education may have unintentionally influenced my interactions with participants and interpretations of the interview content related to racialized experiences.

Second, the sample size was small and limited to mixed race and multiethnic undergraduate students. The mixed race and multiethnic sample was not representative of the entire multiracial and multiethnic population, resulting in limited generalizability of the findings. Hence, future studies should consider larger sample sizes to improve the generalizability of the findings. Conducting research with a more diversified multiracial and multiethnic student population (e.g., dual minority, mixed race white students) acknowledges the heterogeneity of narratives and lived experiences mixed race and multiethnic people represent. Also, diversifying the sample to include a more balanced representation of genders, class years, and other key variables that might influence students' college experiences is important for future research to incorporate.

Third, the study was conducted at a single predominantly white institution, limiting understandings of how sense of belonging is experienced by mixed race and multiethnic students across different institution types and geographic contexts. Conducting research on sense of belonging among mixed race and multiethnic student populations attending different types of institutions (e.g., minority serving institutions, PWIs) in different geographic locations would contribute to the extant scholarship by identifying varying contextual influences. Expanding the

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research in this area may shed light on different aspects of their experiences that may be important in how they develop and process sense of belonging given varying institutional campus racial climates, policies, and practices on campus as well as regional differences.

Fourth, the study was conducted at a single point in time, with the intention to explore experiences and not development (a process of growth over time) of students' sense of belonging. Future scholarship on sense of belonging with mixed race and multiethnic students should consider taking on a longitudinal approach to offer a more holistic account of how students are experiencing *and* developing sense of belonging across different periods of time. Fifth, students self-selected to participate in the study, which highlights that students actively expressed an interest in participating in interviews to share their lived experiences. This may not be reflective of other mixed race and multiethnic students' experiences that were not as inclined to openly discuss their narratives about their race and sense of belonging at the institution.

Sixth, though this study offered important insights into the affective, cognitive, relational, and behavioral elements associated with sense of belonging, more in depth research is needed to unpack how and why multiracial and multiethnic students' cognitively process, behaviorally respond, affectively react the way they do when their sense of belonging is either enhanced or inhibited. Research should explore interactions between these multidimensional aspects to determine if patterns exist. One concrete example from this study that warrants further research is in relation to the significant finding of students adopting two types of behavioral strategies in managing their reduced sense of belonging due to multiracial microaggressions. In this study, it was not discernable why students decided to adopt the specific behavioral strategies when they did. What were the differences and similarities (in terms of cognitive evaluation and flexibility) between when a student decided to accommodate to monoracial norms and when they chose to

resist conforming to those norms? Future research should consider exploring these reasons, as it may provide a clearer depiction of essential cognitive, behavioral, and affective patterns.

Seventh, while the primary mode of data collection (one-on-one interviews) is a reliable way of gathering data from mixed race and multiethnic individuals, it still has certain limitations to consider. Some primary challenges of conducting interviews include interviewees' responses may not be completely representative of their thoughts, may not possess relevant information pertinent to the interview goals, may not articulate their opinions well, or may not be willing to share their knowledge (Griffee, 2005). Thus, as self-reported data by students is important, future studies should consider data triangulation by collecting data through other means such as observation or from other individuals relevant to these students' experiences (e.g., institutional or organizational perspectives, perspectives from peers).

Eighth, while the qualitative inquiry used in this study offered a student-centered perspective that depicted the realities of multiracial and multiethnic students' sense of belonging in college, more qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies on sense of belonging is warranted. For instance, increasing comparative research studies between monoracial and monoethnic students and mixed race and multiethnic students will help distinguish certain experiences around belongingness that might be unique to mixed race and multiethnic students' needs. This data can further be used to enhance existing quantitative measures of sense of belonging in postsecondary education to accurately capture mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging. With existing quantitative measures grounded in data primarily gathered from monoracial students of color and white students, increasing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies may provide new insights on mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging that might inform novel ways to understand and measure this important construct.

Lastly, while this study was grounded in perspectives within higher education scholarship, it is important for future studies to consider adopting other interdisciplinary lenses (i.e., ethnic studies, counseling) to examine the experiences of mixed race and multiethnic students' belongingness in college, as they might provide additional useful frameworks to critically analyze and understand these experiences.

5.2   IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

There are several implications for practice based on the findings from this study. Many of the participants in this study conveyed feelings of alienation, isolation, discomfort, and being unwelcomed as they internalized perceptions of being underrepresented and underserved on campus. Educators must acknowledge the presence of multiracial and multiethnic students on campus as a critical step towards creating a college environment where they feel welcome, accepted, comfortable, and important. Institutional validation of multiracial and multiethnic students sends the message that the institution cares about their success, sense of belonging at the institution, and overall well-being.

Furthermore, educators and administrators must make strides towards transforming dominant monoracial culture and values prevalent on campus to be more culturally relevant, engaging, and inclusive of multiraciality. Evident in this study was students' belonging uncertainty stemming from their negative perceptions and experiences relating to the marginalization and exclusion of multiraciality in academic curricula, co-curricular spaces, and general resources. As such, assessments of the campus racial climate may be useful in understanding how multiracial and multiethnic students perceive the campus racial climate. In

addition, students experienced marginalization and discrimination in their social interactions with others on campus, which affected their feelings of belonging. Enhancing dialogues, curricula, and trainings (e.g., intergroup dialogues, social justice training, leadership training, ethnic studies) to be more inclusive of mixed race identities, experiences, and histories in formal and informal academic (courses), social (events), and co-curricular (student organizations, programs, activities) contexts that engage students around topics of race and racism would be important. Doing this may facilitate students to critically think about race and racial formation in different ways that validate the diversity among various racial and ethnic populations and may also contribute to improving race relations on campus (e.g., lessen occurrences of multiracial microaggressions, dismantle rigid socially constructed monoracial boundaries). Additionally, offering identity-based resources that are geared towards directly supporting multiracial and multiethnic students was a recommendation brought up by participants in this study. Generating workshops for students to better understand and name their experiences as a mixed race person or having counselors who specialize in understanding the needs of multiracial people may support and guide multiracial students in ways that are beneficial to their personal well-being and success in college.

Moreover, students in this study stressed the importance of forging relationships with friends who were like-minded, had similar or relatable experiences, provided identity support, and offered a safe emotional relational space. Drawing from students' suggestions on how institutions could foster multiracial students' sense of belonging in college, educators must consider cultivating new or enhance existing spaces (i.e., social, physical, psychological) across various domains (e.g., residential, academic, co-curricular) to be more inviting for mixed race and multiethnic students as well as more intentional in fostering meaningful interactions.

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Creating opportunities for these students to share about their mixed race experiences and connect with others who are like-minded or share similar experiences through events or a multiracial student organization may enhance their institutional and contextual sense of belonging (e.g., feel authentically accepted, that they matter, validated, welcomed, socially supported, included, and respected), among other outcomes.

In summary, the perceptions students provided in this study are an important start for better understanding the nuances associated with sense of belonging in college when navigating dominant monoracial culture and norms at a PWI. As such, culturally relevant and responsive philosophies, policies, and practices grounded in stronger understandings of multiraciality are fundamental. They are essential in fostering equitable climates and inclusive peer cultures that embody normalizing and validating mixed race and multiethnic students' identities and experiences. As such, studies like this one are important to equip higher education professionals with the information on how to effectively create, enhance, and implement practices and shape cultures on campus to better support these students' sense of belonging.

5.3 CONCLUSION

Sense of belonging is a vital dimension of students' overall development and learning in college and plays an important role in achieving the broader goals of higher education. Understanding the factors that influence mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging is essential for educators and administrators as they work towards creating equitable climates and cultures that are inclusive and engaging of this student population. As a population that challenges dominant monoracial conceptions of race, their unique needs and experiences may have implications for

how they experience sense of belonging, as seen through the findings of this study. This study strengthens the discourse, scholarship, and understandings of race and sense of belonging in higher education in ways that are representative and inclusive of multiraciality and multiethnicity. By deconstructing how normative understandings of race (i.e., monoraciality) in higher education influence mixed race and multiethnic students' sense of belonging, we may be able to depict important ways educators and administrators can begin to transform climates and cultures on campuses to be more responsive and relevant to this student population. This study offers a foundation for further exploration into the experiences of institutional and contextual belonging for mixed race and multiethnic students, as it identified various key factors that directly impacted their belonging. The opportunities for research in this area are ample, as there is quite a bit the field of higher education still needs to understand about sense of belonging and this growing student demographic.

PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Table 2. Participant Background Information

Participant	Self-Identification of Gender	Self-Identification of Race	Self-Identification of Ethnicity	Race(s) Selections Based on Provided List of Races (see Appendix F)	Race & Ethnicity of Mother	Race & Ethnicity of Father	1st in Family to Attend College	Year in School	Major(s) & Minor(s)
Amanda	female	Multiracial	Multiethnic	Asian black or African American white multiracial or mixed race	American black and Chinese	Bermudian black and white	No	4th Year	Linguistics; Japanese
Amber	female	Black & White	Jamaican & Irish	black or African American white multiracial or mixed race	white Irish American	black Jamaican	No	3rd Year	Emergency Medicine Minor: Chemistry
Bob	male	black	Guyanese, Nigerian, American	black or African American	Nigerian black	Guyanese black	No	2nd Year	Supply Chain Management Minor: Chinese

Table 2 Continued

Elysse	female	Black, White, Native American, Hispanic	Hispanic, Columbian + Jamaican	black or African American Latino/a multiracial or mixed race	white, Native American, (Columbian) Hispanic	black (Jamaican)	No	1st Year	Anthropology Minors: French; Chemistry
Gerafrican	female	(Gerafrican) German-African-American	German-African-American	black or African American white biracial	Eritrean	German	No	3rd Year	Biology; Anthropology Minors: German; Chemistry
Olivia	female	mixed (self-identify), black and white	Scottish/unknown	black or African American white multiracial or mixed race biracial	White Nordic, Scottish, Prussian	Black n/a (ethnicity)	No	3rd Year	Anthropology Minors: Korean; Linguistics
Rachel	female	white	white/Hispanic	Latino/a white multiracial or mixed race	Hispanic	white	No	1st Year	English; Spanish
Randall	male	African American & Italian	N/A	black or African American white biracial	Italian	African American with Native American and European heritages	No	2nd Year	Finance; Supply Chain Management Minor: Public Service
Somoan	female	Multiracial, black + white	black, Portuguese, French	black or African American multiracial or mixed race	Portuguese & black	black & French	No	3rd Year	Sociology Minors: Spanish; Nutrition
Sophia	female	Caucasian, African American, Dominican	Spanish	black or African American white multiracial or mixed race	Caucasian	African American, Dominican (Spanish)	Yes	1st Year	Psychology; Pre-Pharmacy
Victoria	female	Black + White	Black, German, British, Scottish	American Indian or Alaska Native black or African American white multiracial or mixed race biracial	black + Cherokee	German, British, Scottish (white)	Yes	1st Year	Social Work Certificate: Writing

RECRUITMENT CORRESPONDENCE

Recruitment Email for Professors/Instructors

Hello Name**,**

I am a doctoral student in the [name of program] at the [institution] School of Education. As part of my Ph.D. dissertation research, I am conducting a qualitative study with multiracial and multiethnic college students to better understand their experiences around cultivating a sense of belonging in college. The results of the study are intended to inform the work of postsecondary educators and researchers that are focused on understanding and authentically promoting students' sense of belonging on campus. Students are asked to complete a questionnaire and participate in an interview that is anticipated to last approximately two hours. Upon completion of one's participation one will receive $10. With students arriving back at school at the start of the year, I was curious to know if it would be possible to come at the beginning or the end of your class (whichever you prefer) during [insert dates] to talk about my study and circulate a sign-up sheet for those who are interested. It should take no longer than 5-10 minutes. I have attached a flyer to circulate electronically to your students. The flyer describes the eligibility criteria. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at [email address] or [phone number]. Thank you for your consideration and time.

Best,
Prema Chaudhari

Recruitment Email for Student Organizations

Hello Name**,**

I am a doctoral student in the [name of program] at the [institution] School of Education. As a previous graduate student assistant through the [name of department] at the [institution], I have always had a genuine interest in learning more about how students like you are experiencing a sense of belonging to your institution and communities on campus. In particular, for this project, I'm interested in understanding the experiences of students who identify with two or more racial and/or ethnic backgrounds. As part of my Ph.D. dissertation research, I am conducting a qualitative study with multiracial and multiethnic college students to better understand their experiences around cultivating a

sense of belonging in college. The results of the study are intended to inform the work of postsecondary educators and researchers that are focused on understanding and authentically promoting students' sense of belonging on campus. With students arriving back at school at the start of the year, I was curious to know if you would be willing to circulate the attached flyer to students in your organization or to friends you know that might be interested. Students are asked to complete a questionnaire and participate in an interview that is anticipated to last approximately two hours. Upon completion of one's participation one will receive $10. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at [email address] or [phone number]. Thank you for your consideration and time.

Best,
Prema Chaudhari

RECRUITMENT FLYER

SHARE YOUR NARRATIVE.

CONTRIBUTE TO RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION.

To Qualify for the Study You Must

- Be a **full-time Academia University undergraduate** student enrolled in a **minimum of 12 credits** with the exception of part-time seniors in their last term before graduation (ages 18 and older)

- Self-identify with **two or more races or ethnicities**

Receive $10 for **1-2 hours** of your time **in-person**
on the Academia University campus.

**TO LEARN MORE OR SCHEDULE A TIME TO PARTICIPATE
IN THE STUDY**

Contact Prema   [phone number]   [email address]
School of Education, [name of institution]

APPENDIX D

IN-PERSON RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hello. I am here to briefly share information about a research study opportunity. The purpose of this research study is to better understand multiracial and multiethnic students' experiences around cultivating a sense of belonging in college. We are looking for college students who may be interested and willing to share their thoughts about the experiences they have had during their time at the university.

There are two main criteria to be eligible for this study. The first is that you must be enrolled as a full-time Academia University undergraduate student enrolled in a minimum of 12 credits with the exception of part-time seniors in their last term before graduation. The second is that you must self-identify with two or more races and/or ethnicities. I'll be asking students to complete a small questionnaire packet and participate in a one-on-one interview, which should take approximately 1-2 hours of your time in-person. We will meet on Academia University's campus for everyone's convenience. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop completing the survey or interview at any time. With this project, there are no foreseeable risks nor are there any direct benefits to you. The information you provide will be confidential and will be securely locked. Eligible students who complete the questionnaire and interview will receive $10 as a token of our appreciation.

If you are interested, I have a sign up sheet here where you can provide your name and preferred contact information to schedule a meet up. In addition, I have a flyer that has information about the study and contact information. If you know someone else who may be eligible and interested in participating feel free to pass this information along. This study is being conducted by Prema Chaudhari, who can be reached at [phone number] if you have any questions. Thank you for your time.

Date of Interview   _____   Pseudonym   _____

Interview Start Time _____   End Time   _____
Interviewer   _____

INTERVIEW CONTEXT & INFORMED CONSENT
Thank you for volunteering for this study. This research study centers on understanding how multiracial and multiethnic college students are experiencing sense of belonging at their institution. Before we begin, I ask all students to provide me with an alternative name for confidentiality purposes. What would you like your alternative name to be? During our conversation today, I'd like to learn about how mixed race and multiethnic students, like you, are experiencing a sense of belonging to your institution and communities on campus. Ultimately, this project is intended to inform the work of university educators that are focused on authentically promoting students' sense of belonging on campus. Since you are volunteering, please know that at any point you can decline to answer questions or refuse to participate. After we've completed our conversation in this interview, you will be provided with $10 as a token of our appreciation. Should you withdraw in the midst of the survey or interview, you will not receive the $10. To ensure I capture everything, I will be audio recording this conversation. Do I have your permission to record this conversation? After the interview has been transcribed, I'd like to touch base with you if I have any follow-up questions and also for you to review the transcription. I want to make sure that what you shared in the conversation accurately reflects what you intended to convey. If there is anything that you would like to clarify we can touch base again after that as well. Is it okay that I contact you for a follow-up? Thank you.

INTRODUCTION
- **To start off, tell me a little bit about yourself.**
   [Probe: major, year in school, aspects of college you enjoy or dislike]
      o *Follow-up*: How do you racially identify? Ethnically identify?
         [Probe: importance of racial and ethnic identity, shifting identities across contexts]

SENSE OF BELONGING IN COLLEGE

- **I'd like for you to reflect on your experiences at this institution. In what ways do you feel a sense of connection to your institution?**
  [Probe: space(s) on campus you feel comfortable, accepted, valued, supported, welcomed, or a part of; transitional times; institutional fit; social, academic, co-curricular, emotional, cultural]
  - *Follow-up*: What spaces on campus are you the most engaged in or feel connected to? (e.g., academic settings, residence halls, co-curricular spaces, peers)? Why?

  (Follow student's lead and ask follow-up questions about co-curricular life, academic engagement, and interactions with peers if the student does not initially bring it up.)

  - **Co-curricular Life**: **During your time here at the institution, what programs, services, or organizations have you been involved with and to what extent you feel a part of those communities?**
    [Probe: type of activities and organizations (i.e., student organizations, leadership programs, tutoring services, residence hall, living learning community, community-based), frequency of involvement, leadership role, type of support]

  - **Academic Engagement**: **In terms of your academic engagement, tell me about your involvement in your classes and the type of interactions you have with faculty.**
    [Probe: faculty or staff involvement in your academic or professional interests, extent of interest in major, comfort with asking questions in class, peer interactions related to academics (i.e., study group, group assignment), racial and ethnic issues in class, involvement in academic support programs]

  - **Interactions with Peers:** **Could you describe the types of interactions you have with your peers?**
    [Probe: support, exclusion, moments of conflict, diversity-related, importance of peers in feeling a sense of connection to the institution]

- **How would you describe the university environment? In relation to race and ethnicity?**
  [Probe: open-minded, welcoming, unsupportive, resourceful]
  - *Follow-up*: How often is race or ethnicity brought up on campus? By whom? What about mixed race or multiethnicity?
  - *Follow-up*: What is your perception of race relations and attitudes about being mixed race or multiethnic on campus? Does it play a factor in how you feel about having a sense of belonging at this institution?

- **Could you describe in detail any experiences or interactions during your time at this institution where you felt like you belonged? How about when you felt like you didn't belong?**
  [Probe: with peers or faculty, social identity (i.e., race or ethnicity) related situations; how it made you feel (i.e., felt accepted, valued, or comfortable or felt judged, hurt, angry, isolated,

excluded) (affect), your thought process & perspective (cognitive), what did you do (behavioral)]

- o *Follow-up:* What factors contributed to that feeling of belonging (or lack of)?
- o *Follow-up*: Have there been specific situations where your race or ethnicity has played a role in whether you felt like you belonged at the institution? Tell me about it. [Probe: positive/supportive/encouraging (e.g., accepted, shared identity space), negative/difficult (e.g., isolation, hostility, exclusion, prejudice, or discrimination)]

- **I'd like for you to think about what it means to have or experience a sense of belonging in college. How would you describe having a sense of belonging?**
  [Probe: what would you want or need to feel a stronger sense of connection or belonging to the institution?]

- **What do you think the university can do to authentically support students' experiences around feeling connected, accepted, and included at the institution? Particularly for multiracial or multiethnic college students?**

CLOSING
- **Is there anything else you would like to share with me? Do you have questions for me?**

APPENDIX F

DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Gender _____
Age _____
Major _____
Minor (if applicable) _____

Education Level (select one)
First-Year   Sophomore   Junior   Senior   Graduate

How long have you been a student at the university? (select one)
1 year   2 years   3 years   4 years   5 years   6 years   7+ years

Do you live on- or off-campus? _____
      If on campus, do you live in a residence hall?   Yes   No
      Did you ever participate in the living learning program?   Yes   No

How many siblings do you have? _____

Are you the first in your family to attend college?
Yes   No

Is anyone in your immediate family enrolled in college currently?
Yes   No   If yes, who? _____

Immigration status (select one):
      ___ 1st generation: immigrated to U.S.
      ___ 2nd generation: child of parents who were first to immigrate to U.S.
      ___ 3rd generation: grandparents immigrated to U.S.
      ___ 4th + generation

Annual household income (where you grew up): _____

Were you eligible for a Federal Pell Grant?   Yes   No

How do you self-identify racially? _____
How do you identify ethnically?   _____

Race & Ethnicity of Mother: _____
Race & Ethnicity of Father: _____
Race & Ethnicity of Legal Guardian other than biological parents (if applicable):
_____

Are you a transfer student?   Yes   No
      If yes:
               When was the transfer(s)? _____
               From where? _____
               Reason for transfer? _____

Are you involved in activities, programs, organizations, or services outside of academics?
      Yes   No
If yes:
What are you involved in? _____
How frequently do you engage in these activities, programs, organizations, or services?
_____

Do you hold a leadership position within any of these?   Yes   No
      If yes:
               What program or organization? _____
               What leadership position(s)? _____
               How long? _____

Are you employed? Yes   No
      If yes:
               How many hours per week do you work? _____
               Where are you employed? _____

What is your race according to the following race(s) (select one or more)?
___ American Indian or Alaska Native
___ Asian
___ black or African American
___ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
___ Latino/a
___ Arab or Middle Eastern
___ white
___ multiracial or mixed race
___ biracial
___ race not included above: _____

CODEBOOK

Table 3. Factors Influencing Sense of Belonging Code List

Factors Influencing Sense of Belonging Code List		
Code	**Sub-Code**	**Description**
MR MICROAGG		*Multiracial microaggressions* (Johnston & Nadal, 2010)
MR MICROAGG	EXCL/ISOL	*Exclusion or Isolation* "Occurs when a multiracial person is made to feel excluded or isolated based on their multiracial status" (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 133)
MR MICROAGG	EXOT/OBJECT	*Exoticization or Objectification* "Occurs when a multiracial person is dehumanized or treated like an object" (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 133)
MR MICROAGG	ASSUMP MONORAC	*Assumption of Monoracial Identity or Mistaken Identity* "Occurs when multiracial people are assumed or mistaken to be monoracial (or a member of a group they do not identify with)" (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 133)
MR MICROAGG	DENY MR	*Denial of Multiracial Reality* "Occurs when a multiracial person is not allowed to choose their own racial identity" (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 133)
RES		*Residential Status*
RES	LIVE ON	*Lives On-Campus* Student living/lived on-campus in residence hall
RES	LIVE OFF	*Lives Off-Campus* Student living/lived off-campus
RES	POS RA	*Positive Interactions with Resident Assistant* Student has positive interactions with their resident assistant in their residence hall
RES	COMM	*Sense of Community in Residence Hall/Floor* Student expresses that they experience(d) a sense of community with their peers in the residence hall/floor they live in
ACAD		*Academic Experiences*
ACAD	CLASS OR DEPT SZ (SM or LG)	*Class or Academic Department Size (Small or Large)* Class or academic department size influences the student's experience of belonging
ACAD	SUPP - FAM - ADVSR - RESRC CTR	*Academic Support* Student receives academic support from in or out of class agents (e.g., family, advisor, academic support organizations and services)
ACAD	FAC INTXNS	*Interactions with Faculty* Student's interactions with faculty member(s)

Table 3 Continued

ACAD	ID LEARN	*Identification with Learning* Student identifies with their learning experiences through intrinsic enjoyment of learning or personal connection to content they are learning
ACAD	PEER INTXNS	*Interactions with Peers in Academic Context* Student's interactions with peers related to academic experiences or in an academic context
SOC INTXNS		***Social Interactions with Others***
SOC	DIV INTXNS	*Interactions with Diverse Others* Student's interactions with diverse others
SOC	OPP INTXNS	*Opportunities to Interact with Others & Meet New People* Opportunities to interact with others and meet new people
SOC	CLOSE MINDED	*Close-Minded People* Student discusses interactions with others who exemplify close-minded perspectives and attitudes about diversity
SOC	FRIEND	*Friendships* Student discusses their friendships
	- MR FRIEND	*Friendships: Mixed Race Friends* Student discusses having friendships with other mixed race students
CO-CURR		***Co-Curricular Experiences***
CO-CURR	CO-CURR INV CO-CURR INV-LACK OF	*Co-Curricular Involvement* Involvement (or lack of) in co-curricular experiences such as events, programs, student organizations
CO-CURR	CO-CURR OPP DIV ENG	*Co-Curricular Opportunity for Diversity Engagement* Student talks about opportunities to engage in culturally relevant initiatives, events, programs, and services
CO-CURR	CO-CURR EXCL ST ORGS	*Co-Curricular Student Organizations are Exclusive* Student feels student organizations are/can be intentionally or unintentionally exclusive (observed or experienced)
CAMP CLIM		***Campus Climate***
PERC RAC CLIM		*Perceptions of Campus Racial Climate* Student's perceptions of how race, racism, racialized experiences, and racial issues are prevalent on campus and influences students
PERC RAC CLIM	STRUCT DIV	*Structural Diversity* Refers to the student's perceptions of the racial and/or ethnic composition of students at the institution
	- MR INVIS	*Structural Diversity – Mixed Race Invisible* Student observes mixed race and multiethnic students comprise of an extremely small percentage of the student population at the institution
PERC RAC CLIM	WH PRIV	*White Privilege* Student makes an observation that being racially white on the campus gives the student an advantage or privilege
PERC RAC CLIM	MONORAC CULTR	*Monoracial or Monoethnic Subcultures* Student perceives monoracial and monoethnic subcultures on campus
PERC RAC CLIM	RACISM	*Racism* Student observes certain students are discriminated against based on race (e.g., stereotype threat, monoracism) or have negative attitudes or misperceptions about race relations. Student experiences racism.
CAMP CLIM	RIGOR ACAD CULTR	*Rigor of Academic Culture* The perception and experiences around the rigor of academic culture at the institution
CAMP CLIM	INSTIT SZ – LG	*Size of Institution – Large* Student observes the institution is large in size - large student population, physical layout of campus
CAMP CLIM	INST PRIDE	*Institutional Pride* Student observes institutional pride on campus or experiences institution pride

Table 3 Continued

CAMP CLIM	ENVIR FRNDLY/SUPP	*Friendly/Supportive Campus Environment* Student describes the overall campus environment generally as friendly or supportive
CAMP CLIM	ENVIR UNWELC/ UNSUPP	*Unwelcoming/Unsupportive Campus Climate* Student describes the overall campus environment as unwelcoming, not accepting, unsupportive
CAMP CLIM	PERC CLASS PRIV	*Perceptions of Class Privilege* Student observes class privilege at the institution through observations or experiences of classism
CAMP CLIM	CULT INTEG	*Cultural Integrity* Student describes the existence or nonexistence of culturally relevant, inclusive, and engaging practices and strategies at the institution (e.g., engaging students' diverse backgrounds in a positive manner toward the development of more relevant pedagogies and learning activities) (Tierney, 1999, Museus, 2014)
SOCID		***Social Identities***
SOCID MIXED ID		*Mixed Race and Multiethnic Identity* Student's mixed race and/or multiethnic identity
SOCID MIXED ID	SELF ID	*Self-Identification* Student talks about their racial and ethnic self-identification
SOCID MIXED ID	PHYS APP	*Physical Appearance* Student's physical appearance/phenotype
SOCID MIXED ID	EXT PERC	*External Perceptions* Others' perceptions of their multiracial or multiethnic identity
SOCID MIXED ID	PRESCRIB BY OTHERS	*Prescribed by Others* Others prescribe a racial and ethnic label on the student; different than external perceptions because it is an act of doing the prescribing
SOCID MIXED ID	FRAC LANG	*Fractional Language* Student or others use fractional language to talk about one's mixed identity
SOCID MIXED ID	SITU ID	*Situational Identity and Behaviors* Student's unconscious or conscious shifting of their racial and/or ethnic identity
SOCID	CLASS ID	*Class Identity* Student's class identity
SOCID	GENDER ID	*Gender Identity* Student's gender identity
SOCID	GEN - 1st GEN	*College Going Generation Status* Student's college going generation status *First Generation College Going Generation Status* Student mentions they are the first in their family to attend college
SOCID	RACE CONSC	*Heightened Consciousness of Race* Student's heightened consciousness of race issues influences how they perceive, navigate and process situations in which they experience or do not experience a sense of belonging
SOCI ID	SOC ID INTSXNS	*Intersections of Social Identities* Instance where multiple intersecting social identities are discussed
SOCID	DISCRIM	*Experiences Discrimination* Student personally experiences discrimination associated with any of their social identities.

Note. This is an abbreviated version of the factors codebook. Examples for each code are excluded from this table due to the extensive nature of the codebook. However, examples for each code were provided in final codebook to assist coders in better understanding the codes.

Table 4. Emotional Reactions Code List

Code	Sub-Code	Description	Examples
Emotional Reactions Code List			
EMOT RCT	----	Emotional Reactions	----
EMOT RCT	JUDGE	Feels Judged	"I know that they were judging me on how I looked and not necessarily who I was." *Elysse*
EMOT RCT	UPSET	Feels Upset or Frustrated	"That got me a little angry." *Elysse* "It's just really frustrating." *Olivia*
EMOT RCT	ANNOY	Feels Annoyed	"I can't believe how annoyed I'm getting thinking about it. *Olivia* "I know it's easier to unify under something definite, but it's sometimes annoying." *Amber*
EMOT RCT	ISOLATE	Feels Isolated	"When the guy asked me how I felt about the N-word, I felt very isolated. I'm sitting in this group of white people." *Gerafrican*
EMOT RCT	COMFORT	Feels Comfortable	"I just feel comfortable there. It's my outlet kind of thing." *Elysse*
EMOT RCT	UNCOMFORT	Feels Uncomfortable	"I felt stared at a lot, which was awkward. And I knew a lot of people, but it's just awkward to be the only one who's light-skinned or biracial or looks biracial I should say. So I left. I just felt really awkward." *Somoan*
EMOT RCT	ACCEPT	Feels Accepted	"I feel a connection 'cause usually they know the struggle. And they want to express their culture and get people to learn about it. And they're more accepting." *Somoan*
EMOT RCT	NOT ACCEPT	Does Not Feel Accepted	"I wanted to be part of the community. I didn't really feel as welcome as I hoped." *Somoan*
EMOT RCT	CONFLCTED	Feels Conflicted or Confused	"I'm always torn between mixed and black." *Amanda*
EMOT RCT	NOTBOTH	Does Not Feel Bothered	"It doesn't bother me. To me, it just means, oh, they're curious." *Amanda*
EMOT RCT	SUPP	Feels Supported/Validated	"I feel supported by a lot of people within the business school." *Randall*
EMOT RCT	UNSUPP	Feels Unsupported/ Invalidated	"When you take away the validation of somebody else's culture what are you doing to me?" *Olivia*
EMOT RCT	SUB-PAR	Feels Unintelligent or Not Smart Enough	"It's just a really hard class and that's not fair to a lot of students because it just makes them feel stupid and incapable of continuing on in this institution...And that's been something that I and other students have expressed dealing with." *Sophia*
EMOT RCT	PROUD	Feels Proud	"I definitely take pride in it...I am not just a white guy, I am not just a black guy. I am both. I like being biracial." *Randall*

Note: This is an abbreviated version of the emotional reactions codebook. Other emotional reaction codes included *sad*, *happy*, *excited*, *shy*, *dislike*, *disappointed*, *stressed*, *not stressed*, *respected*, *disrespected*, *offended*, *not offended*, *embarrassed*, *shocked*, *hurt*, *intimidated*, *nervous*, *okay*, *difficult/struggling*, *discouraged*, *encouraged*, *relieved*, which are not included in this table because it was too extensive to report.

Table 5. Behaviors Code List

Code	Sub-Code	Description	Examples
**Behaviors Code List**			
BEHAV	----	Behaviors	----
BEHAV	JUSTIFY ID	*Justify Identity* Student feels they have to justify their identity or does justify their identity	"I thought that all the black kids were gonna feel that way about me, that I was just pretending or something and that I would have to show them my birth certificate or something along those lines." *Sophia* "Sometimes I feel like I have to justify who I am." *Elysse*
BEHAV	HUMOR	*Uses Humor as Coping Mechanism* Student uses humor as a coping mechanism	"We joked about that." *Amber* "You kind of get numb to it and you start to make jokes about it." *Olivia* "It's best to just make it funny. If you can make it funny, you lighten the mood and it's like okay, it's not a big deal." *Gerafrican*
BEHAV	DISENG	*Disengage* Student disengages entirely or becomes less involved in the activity, organization, or interaction with others	"I don't put myself in those situations anymore because I know how it made me feel." *Sophia* "I knew a lot of people, but it's just awkward to be the only one who's light-skinned or biracial or looks biracial I should say. So I left." *Somoan*
BEHAV	DEFENS	*Defensive* Student reacts in a defensive manner	They'll point out different features and they'll be like, "Oh! Where did that come from?" And I'll be like "uhhhh" and I'll get a little defensive." *Elysse*
BEHAV	INTERV	*Intervene or Disrupt* Student intervenes or disrupts a conversation, a situation, etc.	When a student responds to a multiracial microaggression by interrupting a conversation to stand up for oneself. When a student demonstrates that they are empowered or compelled to interject their opinion or thoughts into or as a response to a discussion or situation. "I was talking to this lady about interviews and she was like "are you going to straighten your hair?" I was like "why would I straighten my hair?" She goes "why would you wear your natural hair to an interview?" "Why wouldn't I? You do." So that was interesting." *Somoan*
BEHAV	ADAPT	*Adapt* Student adapts to the person's expectations or the situation	"I'm just more adaptable. So for me, when things come up, I'm just of like, "Well, I'll find something else. I'll get use to it...I feel like, "I'll find my way in there somewhere...maybe it's just multiracial people in general just end up becoming a little more adaptable to situations." *Amanda* "I'm like a chameleon...I can kind of just go either way." *Rachel*
BEHAV	QUES	*Questioning* Student questions oneself, a situation, a decision, etc.	"My friends are all like "Just put Hispanic, it's like better". And I'm like, "Well, is it better? Or is better that I put white?" Like I don't really know because whites definitely have an advantage, but Hispanic is like, would I get an advantage if I put I'm a minority?" *Rachel*
BEHAV	FORCED TO CHOOSE	*Forced to Choose*	"You kind of have to choose one [race or ethnicity]." *Bob*

Note. This is an abbreviated version of the behaviors codebook. Other behavioral codes included *isolate*, *no self-care*, *cry*, *observe*, *downplay*, *engage*, *ignore*, *seek support*, which are not included in this table because it was too extensive to report.

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