THE CORRELATION BETWEEN ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT, STUDENT-
FACULTY INTERACTIONS, AND CLASS STATUS AMONG AFRICAN
AMERICAN AND CAUCASIAN STUDENTS AT HUMBOLDT STATE
UNIVERSITY

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A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Humboldt State University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Psychology: Counseling

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May 2014
ABSTRACT

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African American college students continue to experience challenges both academically and personally at predominantly White colleges and universities. Predominantly White Colleges and Historically Black Colleges and have been the focus of prior research to examine various factors relating to academic self-concept. However, results consistently elucidate that African American college students have a lower academic self-concept when compared with their White counterparts (Cokley, 2000). Using a sample of African American and Caucasian college students at Humboldt State University, the current study will examine academic self-concept, student-faculty interactions, and class status among these students. Students will complete the Academic Self-Concept Scale (Reynolds, 1988), Campus Connectedness Scale (Lee & Davis, 2000), and specific questions relating to the quality and frequency of student-faculty interactions. The results of this study may provide information for predominantly White universities to reform their approaches to education and personal development in order to effectively assist African American students and other minority students with achieving academic success.
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INTRODUCTION

Academic self-concept has been referred to as an individual’s belief about their academic ability compared to others (Lent, Brown, & Gore, 1997, pg. 308). Research in the field of academic self-concept has primarily focused on African American adolescents rather than African American college students. Reasons cited as academic barriers to African American adolescents include psychological factors, differences in motivation and achievement values (Graham, 1994; Graham, Taylor, & Hudley, 1998). Also, research in this area tends to focus on high school grades, SAT scores, and other aptitude tests as predictors of college academic success. There are additional factors relating to the academic achievement of African Americans. Witherspoon, Speight, and Thomas (1997) investigated the relationship between academic self-concept, racial identity attitudes, and school achievement among African American high school students. They found that none of the racial identity attitudes were significantly correlated with academic self-concept, and academic self-concept was the best predictor of GPA. Few studies have examined ethnic differences in academic self-concept, and even fewer studies have examined the African American population.

Academic Self-Concept and College Students

Studies investigating academic success and academic self-concept compare African American college students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Predominantly Institutions. One major concern is the graduation rate of African
American students at PWIs. Allen (1992) states that a disproportionately higher number of African American graduate and professional students have graduated from HBCUs than PWIs. Additional research states that higher GPAs are reported among African American attending HBCUs than PWIs, and there are specific factors which impact African American students’ ability to succeed academically. Studies such as Allen (1992) and Cokley (2000) examine these factors impeding the academic achievement of these students. Academic self-concept is most commonly compared with GPA in most studies, and results from these studies have found differences in academic self-concept at PWIs and HBCUs. The results of Cokley’s (2000) study state that student-faculty interactions were a much better predictor for academic self-concept followed by GPA and class status at HBCUs whereas GPA significantly predicted academic self-concept and quality of student-faculty interactions at PWIs. These results indicate that both HBCUs and PWIs encompass unique factors which may contribute to low academic achievement among this population. Many studies suggest there are gender differences relating to academic self-concept among African American students. Cokley’s (2000) review of the literature implies that some researchers reported that African American males attending HBCUs were higher in academic self-concept than African American females (Fleming, 1984), whereas other researchers reported that African American females had higher self-confidence than African American males (Allen, 1992).
**Factors Affecting Academic Self-Concept**

Research studies suggest that there are differences in experiences of African American students at PWIs. Cureton (2003) states that African American college students have to adjust to an atmosphere that may not be as understanding of specific issues related to African American students. Cureton also suggests that African American students may incorporate these campus issues from a historical perspective of their individual experiences, situations or circumstances relating to arriving on campus, or a result of their perception of the university in particular. These results have a lasting impact on the academic development of African American college students and indicate that PWIs can begin to implement programs designed to integrate culture sensitivity. Also, these findings can promote a more positive environment, ultimately leading to a more positive academic self-concept for African American college students. Prior research relating to campus environment suggests that students’ perception of the college environment which refers to feeling comfortable with the university, faculty relations, and nurturing environment that encourages personal development, or the university’s reputation has a strong effect on academic performance (Dorsey & Jackson, 1995; Helm, Sedlacek, & Prieto, 1998; Kemp, 1990; Nettles, 1998; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996).

One major concern that conceivably threatens African American students’ academic self-concept is racial discrimination. Cureton (2003) states that susceptible
nature of racial confrontation(s), conflict, or misunderstanding(s) can quickly become a stressful, hostile, frustrating, and angry or self-absorbed experience which may be damaging to college performance. Also, African American students face individual and institutional racism, and negative perceptions at PWCU's. Kobrak (1992) states that what African American students experience in the classroom with instructors serve as a method for racist behavior by students and other faculty. This expression of racism consistently creates a tense college climate for African American college students.

Another factor impacting academic self-concept is negative attitudes among staff, administrations, and White students. Findings from Saddler’s (1996) qualitative study concluded that white freshmen had minimal or no contact with African Americans yet they withheld negative assumptions regarding African Americans and African American culture. The ability to understand the experiences and cultural backgrounds of African American college students serve as the foundation to developing a compassionate framework for improving academic self-concept at PWIs.

There is research supporting the notion that cognitive differences experienced in college between African American and Caucasian college students contribute to outcomes of academic self-concept (Flowers et al., 2003). Cognitive differences between the two groups were expressed as abilities to problem solve, writing proficiency, arithmetic, ways of thinking, and scientific processes. Flowers et al. (2003) reported that African American students performed significantly low on these aspects of general abilities which may indicate that African American students learn differently than Caucasian students. Additionally, other factors may be involved such as personal beliefs
about one’s self and view of academic achievement among African American college students when assessing academic self-concept compared to their White counterparts (Cokley et al., 2003)

Among the many factors impeding the academic success and self-concept of African American students, they also face significant adjustment issues at predominantly White colleges. African American students often find it necessary to create private social and cultural networks in order to assimilate their exclusion from the wider, White-oriented university community. Of the most serious concerns African American students face on White campuses, isolation, alienation, and lack of support appear to be the most significant (Allen, 1985, 1986; Smith & Allen, 1984). African American students tend to struggle not only with adjustment issues on White campuses, but also psychological development.

**Challenges at PWCUs vs HBCUs**

Predominately White Colleges and Universities have been subjected to scrutiny regarding their ability to provide adequate education opportunities for African American college students. The PWCU model of education focuses on individuals who academically meet White-created standards, such as high grade point averages and standardized test scores (Delgado, 1998; Easley, 1993; Sedlacek, 1999; Suen, 1983), who have culturally integrated into mainstream society, and who possess the financial resources to pay for the increasing costs of education. All of these factors compounded can impact the academic self-concept and performance of African American students
attending PWCUs. African American students manage to find ways to cope with the uninviting atmosphere at PWCUs by joining African American student unions, historically African American fraternities and sororities, and other organizations (Culbert, 1988; Kimbrough et al., 1996). HBCU’s equip African American students to perform higher academically, develop a stronger sense of identity, and have better psychological adjustment (Allen, 1992; Lang, 1994). The HBCU model incorporates educating and graduating all students admitted, and is more inclined to meet students where they are and assist them to where they need to be (Benton, 2001). Colleges using the HBCU model make an effort to educate and graduate all students who are admitted despite financial disadvantage, low ACT or SAT scores, or mediocre grade point averages (Robinson, 1990). It is suggested that PWCUs consider the HBCU model to promote African American student success.

The overall success and prosperity of African American students and students of color at PWIs is of the utmost importance. While the responsibility exists within the student population, university administration is equally responsible for assisting this population in overcoming academic barriers. Establishing a personal relationship while gaining knowledge on the experiences and cultural ideals of African American students provides a framework to understanding how these students navigate through the educational system, university officials, faculty and student development can collaborate in facilitating and engaging African American students in events designed to increase cohesiveness and support systems among this population. The academic challenges, experiences with racism both inside and outside the classroom, marginalization among
other ethnic groups, and campus environments that are viewed as unwelcoming are issues that remain pertinent to be openly addressed at an institutional level and within the African American community.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study investigates the relationship between academic self-concept, studentfaculty relationships, and class status on African American college students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). Academic self-concept is defined as “attitudes, feelings, and perceptions relevant to one’s intellectual or academic skills” (Lent, Brown, & Gore, 1997, pg. 308). The term class status refers to how an individual identifies in school, as freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior. Student-faculty interactions are defined as both informal and formal engagements between faculty and students inside or outside the classroom environment. HBCUs and PWIs are being compared because of the differences existing among African American students at these two institutions regarding academic self-concept, level of faculty support, and how class status influences these factors.

Academic Self-Concept

Although previous research exists that investigates variables such as academic self-concept, racial identity attitudes, and academic achievement among African American high school students (Witherspoon, Speight, & Thomas, 1997), few studies have examined African American college students’ academic self-concept and the challenges faced at the collegiate level. Most studies investigating African American college students’ academic self-concept compare Historically Black College Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). Cokley (2000) indicates that grade point average highly influences academic self-concept at PWIs, in contrast to
supportive faculty involvement as the determining factor of academic self-concept at HBCUs. These findings suggest that reasons for perceptions of success differ for African American students at either PWIs or HBCUs, and differentiating factors influence or deter academic achievement. Previous research examining African American college students at HBCUs found that constant student-faculty contact provided support for African American students in facing challenges and achieving a stronger academic self-concept (Cokley, 2002). Another factor affecting academic self-concept among African American students is class status; meaning whether or not an individual identifies as freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior. It is believed that students of high class status (i.e. senior) also have higher levels of academic self-concept.

Little is known about the academic self-concept of African American college students at PWIs. Over time, research has shown that African American students continue to struggle academically compared to their White counterparts. PWIs enroll more African American college students than HBCUs based on the perceived notion that the availability of resources at PWIs are superior, however African American students continue to struggle in finding support at these institutions. Also, academic self-concept is closely compared with academic achievement of African American college students at HBCUs, with students at PWIs, and the results from findings at HBCUs may provide implications for PWCUs to increase academic achievement for African American college students. For instance, a study by Gerardi (1990) examined whether or not academic self-concept predicted academic success in relation to minority and low-socioeconomic college students. Gerardi’s results stated that academic self-concept correlated
significantly in relation to academic success. Additionally, Gerardi concluded that a relationship existed between academic self-concept and GPA. Although this study was conducted with low-socioeconomic college students, these results are reflective of the research relating to African American students at HBCUs and PWIs because factors relating to academic self-concept differ at these institutions.

Past research comparing academic achievement among African American students at HBCUs and PWIs reflect greater levels of academic self-concept at HBCUs than PWIs (Cokley, 2000). Few studies have investigated academic self-concept among African American college students and their White counterparts at a PWI. Examining the differences between African American students and White students at Humboldt State University in relation to academic self-concept may shed light onto the challenges African American students face academically and additional factors that may be affecting their academic self-concept. Currently, the African American population at Humboldt State University is staggering at 3.6% compared to their White counterparts at 52.6% according to reports by the Institutional Research & Planning Department at Humboldt State University. One might pose the question “what other factors negatively impact African American academic success at PWIs?” Allen (1988) states that difficulties in adapting to one’s ethnic environment, culture, increasing alienation from other African Americans, and issues of racism interact to negate the intellectual environments of African American undergraduate students. In order to best assist African American college students at Humboldt State University, an understanding of the salient concerns and an exploration of African American students’ obstacles in achieving higher academic
self-concept as well as other factors contributing to poor academic achievement need to be investigated. According to previous research, higher grade point averages remain constant among African American students at HBCUs in contrast to African American students at PWIs (Allen, 1992; Davis, 1994; Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998) which suggests further analysis of PWIs regarding the type of academic environment surrounding African American students.

Racial Identity and Academic Achievement

African American students are rapidly entering primarily White institutions compared to Historically Black Colleges. A common theme occurring today is the presence of African American students at PWIs. According to Nettles & Perna (1997), greater than 80% of African American students are attending college. Although there has been an increase of African American students at these institutions, the question of why some African American students surpass academic barriers compared to others who perform far below standard academic rigor remains unanswered. Three key areas past research has explored in order to explain this phenomenon include: scholastic achievement, institutional environment, and cultural connectedness (Allen, 1992; Cross, 1991; D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Flowers & Pascarella, 1999, 2003; Goodstein & Ponterotto, 1997; Gossett, Cuyjet, & Cockriel, 1996).

African American students attending PWIs experience challenges to perform academically, and maintain that level of academic performance. When comparing areas of student learning and academic achievement for African American students at PWIs,
African Americans continue to face greater challenges compared to other ethnic groups (Nettles, Thoeny, & Gosman, 1986; Sampel & Seymour, 1971; Wolfle, 1983). Past research on race and achievement has been instrumental in measuring the impact of ethnicity on educational goals (Allen, 1992; D’ Augeli & Hershberger, 1993; Flowers & Pascarella, 1999, 2003). Differing views exist relating to factors which may contribute to the academic success of African American students at PWIs. Fordham (1988) contends that in order for African Americans to prevail at PWIs, there must be a severance between African American kinship and the individual. Some researchers may disagree with Fordham, assuming that the communal aspect for African Americans is salient to academic achievement, identity, and cultural development. Differing research dispels Fordham’s argument and suggests that African American students could attain success and still maintain their relationship within the African American society (Parker & Flowers, 2003).

O’Connor (1997) explored six African American students in high school who strongly identified with African American culture and perceptively acknowledged prejudice, but nevertheless, believed in their academic abilities. This study aimed to suggest that adapting to the dominant culture is one way of achieving success among this population. Additionally, it was stated that African American students who attained higher scores on a measure of integration within the dominant culture reported no improvement scholastically compared to African American students who attained lower scores on the measure of integration. It is recommended that future research in the area of racial identity development should focus on creating programs which promote self-
confidence and meaningful interactions between African American and Caucasian students (Parkers & Flowers, 2003).

African American students continue to encounter barriers in achieving similar academic successes as their White counterparts. Results from Flowers & Pascarella (2003) study showed that African American students scored lower than White students on identical measures of critical thinking, reading comprehension, mathematics, science reasoning, and writing skills although variables that may have likely influenced results were minimized. Previous research on African American academic achievement continue to elucidate that African American students as a whole lack the rising levels of scholastic achievement attained by students of White and Asian decent (Osterlind, 1997). At these rates of achievement, one may wonder what is happening in high schools to contribute to these academic challenges. Another area of growing research focuses on African American student retention rates and the factors involved in facilitating academic achievement. Pantages & Creedon (1978) state that academic factors have been one of the main causes for high attrition rates among African American students. This research finding can be detrimental if left unaddressed at the institutional level.

Also, researchers have found that socio-psychological factors continue to influence African American student attrition. Socio-psychological factors such as racism and alienation play a role in the attrition and academic challenges of African American students (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Fleming, 1984; Tinto, 1975). The research examining academic achievement and racial identity
concludes that racial identity plays a significant role in cognitive development for African American students on White campuses (Parker & Flowers, 2003).

The Importance of Parental Attachments and Psychological Well Being

It is well known that African American college students experience certain pressures that their White counterparts are often not familiar with. Love (2008) examined whether parental attachment served as a protective factor amidst psychological stress for African American students. Parental attachment research stems from the early development from John Bowlby (1977) who viewed attachments as relationships acquired by an individual who feels safe enough to form connections with others. Attachment has also been referred to as “cognitive working models” conceptualized during infancy stressing the importance of the caretaker’s attunement towards the child, and the baby’s unique way of evoking responses from their caretaker (Bretherton, 1992). Extending from this caretaker-infant interaction are encouraging or discouraging reactions which foster sense of identity, self-worth, and warmth in the child. As previously mentioned, African American students face obstacles unknown to their White counterparts and experience marginalization among the dominant culture which may result in mental impairment and educational challenges (James, 1998; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003). It is of utmost importance in promoting the overall success for African American students that barriers to the mental well-being and academic shortcomings among this population are ascertained. Love’s (2008) study examined whether parent styles served as a protective factor against mental stress and the influence of depression and anxiety
among these parenting relationships. Results indicated that mothers who were authoritarian elicited psychological distress compared to fathers who were authoritative which acted as a protective factor against psychological distress.

Parental attachment research extends from various studies by Ainsworth (1989) which described the importance of parental nurturing and the outcome on later attachment styles developed by the children of these caregivers. Three types of attachment styles were of particular interest in Ainsworth’s (1989) research: secure, insecure-anxious, and insecure-avoidant. Those who were considered to have established secure attachment styles were content with being close and distant simultaneously in relationships and were also found to be self-sufficient, obliging, and more supportive of others. The attachment style of insecure-anxious individuals reflects those who have challenges developing secure relationships, challenges maintaining connection and trust among others, and more frequently than not, consider themselves undeserving of affection and struggle with depending on others. The third attachment style, insecure-avoidant, refers to individuals who experience issues being connected to others, and this type of attachment often leads to rejecting behavior and other intimacy issues. African American and Caucasian students experience differing types of parenting styles that later predict future interactions. Past research suggests that African Americans described more intimate and meaningful relationships with their parents than their Caucasian counterparts. Giordano, Cernkovich, and DeMaris (1993) investigated African American and Caucasian teens’ level of attachment with parents and reported that African Americans experienced greater closeness, influence, and connection with their parents
compared to Caucasian teens which provides implications that closeness and secure relationships exists among African Americans.

Implications for professionals working within the African American population should consider the cognitive framework used among African Americans to assist in navigating through college. Love (2008) indicates that the cognitive framework surrounding how children view their parental relationship reflects future emotional connections established with others and determines other important interpersonal factors such as social relationships, academic growth, and psychological mindfulness. Research has indicated that an association exists between healthy parental attachment and quality of life, emotional wellness, and psychological wellness, whereas as the contrary exists for internalizing disorders and feeling threatened (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Rice, Cunningham, & Young, 1997). Developing a confident view of oneself and others plays a vital role in resiliency factors in contrast to an unstable view of oneself which can lead to atypical trajectory (Kenny & Rice, 1995). Additionally, African Americans prosper in a communal environment where family support and emphasis on the caregiver-child relationship is critical to establishing healthy, stable relational attachments, and fostering a sense of within-group cohesiveness possibly absent at the institutional level (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997).

Effects of Racism

Previous research has noted that African Americans experience situations where rejecting behaviors based on race is commonplace, and the implications of these rejecting
experiences affect how African American students interact with the dominant culture and university. Mendoza-Denton et al. (2002) explored how experiences of race-based rejection influenced how African American students perceive or expect rejection. Rejection sensitivity (RS) is viewed as a cognitive processing model where people begin to experience anxious feelings, anxiety, and react strongly to situations where rejection may occur (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). African American students at White institutions may experience feelings of marginalization, apprehension and tension towards the dominant culture which can also lead to feelings of mistrust among university officials in creating a culturally sensitive environment for African American students. Individuals from marginalized groups may perceive experiences of approval and rejection from prior direct or indirect experiences where race was the main predictor. As a result, African Americans may be more likely to experience racism or other injustices as a marginalized group, and cultivate anticipations of rejection by groups who are not considered the minority and by institutions who have traditionally neglected them (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002). African American students maintain a level of suspicion and uncertainty about feeling included at these types of universities, and these experiences may contribute to the academic disparities among African American and Caucasian students (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Steele, 1997).

Specifically, Mendoza-Denton et al. (2002) focused on African Americans’ anticipation of rejection based on race, elucidating if the anticipation of race rejection is separate from feelings of personal rejection, how readily perceiving rejection affects academic challenges while attending a PWI, and whether these situations result in
adverse college experiences using the RS-Race Questionnaire. This type of “bracing for impact” approach African American students experience can reinforce feelings of indifference among the dominant culture and university. Results from the study indicated that students who scored high in RS-race felt more distress entering college, greater mistrust in the university, and experienced a decrease in grades within 2-to-3-years. Students who scored both high in RS and encountered pleasant race-related situations felt integrated at the institution. Downey and Feldman (1996) suggested that when individuals experience frequent intimate relationships (e.g. family or peers) where rejection in place of approval is more prevalent, feelings of rejection may be self-internalized whenever these familiar situations arise. It is vital to understand the internalized stigma African American students maintain about themselves based upon experiences surrounding the exclusion from the dominant culture at PWIs or family history.

**Stereotype Threat**

Research pertaining to African American college students coping mechanisms and stressors experienced at PWIs has been previously explored (Greer & Chwalisz, 2007). Among the many factors contributing to the underachievement of African American college students, research suggests that an underlying psychological component exists which may contribute to academic differences among their White counterparts. This phenomenon is better known as “stereotype threat” (Aronson et al., 1999; Aronson et al., 1998; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995), and is referred to as
the beliefs African American students hold about themselves and group in particular as being academically inferior compared to their White counterparts. The concept of stereotype threat was coined by researcher Claude Steel (1995), and states that circumstances in which a stereotype exists about a group’s intellectual capabilities, African American college students bear additional weight in rejecting a stigma that their White counterparts do not experience (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002). It is of critical importance that institutions of higher education explore ways in which African American college students can encounter environments that foster non judgment in regards to academic performance, and support systems that account for the feelings of inadequacy African Americans experience academically.

Stereotype threat refers to the notion that African American students perceive the likelihood of validating negative beliefs about themselves and their racial group, specifically in regards to their academic abilities being viewed as inferior when compared to their White counterparts, which results in variations of performance anxiety and lack of self-confidence. When African American students experience this type of “inferiority complex”, they tend to want to dispel this belief in order to avoid confirming the bias (Aronson et al., 1999; Aronson & Good, 2000). This “self-fulfilling prophecy” amongst other stressors African American college students face, increases feelings of trepidation and doubt in one’s academic abilities compared to their White counterparts. Additionally, stereotype threat compromises achievement in predominantly two ways: first, it can impact academic functioning by provoking apprehension. Many studies report that African American college students experience high levels of discomfort relating to
academic achievement (Aronson, 1999; Aronson et al., 1998; Blascovich et al., 2001; Steele & Aronson, 1995). For instance, focusing on academic ability or identifying race on an exam largely elucidated stereotype threat on academic tests. Additionally, if African American and Caucasian students’ scores were grouped and focused on general knowledge of cars instead of inspecting individual scores of car knowledge, the presence of stereotype threat decreases. Secondly, stereotype threat negatively impacts academic achievement by what is called “disidentification”. Disidentification refers to removal of threatening stimuli to a non-threatening state to prevent assumptive beliefs in that area. In order to maintain a sense of worth, one would need to excel in a certain area in which they feel competent, or disregard an area where excelling is unlikely (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995; Harter, 1990; Aronson, Blanton, & Cooper, 1995; Pelham & Swann, 1989; Steele, 1992). Ultimately, this process may lead to dismissal of course subjects, or other areas of disidentification altogether (Major & Schmader, 1998). Compared to their White counterparts, African American college students withstand numerous hurdles related to not only attending a PWI, but also collectively maintaining their self-worth in a testing environment that may not be sensitive to the differences between cognitive and emotional mechanisms underlying achievement.

**Distinctions among HBCUs and PWIs**

Differences involving academic progress have been examined among African American students at PWIs and HBCUs. Results from Flowers & Pascarella’s (1999) study found that African American students attending PWIs received lower than desired
scores compared to their counterparts at an HBCU who received higher ratings on the construct of reading comprehension. These findings indicate that African American students at HBCUs are succeeding at significant or higher rates than African American students at PWIs, which may indicate that certain factors may be advantageous at HBCUs. DeSousa & Kuh (1996) reported that African American students at HBCUs made academic progress and social interactions that were equal to or greater than African American students attending PWIs. The present study by Parker & Flowers (2003) suggests that African American students attending HBCUs “obtain healthy mental and physical states, embrace cultural identity, engage in supportive academic experiences, and overall are more satisfied with their college experience while sacrificing quality resources and loss of educational curriculum” (Allen, 1992). Another interpretation suggested that African American students at HBCUs benefit from numerous social relationships with others who are able to empathize and relate to each other’s challenges. In light of these cultural encounters, African American students have the ability to gain self-awareness which may also assist in promoting academic success (Allen, 1992).

**Motivational and Judgment Factors**

Researchers continue to explore the differences between HBCUs and PWIs in regard to academic motivation, judgment, and academic achievement. Also, researchers look to investigate how the type of institution (PWI, HBCU) influences these variables and academic achievement. Reeder & Schmitt (2013) examined whether or not differences existed in African American student achievement depending on whether the
student attended an HBCU or PWI. Variables such as achievement at the individual level (e.g. background characteristics, academic and nonacademic college experiences) and institutional level (e.g. expenditure and resource allocation, admission selection, number of students, and faculty traits) are of high interest to researchers (Reeder & Schmitt, 2013). One distinct institutional characteristic that has garnished the attention of researchers is the purpose of HBCUs and PWIs. Brown & Freeman (2002) and the National Center for Education Statistics (1996) stated that HBCUs were created to provide a college education to African American students. This inference regarding HBCUs implies that African American students are more likely to succeed in environments that foster African American values, culture, identity, and overall well-being.

Issues surrounding stunted academic achievement and lack of presence of African American students at universities compared to other ethnic groups continue to be a major concern within the United States (Bennett & Xie, 2003; Cokley, 2003). As stated in similar research by Allen (1992), African American students at HBCUs obtain advantages that may assist in the promotion of academic achievement. Some of these advantages include large gains in academic performance, extensive mental and cognitive development, psychological adjustment, and awareness of diversity (Allen, 1992). To the contrary, African American students at PWIs frequently experience barriers such as alleged aggression, isolation, racial bias, and lack of integration into the overall environment (Allen, 1992). These differences between HBCUs and PWIs indicate a void
in the institutional system of PWIs on how to best address these concerns and develop a leveled playing field for African American students’ success.

**Theoretical-Based Models of Success**

Although differences have been found among African American students at PWIs and HBCUs, researchers look to explain from a theoretical perspective whether or not psychological or motivational attributes predict achievement. Academic success is dependent upon many factors which can obstruct or promote achievement for African American students. Past research suggests that environments at HBCUs and PWIs have distinctive characteristics which discourage or encourage achievement for African American students, posing the question of whether psychological or motivational attributes influence achievement at HBCUs or PWIs (Allen, 1992; Chavous et al., 2004).

The attraction – selection – attrition model indicates that institutions modeled after specific attributes appeal to those who believe these institutions reflect their own values, belief systems, and vice versa. Those same institutions experience attrition rates when the individual no longer feels integrated. This description of the attraction – selection – attrition model suggests that African American students at PWIs experience challenges and displacement due to cultural differences which in turn negatively reinforce African American students at PWIs. In light of this information, Reeder & Schmitt (2013) predicted that the amount of support accessible to African American students would have a great effect on motivation and capability. In other words, the less support readily available, the more salient internal motivation and self-ability becomes.
Researchers have begun to explore mean differences in student characteristics and performance between HBCUs and PWIs. One distinct group of psychosocial variables includes race-related psychological constructs. Greer & Chwalisz (2007) reported that more significant minority-status stress existed among African Americans attending PWIs than HBCUs. Minority-status stress refers to inferiority experiences African Americans face amongst their White counterparts at PWIs. On the other hand, students attending HBCUs frequently utilize coping strategies such as problem solving, learning how to withstanding challenges, and other forms of communication in order to deal with stress compared to African American students at PWIs who utilize diversions, engage in social outreach, and spiritual fellowship as coping strategies (Fleming, 1981). It is suggested that the coping techniques employed at HBCUs be adopted in order to best aid African American students at PWIs to adapt to their environment and compete academically.

In addition to race-related variables which reflect self-concept, Sellers et al. (1998) investigated and described four racial ideologies which may explain how African American students navigate themselves on Predominantly White campuses. First, the “nationalist ideology” is referred to as Black consciousness, the awareness of being Black. Secondly, the “minority ideology” refers to the collective experiences of discrimination and barriers African Americans have faced compared to other ethnicities. Thirdly, the “assimilationist ideology” refers to the mutual life experiences among African Americans and society. Lastly, the “humanist ideology” refers to the unique experiences within society. The results of the study indicate that African Americans at PWI’s identified significantly with the assimilationist and humanist philosophies while
African Americans at black campuses identified with nationalist philosophy. It was also found that assimilationist and nationalist principles influenced grade point average; however, the type of ideology philosophy predicted grade point average when race was the essential factor. It is possible that African American students at PWIs externalize their experiences with blackness compared to African American students at HBCUs who may internalize their experiences with Blackness. Hypothetically, African American students at HBCUs are more likely to experience a conscious awareness of what it means to be African American compared to those at a PWI who may identify with being African American through campus based events and organizations.

**Academic Self-Concept and Motivation**

Another focus of research relates to academic self-concept and motivation within HBCUs and PWIs. Differences among these institutions aid in distinguishing which factors influence motivation and promote higher academic self-concept amongst African American students at PWIs. Cokley (2003) reported that students attending HBCUs displayed greater levels of academic self-concept and self-determination. Cokley also stated that factors influencing academic self-concept included perseverance and faculty support. Cheatham et al. (1990) found there were no significant differences between African American students at PWIs and HBCUs on a measure of self-consciousness, which may also infer that additional research needs to be conducted in this area to distinguish between these two institutions. This finding may have important implications for African American students in terms of resiliency and protective factors at institutions.
that seem unaccommodating to the needs of this population. Research in the area of achievement investigates academic goals and what variables predict academic self-concept. Related variables of study include intellectual skill, perceived capability, and grade point average in high school (Bennett & Xie, 2003; Davis, 1994; Kim, 2002; Kim & Conrad, 2006). It was also reported that African American students at HBCUs achieved greater academic gains which is measured by college grade point average (Allen, 1992; Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004; Cokley, 2000; Sellars et al., 1998).

Increasing involvement on campus relating to academic activities and social engagement is more common among African Americans attending Black colleges compared to African American students at Predominantly White colleges (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996). Exploring factors which facilitate involvement in academic activities or social relations at HBCUs can be beneficial to African American students at PWIs. Another focus in academic outcomes is the degree attainment among African American students. Research suggests that degree completion is higher among full-time students (Gasman et al. 2010; Ryan, 2004). Additional research is needed examining academic goals and the predictors of those goals among both PWIs and HBCUs.

**Differential Predictors of Academic Outcomes via Institution Type**

Research in the area of differential predictor-outcome relationships exists, but is sparse. Studies such as Cokley (2000) state that differential relationships exist between academic-self-concept and a number of predictor constructs at HBCUs and PWIs. Similar findings include Chavous et al. (2004) who reported a noteworthy relationship exists
among gender, institution, and stereotype expectations in predicting academic competence. These studies indicate that HBCUs indeed have some similarities, but also varying differences in regards to academic success. Explanations relating to differences in academic motivation suggest that consistent individual disparities relating to academic perseverance and judgment may determine academic achievement at PWIs compared to HBCUs. African American students attending an HBCU or PWI encounter numerous experiences which impact their academic outcomes at these institutions. For instance, African Americans at PWIs experience harsh environments compared to their African American counterparts at HBCUs. Additionally, African Americans at PWIs face significant obstacles through which they must persevere in order to succeed (Reeder & Schmitt, 2003). The obstacles African American students encounter at PWIs in part, promotes determination whereas African Americans at HBCUs have the availability of faculty support.

Research indicates that African American students at PWIs face significant levels of stress and prejudice (Cokley, 2000; Chavous et al., 2004; Greer & Chwalisz, 2007). The stress-related experiences of African American students at PWIs result in displaying an excessive work ethic and exert higher amounts of energy in order to obtain the same levels of academic success as African American students at HBCUs. African American students at PWIs devote tremendous amounts of time and energy in achieving their academic goals (Allen, 1992; Davis, 1994; Watson & Kuh, as cited in Kim, 2002). Another concept related to perseverance and goal attainment is continuous learning which measures level of engagement in work tasks, aggressively seeking opportunities to
gain knowledge and develop skills (Oswald, et al. 2004). Research suggests that individuals rated high in continuous learning cultivate ways to achieve academic goals in the face of adversity, take initiative on researching in-depth information, and actively explore prospective educational opportunities to further learning. Conversely, individuals rated low in continuous learning require extra incentive when engaging in coursework. Seemingly, African American students at PWIs may be low in continuous learning compared to African American students at HBCUs, and if so, what factors influence this distinction? Previous research comparing HBCUs and PWIs support the notion that the ability to make academic decisions may differ in relationship to academic performance at both institutions in addition to the higher levels of educational assistance received at HBCUs compared to PWIs (Reeder & Schmitt, 2013).

**Campus Environment**

Research examining the differences between campus environments at PWIs and HBCUs has been beneficial to determining reasons for academic success for African American students. One of the most widely known research studies by Allen et al. (1991) investigated the significance of university experiences and the how students navigated through these college experiences. The study involved a large portion of African American students and PWIs and HBCUs according to the National Study of Black College Students (NSBCS). Allen et al. (1991) reported that many African American students considered the environment at PWIs as segregated and desolate. On the contrary, African American students at HBCUs indicated a more affable and pleasant
environmental experience. Similar research has explored the viewpoint of African
American students related to campus unity and whether or not these students felt
integrated on campus (Gossett et al., 1996). The results from this study suggest that
African American students believe that PWIs are less attuned to their needs and resources
in order to feel part of the campus environment. Also, it is inferred that the presence of
Black Faculty on campus improves not only academic achievement and ability among
African American students, but also a more secure campus environment. Furthermore,
the study suggested that less effort existed among PWIs towards assisting in providing a
positive and warm environment for African American students. This study highlights
some of the issues which continue to plague African American students in regards to
attrition rates at PWIs and encountering environments that negatively stunt overall
development. According to Allen, 1992 and Tinto, 1975, there is some research
supporting the notion that variables such as alienation and identity influence academic
success and adjustment. Clearly some African American students adjust to the campus
environment while other African American students experience challenges (Helms,
1990). Parker & Flowers (2003) suggest that racial consciousness is salient to whether or
not African American students feel connected at PWIs. Racial consciousness is defined
as the belief system held about oneself and/or relationship towards one’s ethnic group
collectively.
Suggestions for University Officials

Results stemming from the Parker & Flowers (2003) study imply that three main points are of significant importance in order for African American students to thrive at PWIs. First, a large portion of the responsibility exists between student affairs and university administrators to promote a sense of African American identity and internal consciousness of Black heritage. In return, this type of exploration and knowledge of the self promotes self-confidence and self-efficacy. Also, it is of the utmost importance that university leadership effectively educate themselves on premises of African American culture such as racial identity and incorporate concepts such as this into the overall development of college coursework and university advisement to assess effectiveness. Additionally, it is recommended that those in leadership positions attend trainings which foster cultural competencies within the African American community and people of color in general. This information can be useful in creating a culturally sensitive atmosphere that supports the experiences of African American students at PWIs. Second, in Parker & Flower’s (2003) study, it was reported that students who identified at the Immersion-Emersion stage felt that they did not fit in on campus. In order to encourage inclusiveness on campus, it is imperative for university officials to actively engage African American students in campus events or dialogues as a way of connecting with this population. Suggestions were offered which serve as possible program alternatives to addressing the challenges African American students experience on PWI campuses. Some of these
interventions include: group meetings, creating an open space for African Americans to freely voice their opinions confidentially to community advocates, and establish peer support programs. Implementing these interventions successfully would require a staff force that is culturally aware of the issues that affect African Americans and their internal experiences. Lastly, it was suggested that program initiatives should be directed toward the success of African American students by distinguishing between the imperative needs relating to social interactions and academic persistence. A paradigm shift must occur within university settings that consider the cultural aspects of African American students and target areas that are instrumental in promoting overall success among this population.
STUDENT-FACULTY RELATIONSHIPS

The literature also ascertained that a key contributor to academic self-concept in African American college students was student-faculty relationships. The number of Black faculty at PWIs is increasingly undersized. Research has shown that faculty support and involvement can have considerable effects on the academic self-concept of African American students. Additionally, student-faculty interactions may create a positive environment and experiences both in and out of the classroom for African American students at PWIs. Student-faculty interactions may also serve as an opportunity to develop relationship building and support systems while facing various challenges at PWIs. According to Fleming (1984), environments that foster relationship building with faculty and staff also serve as a support system for students. Past research by Fleming contrasting HBCUs and PWIs conclude that HBCUs thrive in this area, and suggests that PWIs incorporate similar strategies to promote a stronger academic self-concept among African American college students. Also, Fleming states that quality student-faculty involvement is critical in providing a strong positive academic self-concept for African American students at both PWIs and HBCUs. Studies examining student-faculty relationships express salient concerns to institutions in strategizing how to best implement this practice. For instance, Terenzini et al. (1996) reported that students’ informal interactions with faculty resulted in optimistic outcomes between students and faculty and intellectual development. This research stresses the importance of providing
an environment for African American students to reap the benefits of an academically supportive and relationship building institution.

African American students attending HBCUs have greater access to faculty and engage in more valuable interactions with faculty than students attending PWIs (Allen, 1992; Cokley, 2000; Cokley, 2002). Also, students attending HBCUs obtain extensive mentorship from faculty involvement which enables students to persevere throughout the college experience and succeed academically (Cokley, 2002). These findings indicate that African American students at PWIs remain vulnerable to negative influences, left to their own devices, and are faced to make difficult decisions single-handedly regarding their academic career without reaping the benefits of faculty support. The lack of faculty support continues to be an issue at PWIs, and programs focused towards increasing faculty involvement among African American students is vital to attaining academic success and improving persistence rates. African American students at PWIs benefit from receiving assistance outside the university which may improve decision making factors and academic success (Reeder & Schmitt, 2013).
CLASS STATUS

Class status refers to year in college, such as freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior. Prior research examining class status states that those who were classified as sophomore and above have a higher sense of academic self-concept in contrast to those who were just starting college (Reynolds, 1988). It is presumed that students who identify as freshman may be self-conscious regarding their academic aptitude and execution of these skills. Students having the option to swap majors when experiencing difficulty in coursework or when other academic interests arise can increase the outcome of academic self-concept (Reynolds, 1988). This finding is important to understanding the role class status has on academic self-concept among this population. Further investigation is needed regarding how class status affects African American college students and their academic self-concept at Humboldt State University.

African American students face various challenges while attending PWIs such as adjustment to campus environment, lack of Black faculty presence on campus, student-faculty relationships, social support, and academic achievement. Many studies conducted on African American college students and academic self-concept compares Historically Black College Universities (HBCUs) with Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). PWIs face the challenge of helping African American college students achieve academic success by fostering an atmosphere of inclusion and support.

The African American college student population at Humboldt State University not only lack in numbers, but also faces difficulties academically and with retention rates.
According to the 4th Annual Report of Dissecting Diversity at Humboldt State University, African American undergraduate college students represented the only ethnic minority compared to Asian/Pacific Islander, Latino, Native Americans, and two or more ethnicity's with the lowest median cumulative grade point average of 2.53. Factors relevant to the study of African American college students’ success were explored.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between African American college students’ academic self-concept, student-faculty interactions, and class status at Humboldt State University. The anticipated results from this research can be of benefit to the field of study because PWIs can implement these findings to promote a more welcoming campus environment, educate the dominant culture on sensitive African American cultural issues, and strategize with Black faculty members in helping African American college students feel connected, feel less alienated or isolated, adjust comfortably, compete academically, and successfully graduate.

Goals of the Current Study

The proposed research is significant because Humboldt State University can begin to understand the differences in African American student’s academic achievement, academic self-concept, perceived social support, student-faculty relationships, and factors affecting their overall success. Additionally, the ideas and concepts from the HBCU model should be taken into consideration to provide a more nurturing and protective environment for African American students at Humboldt State University to thrive academically.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1

It is hypothesized that academic self-concept scores will differ for African American and Caucasian students.

Past research indicates that academic experiences, abilities, convictions, and thought processes differ for African American and Caucasian students (Cokley, et al., 2003).

Hypothesis 2

It is hypothesized that Caucasian students would report higher quality student-faculty interactions than African American students.

Based on previous research by Allen (1992), positive student-faculty relationships is the strongest predictor of academic self-concept. African American students are more at risk for being alienated on campus, which emphasizes the importance of faculty support and relationships with students.

Hypothesis 3

It is hypothesized that as class status increases, academic self-concept also increases.

In Reynolds (1988) study, it was reported that a positive relationship existed between the increase of class status and academic self-concept. Class status refers to year in college, such as freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior. Research examining class
status predicts that upperclassmen score higher than freshmen on the academic-self-concept scale (Reynolds, 1988).

Research Question 1

Gender differences will be found among African American males and females relating to academic self-concept. Previously stated research by Allen (1992) & Fleming (1984), found that disparities exist among college institutions and genders in academic self-concept among African American students. Fleming’s (1984) research yielded that on Predominantly White Campuses, White males benefitted more than females and Black males from the college experience, which were measured in terms of cognitive growth, social participation, academic success, satisfaction, and general social-psychological adjustment. Black males had lower academic self-concept than Black females at PWIs. However, previous findings revealed that Black men at PWIs obtain better grades and significant aspirations compared to their female counterparts (Smith & Allen, 1984).

Research Question 2

Campus connectedness will influence the outcome of academic self-concept in African American college students. Based on previous mentioned research by Fleming (1984), it was concluded that PWIs cultivate an atmosphere that is insensitive to the development of African American students. It is important to examine the factors that inhibit the personal and academic development of African American students and other minorities on predominantly White college campuses. There will be a positive correlation between campus connectedness and academic self-concept.
METHODS

Participants

The sample included undergraduate students from Humboldt State University. The sample consisted of African American undergraduates ($N=26$) from clubs (Black Student Union, Brothers United, Serenity Sisters, Legacy), and Caucasian undergraduates ($N=32$) representing the comparison group. This study used a convenience sample (college students) consisting of various majors. Participants were obtained in two ways: through African American clubs and Caucasian students through the Psychology Department Research Participation Pool.

Instrumentation

The first packet was the Campus Connectedness Scale (CCS) consists of a 14-item scale rated on a Likert-type scale ($1 = strongly disagree$ to $6 = strongly agree$). Parker & Flowers (2003) reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .86, and the scale has been frequently used with Asian American college students (Lee & Davis, 2000). The Campus Connectedness Scale is composed of questions measuring sense of inclusion on campus and student’s perceptions of peer interactions. The aim of this survey was to examine the connectedness with the campus environment and other students on campus.

The second survey packet was the Academic Self-Concept Scale (ASCS) by Reynolds (1988) used to measure academic self-concept. The ASCS is a 40-item scale designed to measure general self-concept in college students. The ASCS uses a 4-point Likert-type scale ($1 = strongly disagree$ to $4 = strongly agree$). Reynolds (1988)
concludes that test-retest reliability is .88, and Cronbach’s alpha for the entire scale is .92. The scale has been frequently used among college students as a method for measuring GPA and academic achievement.

The third set of questions referred to the frequency of student-faculty interactions, and the quality of those interactions. The question pertaining to racial identification was stated as the following: “How do you identify your race (For example: African American, Hispanic, Caucasian, Native American, Asian, and Mixed Race)?”, and space was provided for participants to indicate their racial identification. Questions relating to student-faculty interactions were based on a Likert scale and included the following: “What is the quality of your relationship to faculty (Ex. faculty are approachable, faculty make an effort to get to know me, and faculty mentor me) and rated this question as strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree. Other questions relating to student-faculty interactions included: “I have informal out-of-class contact with faculty members” and participant had the option of selecting weekly, about monthly, 1-2 month, rarely, or never, “My out-of-class contact with faculty members is positive or helpful”, and participants had the option of selecting strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree.

Procedure

Participants were asked to provide demographic information stating their gender, class status, and racial identification. Also, participants provided information about their experiences on campus such as connectedness to faculty and students, and academic
experiences. African American students were emailed asking for their participation in my research study through the research participation pool. Additionally, participants completed an informed consent, the Academic Self-Concept Scale, and the Campus Connectedness Scale. Both surveys sampled African American and Caucasian undergraduate students. The responses were entered into a SPSS data file to calculate the results, and the records kept strictly confidential in an electronic password protected file. Participants’ names were not collected, and a numbering system was used for identification purposes. Dr. Emily Sommerman, Ph.D, and principal investigator Autumn Fannin were the only ones with access to the file.

**Data Analysis**

All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS software.

Hypothesis 1. It was hypothesized that academic self-concept scores would differ for African American and Caucasian students. This was measured using an independent t-test to compare mean scores in the current study. An independent t-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference in academic self-concept scores between Caucasian and African American college students.

Hypothesis 2. It was hypothesized that Caucasian students would report higher quality student-faculty interactions than African American students. This was measured using an independent t-test to compare mean scores in the current study. An independent t-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference for Caucasian students than African American students.
Hypothesis 3. It was hypothesized that as class status increases, academic self-concept also increases. This was measured using a Spearman Rank-Order Correlation to compare class levels (i.e. freshman, sophomore, junior, senior) and determine if academic self-concept improves. Class status was gathered through self-report by asking year in school (for example: what year are you in school-freshman, sophomore, junior, senior). A spearman rank-order correlation was used to determine if academic self-concept increased as class status increased for African American and Caucasian students.

Research question 1. Gender differences would be found among African American males and females relating to academic self-concept. This was measured using an independent t-test to compare means between African American males and females. An independent t-test was used to compare academic self-concept scores in African American males and females.

Research question 2. Campus connectedness would influence the outcome of academic self-concept in African American college students. This was measured using a Correlation Coefficient to measure the relationship between campus connectedness and academic self-concept. A correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between campus connectedness and academic self-concept.
RESULTS

For hypothesis one, there was a statistically significant difference in the scores for Caucasian students ($M = 114.96, SD = 15.79$) and African American students ($M = 94.15, SD = 15.70$), $t (56) = 5.00, p = .001$ (see table 1). Cronbach’s $\alpha$ for the Academic Self-Concept Scale was .94 and the Campus Connectedness Scale was .95.

For hypothesis two, four of the independent t-tests yielded non-significant results on the following variables: “Faculty are approachable for Caucasian students ($M = 2.15, SD = .807$) and African American students ($M = 1.96, SD = .720$), $t (56) = .958, p = .342$.

Faculty make an effort to get to know me for Caucasian students ($M = 2.84, SD = 1.01$) and African American students ($M = 2.57, SD = 1.06$), $t (56) = .972, p = .335$. Faculty mentor me for Caucasian students ($M = 2.68, SD = 1.02$) and African American students ($M = 2.57, SD = 1.10$), $t (56) = .394, p = .695$. I have informal out-of-class contact with faculty members for Caucasian students ($M = 2.21, SD = 1.21$) and African American students ($M = 2.38, SD = 1.09$), $t (56) = -.541, p = .591$.” Although Caucasian students reported higher interactions with faculty, statistical significance was only found on the variable “My out-of-class contact with faculty is positive or helpful” for Caucasian ($M= 2.40, SD= .797$) and African American ($M= 1.84, SD= .731$) students, $t (56) = 2.75, p = .008$

For hypothesis three, there was a positive correlation between class status and academic self-concept ($r = .336, r_s = .336, n = 57, p = .011$). Overall for both groups, the relationship was positive. However, when compared separately on these variables, there was no statistical significance because the sample size significantly decreased.
For research question one, there was not a significant difference in the scores on academic self-concept for African American males ($M = 97.66, SD = 15.30$) and African American females ($M = 93.10, SD = 16.05$), $t(24) = -.617, p = .543$

For research question two, there was a positive correlation between campus connectedness and academic self-concept for African American students ($r = .766, n = 26, p = .001$).
DISCUSSION
This study investigated the relationship between academic self-concept, student-faculty interactions, and class status among African American and Caucasian college students at Humboldt State University. These results should be considered with extreme caution due to the small sample size. Hypothesis one assessed whether or not scores would differ in academic self-concept for African American and Caucasian students. It was expected that differences would exist between African American and Caucasian students on scores of academic self-concept because there were more Caucasian participants than African American participants and both groups may experience differences in test taking experiences. These results suggest that other factors may be involved that influence the outcome of academic self-concept for African American and Caucasian students. The sample size (n) used for this study was small, and results cannot be generalized to the general population. The results obtained in hypothesis one are consistent with the literature which indicates that cultural experiences, not ethnicity, makes a huge difference in the outcomes of academic and intellectual processes for both African American and Caucasian college students (Flowers et al. 2003). Existing research (Pascarella, 1985) further suggests that academic achievement in college, specifically knowledge gained involves some mitigating factors such as whether or not the atmosphere is conducive to stimulating cognitive growth, past academic experiences of students, and student attempts at academic change. It is well known that perceptual differences exist between African American and Caucasian students when defining
academic self-concept (Cokley et al., 2003), so additional research may need to focus on the meaning of academic efficiency between these two groups.

Hypothesis two aimed to determine if Caucasian students would report higher quality student-faculty interactions than African American students. Five questions assessing the quality of student-faculty interactions were used in hopes of determining the frequency of interactions with faculty for Caucasian and African American students. Only one question (i.e. “My out-of-class contact with faculty is positive or helpful”) was consistent with the literature on quality student-faculty relationships and refutes the hypothesis. These results were obtained because of the small sample of African American students in the study, and the fact that faculty of color are sparse at Humboldt State University. Existing research discussing factors increasing academic self-concept among African American college students states that student-faculty interactions significantly predicted academic self-concept for African American students at an HBCU compared to African American students at a PWI where GPA significantly predicted academic self-concept (Fleming, 1984). Most research exploring the outcomes of student-faculty relationships on academic self-concept examine African American students at HBCUs. Existing research in this area has noted that faculty mentoring alongside relationship building promotes academic success among this population (Cokley, 2002). These results suggest that Caucasian students may experience better relationships with faculty than African American students because of the lack of faculty of color on campus. Due to the small sample size, results cannot be generalized.
Hypothesis three explored the relationship between year in school (i.e. freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior) and academic self-concept. It was expected that as year in school increased, academic self-concept would also increase for both African American and Caucasian students. These results were obtained because there were more juniors (19%) and seniors (41%) than sophomores (12%) and freshmen (5%) in this study. Existing research in the area of academic self-concept and class status frequently refers to Reynolds (1988) study which sampled 589 undergraduate students from three different universities, and reported that academic self-concept scores was significantly influenced by class status. Also, it is important to note that one participant in the African American group declined to provide their year in school. Higher scores on academic self-concept were predicted because of the significant amount of seniors and juniors in the study. It would be interesting to explore class status among African American and Caucasian students individually to determine the outcome of class status. Due to the small sample size, results cannot be generalized to the greater college population.

Research question one sought to determine if scores differed for African American males and females on academic self-concept. Results were obtained because of the small sample of African American students, with differences in participation being more noticeable among African American males ($n = 6$) than females ($n = 20$). Results for research question one was consistent with the literature. Reynolds (1988) study did not support gender differences among males and females on the measure of academic self-concept. However, Fleming (1984) states that African American females experience challenges relating to confidence and ability than African American males, though these
challenges may be more related to the campus environment in general. Contrary to Fleming (1984), Allen (1992) also noted that African American females as having more self-efficacy in their academic abilities compared to African American males, so the literature may be mixed on this topic. It is also important to mention that African American participants consisted mainly of females than males, which could have influenced the results. Due to the small sample size, results cannot be generalized.

Research question two examined whether or not scores on the campus connectedness scale (CCS) predicted the outcome of academic self-concept (ASC) for African American students. Results were obtained because most participants were juniors or seniors, which also suggest from the research that these individuals also have a higher academic self-concept. Cross’s (1971) racial identity model explores the various identities African American students assume about themselves, their ethnic group, and Caucasian students. Out of Cross’s (1971) five stages, Taylor & Howard-Hamilton (1995) and Mitchell & Dell (1992) indicate that African American students at the “Internalization and Internalization and Commitment” (higher identities) stages would be more proactive in their culture, the culture of others, and interact more frequently in campus activities. Parker (2003) also concluded that internalization significantly relates to greater campus connectedness. However, there is existing research which negates this idea. Gossett el al. (1996) investigated African Americans students’ viewpoint of their campus experiences at a PWI, and reported that feelings of exclusion and estrangement were experienced by African American students at a PWI. Results in this area are mixed, and additional research needs to be done. These results suggest that African American
students who feel more connected to the campus have a higher academic self-concept. Due to the small sample size, results cannot be generalized.

Limitations to study. There were some limitations to this study. First, African American participants were only recruited through African American clubs on campus. This recruiting method resulted in challenges obtaining African American participants and ultimately led to the small sample size. This limits the ability to generalize findings to all African American students on campus. Another possible limitation to this study is the small sample size of participants. As previously mentioned, African American participants were recruited through clubs on campus and not all club members participated as expected. It may have been more effective to expand participation to all African American students on campus or at other CSUs. In general, it is difficult to obtain participation from this population due to the small percentage of African American students on campus. Small sample sizes can contribute to discrepancies in results and statistical power in the study. Another possible limitation was the use of the Psychology Department Research Participation Pool. The Pool was an effective resource in recruiting Caucasian participants, but it was difficult to ensure that only Caucasian students participated in the study. Those who identified other than African American, Caucasian, or Mixed Race were excluded from data analysis.

This research in general is useful because it has intended to elucidate the differences or relationship between African American and Caucasian college students on facets of academic self-concept, student-faculty interactions, and class status. Also, one main objective was to explore the factors which may contribute to the academic and
campus environment challenges specifically related to African American college students. One challenge being the small number of African American students represented at PWIs. Another challenge being the lack of availability pertaining to faculty of color and what aspects of campus environment African American students need to feel connected to the university, which research indicates that understanding these facets facilitates relationship building, involvement on campus, and significant increases in academic self-concept.

Future research examining the relationship between academic self-concept, student-faculty interactions, and class status among African American and Caucasian students may want to take into consideration the academic experiences of each ethnic group. Future research may also want to expand such a study to all CSUs and include other ethnic groups to capture an overall picture of differences between groups. Both African American and Caucasian students may have various cultural values which many contribute to their differences in academic success and interpersonal relationships with faculty. Also, future studies may want to consider other methods of recruiting African American and Caucasian participants more efficiently. It is also important to consider the early academic experiences of African American students such as high school, course content, and their understanding of how they view themselves in academia and in an environment where they predict negative outcomes in their educational journey. Because the African American experience is so complex on PWIs, and the nature of that experience is variable overtime, case study research might be appropriate in exploring the complexities of the experiences relating to African American students. Furthermore,
more studies need to be conducted that investigate the academic self-concept of
Caucasian students because research is sparse in this area. Overall, future research should
continue to explore processes which undermine academic self-concept, academic success,
and create an environment which welcomes all levels of educational experience for
African American students.
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Listed below are a number of statements concerning school-related attitudes. Rate each item as it pertains to you personally. Base your ratings on how you feel most of the time. **INDICATE YOUR RESPONSE BY CIRCLING THE APPROPRIATE NUMBERS. Be sure to answer all items.** Please respond to each item independently; do not be influenced by your previous choices.

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<tr>
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<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>Being a student is a very rewarding experience.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>If I try hard enough, I will be able to get good grades.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Most of the time my efforts in school are rewarded.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>No matter how hard I try I do not do well in school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I often expect to do poorly on exams.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>All in all, I feel I am a capable student.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I do well in my courses given the amount of time I dedicate to studying.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>My parents are not satisfied with my grades in college.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Others view me as intelligent.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Most courses are very easy for me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I sometimes feel like dropping out of school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Most of my classmates do better in school than I do.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Most of my instructors think that I am a good student.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>At times I feel college is too difficult for me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>All in all, I am proud of my grades in college.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Most of the time while taking a test I feel confident.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I feel capable of helping others with their class work.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>I feel teachers' standards are too high for me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>It is hard for me to keep up with my class work.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I am satisfied with the class assignments that I turn in.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>At times I feel like a failure.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>I feel I do not study enough before a test.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Most exams are easy for me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>I have doubts that I will do well in my major.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>For me, studying hard pays off.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>I have a hard time getting through school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>I am good at scheduling my study time.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>I have a fairly clear sense of my academic goals.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>I'd like to be a much better student than I am now.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>I often get discouraged about school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>I enjoy doing my homework.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>I consider myself a very good student.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>I usually get the grades I deserve in my courses.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>I do not study as much as I should.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>I usually feel on top of my work by finals week.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Others consider me a good student.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>I feel that I am better than the average college student.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>In most of the courses, I feel that my classmates are better prepared than I am.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>I feel that I do not have the necessary abilities for certain courses in my major.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>I have poor study habits.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**CAMPUS CONNECTEDNESS SCALE**

**Directions:** The following statements reflect various ways in which you may describe your experience on the entire college campus. Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale (1 = Strongly Disagree and 6 = Strongly Agree). There is no right or wrong answer. Do not spend too much time with any one statement and do not leave any unanswered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Mildly Disagree</th>
<th>Mildly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. There are people on campus with whom I feel a close bond................................. 1 2 3 4 5 6

*2. I don't feel that I really belong around the people that I know on campus.................. 1 2 3 4 5 6

3. I feel that I can share personal concerns with other students.................................... 1 2 3 4 5 6

4. I am able to make connections with a diverse group of people..................................... 1 2 3 4 5 6

*5. I feel so distant from the other students....................................... 1 2 3 4 5 6

*6. I have no sense of togetherness with my peers.................................. 1 2 3 4 5 6

7. I can relate to my fellow classmates.................................................. 1 2 3 4 5 6

*8. I catch myself losing all sense of connectedness with college life............................ 1 2 3 4 5 6

9. I feel that I fit right in on campus.................................................. 1 2 3 4 5 6

*10. There is no sense of brother/sisterhood with my college friends............................. 1 2 3 4 5 6

*11. I don't feel related to anyone on campus........................................ 1 2 3 4 5 6

12. Other students make me feel at home on campus........................................... 1 2 3 4 5 6

*13. I feel disconnected from campus life................................................ 1 2 3 4 5 6

*14. I don't feel I participate with anyone or any group....................................... 1 2 3 4 5 6

* reverse score

Reverse score negative items 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14 and sum all 14 items.
Humboldt State University
Informed Consent to Participate in Research

The Correlation between Academic Self-Concept, Student-Faculty Interactions, and Class Status among African American College Students at Humboldt State University

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your permission, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators: Emily Sommerman, PsyD Research Chair Department of Psychology Humboldt State University Autumn Fannin, Principal Investigator (707) 826-3270

Purpose of the Study: Examine the relationship between academic self-concept, student-faculty interactions, and class status among African American college students compared to other students at Humboldt State University.

Description of the Study: This study will take place at Humboldt State University. You will spend approximately 20 minutes answering questions regarding your academic abilities, interactions with faculty, class level, and campus environment. You will be asked to complete two online surveys using the Survey Monkey database.

Risks or Discomforts: There are no anticipated risks for participating in the study. You may feel uncomfortable answering personal questions. However, all information is confidential. You have the right to refuse to answer any of the questions. You may also discontinue participation at any time.

Benefits of the Study: Participants may be able to change the manner in which African American college students are perceived, eliminate barriers in pursuing higher education, and move toward equality in academic competitiveness. Information obtained from this study may contribute to the body of research on African American college students and suggest innovative approaches to promote academic success among this population.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality and privacy will be maintained at all times restricting subject contact to the survey administrator and assigning each subject an identification number. All documents will be kept electronically in a password-protected filing system which only the Research Chair, Dr. Emily Sommerman, or graduate student Autumn Fannin will have access to. All documents used for data entry or analysis will contain only the subject ID number, and will not contain your name or any other indication of your identity.
Voluntary Nature of Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Humboldt State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue his/her participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If I have questions regarding the survey or your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you can contact the investigator Autumn Fannin graduate student in Psychology, at asf11@humboldt.edu or Emily Sommerman, PsyD and HSU Professor, at Emily.Sommerman@humboldt.edu. I understand that I will be asked for non-identifiable demographic information and that this information will be stored electronically in a password-protected filing system. If you have questions regarding this project, or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you may contact the IRB Chair, Dr. Ethan Gahatan, at eg51@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-4545. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, you may report them to the IRB Institutional Official at Humboldt State University, Dr. Rhea Williamson at Rhea.Williamson@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-5169.

I acknowledge that I have read and understand the implications of this research. By continuing on to the following surveys, I give my consent to participate, and therefore also declare that I am a student at Humboldt State University, and thus eligible for participation in this study.
Hello Everyone,

My name is Autumn Fannin and I am a graduate student in the Counseling Psychology Program. I am interested in looking at the success and well-being of African American students here at HSU. My tentative thesis title is: "The Correlation between Academic Self-Concept, Student-Faculty Interactions, and Class Status among African American and Caucasian Students at Humboldt State University". Students will need to provide information about their experiences at Humboldt State University. My surveys should take no more than 15 minutes altogether.

Please let me know if you can support me in this research study by distributing my questionnaires to your clubs/students. If so, I will provide you with a link to the surveys. Thank you for your help and time in supporting a fellow student.

Sincerely,

Autumn Fannin

M.A. Counseling Psychology Program Candidate
1. Faculty are approachable. (Quality)
   (5) Strongly Disagree
   (4) Disagree
   (3) Neutral
   (2) Agree
   (1) Strongly Agree

2. Faculty make an effort to get to know me. (Quality)
   (5) Strongly Disagree
   (4) Disagree
   (3) Neutral
   (2) Agree
   (1) Strongly Agree

3. Faculty mentor me. (Quality)
   (5) Strongly Disagree
   (4) Disagree
   (3) Neutral
   (2) Agree
   (1) Strongly Agree

4. I have informal out-of-class contact with faculty members. (Frequency)
   (5) Weekly
   (4) About Weekly
   (3) 1-2 Month
   (2) Rarely
   (1) Never

5. My out-of-class contact with faculty members is positive or helpful. (Quality)
   (5) Strongly Disagree
   (4) Disagree
   (3) Neutral
   (2) Agree
   (1) Strongly Agree

6. How do you identify your race (for example: African American, Hispanic, Caucasian, Native American, Asian, or Mixed Race)?