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Racial Identity and Student Satisfaction: Analyzing Black College-Student Experiences Through Social Media Expression

Kameron Drumright

Abstract: This paper explores how Black college students express their positive or negative experiences, opinions, and perspectives relating to racial/ethnic identity at their racialized learning institutions—either Historically Black College/University or Predominantly White Institution. Codes were identified from posts ($n = 57$) on X (formerly known as Twitter) by Black college students through keyword search based on issues prevalent in past scholarly literature as well as historical context—issues such as racial alienation, hostile interracial-interaction, and institutional discrimination. I analyzed these tweets primarily using a thematic analysis in order to triangulate the most commonly held views and opinions of these Black college students in conjunction with historical continuity and scholarly research. This paper identifies great psychological impacts of educational segregation and the concept of “triple consciousness”—an awareness of perception by institutions, by fellow Black peers, and self-reflection on how educational choices affect identity—expanded from W.E.B. DuBois’ theory of racial authenticity, among other findings. These findings suggest consistent patterns and differences in racial identity navigation across institutions. High rates of expressed external identity consciousness, persistent alienation, and institutional criticism show that, while legal segregation has long since ended, its psychological legacy continues to shape Black educational experiences today.

Introduction

The treatment of Black students within the American education system has come a long way. Since the days of the Reconstruction Era following the Civil War, integration of Black people into schools from elementary to higher education became greatly common. Nevertheless, the lasting effects of educational segregation are still affecting Black students today. Two categories of institutions of higher education are discussed throughout this research: Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs) and Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). Both sets of institutions have a population of Black students that face different challenges in both social and education experience. Using X (Twitter) as the primary social media site for data collection, this research sought to present the

thoughts, viewpoints, and insights of these students.

The guiding question for this research was: “How do tweets by Black College-Students represent the opinions and experiences—in relation to racial identity/ethnic background—of attending either an HBCU or a PWI?” The methodology of this research consists of a multi-step, thematic analysis followed by a coding process to categorize tweets from Black students across institutions. This approach was taken to find significant themes from the major grievances and experiences of these students. The steps are laid out in chronological order of how I formulated the research. These steps are:

- Initial Literature Review
- Methodology/Coding Process
- Findings/Analysis
- Conclusions/Implications

With this study, I attempted to put the experiences of Black students at HBCUs and PWIs into conversation to bridge the research gap not previously explored within this field. While past literature discusses these institutions in isolation, this research synthesizes the experiences of these students to help fellow Black students grasp a greater understanding of how their lives are similar to or different from those around them.

Literature Review

College Difficulties

The stress faced by students in higher education, meaning college/university, is well-documented and -discussed; there are many social impacts in adjusting to college education, dorm-life, and, in some cases, the new geographical environment of their institution (Goldrick-Rab et al. 2016; Pedrelli et al. 2015). These stressors have been well documented because college, to many, is the bridge to their professional future. Social isolation, academic inadequacy, and apathy are some of the many reasons why an undergraduate student or beyond might struggle in their college/university career; these social and psychological difficulties in adjusting and/or fitting into college environments are even more prevalent among Black students due, in part, to the lasting impacts of educational segregation as well as lesser educational funding and resources. Black students are disproportionately impacted by systemic neglect, racial inequality, and educational inequalities. Some social challenges faced the most by this subset of students, which will be explored in the results of this research, include racial microaggressions, stereotype threat, campus climate issues, and the necessity for “code-switching”—which means changing or censoring the way one speaks to present a certain personality.

Historical Context

From the cultivation of this country’s thirteen colonies in the early 1600s, Black people—then Enslaved Africans—faced numerous structural barriers preventing their educational and economic prosperity. This was due, in large part, to American society and its economy benefiting through the Slave trade

and the dehumanization of Africans that prevailed in American legislation for centuries. The process of extracting African people from different countries that spoke different languages disrupted both any possible connection that they could have with each other to unionize against their captors and the establishment of culture within these Africans’ country of origin. The countries that were victim to this human extraction were often fighting wars against neighboring African countries and traded with European colonialists for weapons. When the resources that these colonialists sought had dissipated, they received humans as a resource to do labor with. This commodification of African people, along with the pre-established European ideal that darker-skinned people have inferior cultures to their own, helped cultivate American race-politics that would end up being embedded into American society for the foreseeable future. Education within what is now known as the United States of America was a privilege often only given to white people. The education that Black people had in the Antebellum Era consisted of either teachers being sent to teach young enslaved children reading and writing or clandestine learning, which was a tactic of enslaved people teaching others—this defied the era’s laws that prohibited the formal education of enslaved people. Even then, knowledge and learning were a privilege that a large majority of Black people did not have (Cornelius 1991; Anderson 2010).

It would take more than two centuries for the enslavement of Black people in the pursuit of free labor to become illegal. Immediately following the Civil War and the emancipation of Black people across America, education and political power were a priority for Black people. After generations of labor and illiteracy being all that many enslaved Black people knew, establishing their own societal contributions became possible on a macro-scale. In 1865, the Reconstruction Era sought to reintegrate Southern states into the Union in order to establish new governments in the South to give basic rights to formerly enslaved people; constitutional amendments such as the 13th, 14th, and 15th were outlets for this integration. This was done to redefine the relationship between African Americans and white citizens. The interracial relationship of the time was hostile, which led to these efforts being undermined by later Jim Crow laws and white supremacist violence.

After the perceived success of the Reconstruction Era that saw the establishment of civil rights for Black people (DuBois 1935), the white resistance to this nationwide progressive movement in the formerly-Confederate states in the South manifested through violence groups, like the Ku Klux Klan, and the fight to erode the civil liberties Black people had fought for. During the late 1870s, state legislatures in the Southern U.S. passed laws requiring the segregation of Black and white people in such places as public transportation and schooling. This separation through race within learning institutions subsequently damaged the educational success of Black students by systematically underfunding and overcrowding schools that were poorly equipped with resources compared to white schools (Walker 1996). This economic inequality and inequity affected educational opportunities. The fight for the betterment of schooling for Black youth eventually led to the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* of 1954, ruling racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional (Kluger 2004). Despite this ruling, it was not until the 1960s, after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made racial segregation and discrimination illegal on an institutional level, that these segregation laws were fully abolished. While the abolition of racial discrimination and separation helped Black students' educational attainment through increased integration into white schools, de facto segregation within learning environments still persisted, perpetuating racial separation and inequality.

After institutional segregation had been ruled illegal, white communities responded by contributing to social segregation, psychological and emotional strain, and subtle or overt hostility to their Black student-counterparts. White communities also engaged in "white flight" with their access to higher-quality education (Kruse 2005). This contributed to further social segregation because it both perpetuated the idea of a racial hierarchy in American society and, once again, left Black students in learning institutions that were underfunded due to a lack of care for these communities. Within the following decades, as racial integration of educational environments has become normalized, Black communities have improved educational access, increased representation, and social and economic mobility (Harper 2009). Simultaneously, white communities encounter increased di-

versity, collaborative learning, and improved social and political awareness. Similar to many progressive movements, there are barriers to preventing the ideal learning environment for both Black and white communities. Some of these contemporary barriers include implicit biases and hostility towards non-white peers, unequal educational opportunities, racial tension, and the dissolution of safe racial spaces.

College Life for Black Students and the Development of HBCUs

During the early to mid-1800s, the first HBCUs were created with the mission of educating the nation's poorest and least academically prepared students, particularly from communities of color; these institutions sought to prepare first-generation students of color for stable careers to ensure their contribution to the American economy (Allen & Jewell 2002; Gasman 2007; Johnson et al. 2017). These institutions were greatly funded and developed during the Reconstruction Era within the South, which was a short period of over a decade where African Americans gained citizenship, access to education and political office, and career opportunities among other rights.

The legacy of HBCUs is exemplified by pivotal Civil Rights leaders that have graduated from these institutions, including Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.; Thurgood Marshall, Former Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States; Ms. Rosa Parks, Civil Rights activist; and Spike Lee, acclaimed Black director, actor, and activist. HBCUs have a tradition of nurturing students' talents and skills and contributing to the development of the African-American middle class.

In the present-day, HBCUs have seen a decrease in attendance of Black students—with a decrease of 254,286 to 208,785 Black students from 2010 to 2022, respectively (AIBM; IPEDS 2022). This could be indicative of the perception that HBCUs might not be as sought out or necessary in America's current educational environment. Still, for the students that are present at HBCUs, research suggests that the Black-student body tends to have more positive experiences than their Black counterparts attending PWIs. For instance, Pascarella & Terenzini (1997) state that HBCUs appear to have a small positive effect on occupational status and both academic and social self-image

among Black women. This sentiment is mirrored in James Earl Davis' journal (1994) discussing the suggestion that Black students have greater support and reported higher levels of satisfaction when attending HBCUs. Considering the more positive learning outcomes of Black students in HBCUs, it posits whether the contemporary Black college student sees their experiences as positive or not from their own personal perspective.

The interracial relationships vary greatly within institutions of higher learning between Black and white students, whether it be at HBCUs or PWIs. Within the Black-student body at both HBCUs and PWIs, the sense of community is supportive, but there is a specified comfortability between Black students at HBCUs. Leath et al.'s (2022) study on Black students' community at PWIs identified strong Black intraracial-support themes—meaning within the Black community—such as building professional support networks, acknowledging racism in academic settings, feeling like a family, and engaging in activism. But, at PWIs, Black students are exposed to more opportunities for racial discrimination than Black HBCU students. The work of Campbell et al. (2016) reports that students themselves identify that these occurrences of racial discrimination, whether large or minuscule, occur at higher rates than they do at HBCUs. Chen et al. (2014) supports this in their journal that discussed the increased drop-out rates of Black students being due in part to their common feelings of isolation and/or alienation. These racial stressors, among others, affect the psychological well-being of many Black students (Dancy 2018).

Research Connection

The historical context connects to my research process at three points: 1) in what topics were chosen as the focus in the tweet-collection process; 2) what categorization/coding was done after data collection; and 3) what conclusions and implications were drawn from the research. All steps of the research process and conclusions drawn from findings were influenced by previous works within this field of research, and they were performed to best represent the lives of Black college students; past literature and historical continuity substantiates the impact of systematic racism and educational segregation on these students.

Exploring how these students feel these impacts and how they express themselves catalyzed this research. These Black college students are tasked with navigating complex social environments while learning to communicate and represent their own racial identity. Simultaneously, this all takes place in a new environment that is their college/university, where they must maintain an adequate educational career. There is much to be done to improve the lives of these students. With their voices tending to go unheard, taking the time to understand their experiences and opinions can be the necessary step towards change. My research recognizes the necessity of listening to these young college perspectives and the institutional/societal improvements that can come about. By comparing the realities expressed online regarding two different racial learning environments, those being HBCUs and PWIs, the middle ground of what impacts Black college-students most in contemporary higher education could be observed.

Method

Positionality Statement

Before exploring the method of this research, it is crucial to recognize any implicit biases that could have impacted the research process and the work's conclusion. The majority of my own previous research has related to negative historical policies and societal ineptitudes that have impacted Black people in America, including inadequate mental health initiatives for Black high school students and economic mistreatment of Black veterans leading to high rates of homelessness. As a Black student approaching college decisions myself, with educational experience researching and reporting within the fields of humanities and social sciences, I recognize that I bring a personal perspective to this research. Considering that I have personal interest in possibly attending Howard University or another prestigious HBCU, Black college-students' discussions and opinions are useful in my own college searching process as well as for other Black students deciding on their learning institution of choice. Given these factors, there may be preconceptions about which environment might be more accommodating or nurturing for Black students. To

address any potential biases, I implemented the strategy of using a multi-step categorization process in addition to coding and also included both positive and Beattie perceptions of HBCU and PWI institutions for diverse sources. This study also had multiple external reviewers consisting of educational advisors, professional researchers within this field such as Dr. Marlena Debreaux, and peers who are familiar with the research process. While this position requires careful attention to remaining objective, it also provides valuable insight into the nuanced conversations surrounding the college decision process and the racial environment that HBCUs and PWIs , respectively, cultivate for Black students.

Ethical Considerations

For this research project, no direct human subjects were used. IRBs are only necessary when a research project is conducted with direct involvement of human subjects. Because this research only involved the tweets from Black students and not direct contact with the students, no IRBs or other ethical reviews were necessary.

Data Gathering

The data that was gathered were tweets on the social-media platform “X” (formerly known as Twitter) by a number of HBCU/PWI students and graduates. I chose the tweets based on their relevance to keyword searches on the platform’s search engine. Most keyword searches included topics from scholarly literature within this field alongside the inclusion of the acronyms “HBCU” or “PWI” to specify the topic to either learning institution. Once keyword searches were made, tweets relating to the following criteria were chosen:

- User self-identifies as Black/African-American/ Afro-Caribbean/Continental African
- User self-identifies their attendance at either an HBCU or non-predominantly Black college/university through their Twitter Bio, username, or prior posts
- Tweet relates to their own experiences, opinions, and perspectives with their chosen learning institution regarding their racial/ethnic identity in relation to student satisfaction

- Tweet comes from an individual, rather than an organization/representation of a larger group

Approach

Initially, the data analysis and triangulation would have used codes from Williams et al. (2018) source focusing on the microaggression categories that any Black students could face at either institution, but this would have led to different, unintended implications for the experiences Black students have at HBCUs vs. PWIs. To remain focused on comparing the opinions and perspectives of Black students across learning institutions, which helps specify the gap this research attempts to target, I developed more specific codes after identifying multiple categories for each tweet; the first category was given using a sentiment analysis—“Is this tweet positive, negative, or neutral?”— and the following two steps identified specific attitudes within any given college students’ tweet using adjectives descriptive of the Black-college student experience—“Is this student angry, supportive, regretful, etc.?”—and the subject of discussion in each tweet—“What is the specific issue or topic that is being addressed in this tweet?”

Participating Media

The final sample size of tweets consisted of 56 posts from 56 individual, Black students. 30 tweets were from HBCU attendees and 26 tweets from PWI attendees, meaning 30 tweets were about the Black HBCU-student experience and 26 were about the Black PWI-student experience. The institution with the most tweets relating to it was Howard University, which is an HBCU. No more than one tweet from the same individual was included in the data to increase representation.

Data-Analysis Process

I completed initial coding using the aforementioned three-step identification process for comprehensive categorization: This process allows tweets of different focuses and varying positivity levels to be recognized before thematic analysis. This thematic categorization further narrows down tweets before final thematic analysis.

I. Sentiment Analysis of Tweets

Sentiment Analysis was conducted first for each and every tweet using language queues to denote whether the tweet is positive, negative, or neutral. This is useful when observing the commonality of positivity students had towards certain institutions, racial groups—interracial or intraracial, or any other discussion topic.

II. Attitude-Language Distinction

Expanding on the Sentiment Analysis step above, each tweet was given one or multiple words to describe the tone they used within the tweet. Words were effective in encompassing the attitudes of these students.

III. Subject Observation

After the previous two steps, the last step before actual coding was to identify the subject of discussion within each tweet. This was simple and useful for observing where the greater swath of HBCU or PWI students were targeting their energy through their posts.

After the three-step identification process, each tweet was given codes for further categorization, with some tweets being given more than one code. All 12 codes were decided on using the most recurring themes of past literature and the three-step identification. No codes of past research were used to differentiate this research beyond past works. The following is a table of all codes used:

All codes fall under one of two categories—positive or negative codes—with two exceptions [Self-

Identity Conscious and *Identity Conscious of Others*]. *Interracial Appreciation* and *Interracial Judgement* can be defined by Black students’ expressed positive or negative interactions with or insights on White/non-Black peers in regards to their social or educational experience. Similarly, *Intraracial Appreciation* and *Intraracial Judgement* can be defined by the interactions expressed by Black students towards other Black students; these discussions, issues, and gripes remain within the Black community while interracial codes denote interaction across racial groups. *Student Connection* and *Student Alienation* are defined by either the expressed acceptance or isolation a student has felt in their institution. All *Institutional* codes [*Institutional Appraisal (PWI)*, *Institutional Criticism (PWI)*, *Institutional Appraisal (HBCU)*, *Institutional Criticism (HBCU)*] relate to a student’s experience, either positive or negative, at either racialized learning environment—HBCU or PWI. Finally, *Self-Identity Conscious* and *Identity Conscious of Others*, are the aforementioned exception codes. These codes are not inherently positive or negative. Each tweet given one of these two codes contained a student either discussing their own Blackness or how another student chooses to express their own Blackness. “Blackness,” within this study, is defined by one’s expression of African-American identity, culture, and/or ethnic background in social settings—how they talk, dress, portray themselves, communicate ideas, etc.

Fig.1: All Codes Used for Tweets from Black College-Students/Alumni

Positive Codes	Negative Codes
Interracial Appreciation	Interracial Judgement
Intraracial Appreciation	Intraracial Judgement
Student Connection	Student Alienation
Institutional Appraisal (PWI)	Institutional Criticism (PWI)
Institutional Appraisal (HBCU)	Institutional Criticism (HBCU)
Self-Identity Conscious	Identity Conscious of Others

Findings/Analysis

Below is a table showing each code from most frequent to least frequent, an example of a tweet found for each given code, historical context, and a connection to past literature in order to triangulate what themes are most commonly expressed and why.

Fig. 2: Black Student Experiences at HBCUs and PWIs: Triangulation Analysis

Code	Frequency	Frequency in Percentage (%)	Twitter Evidence	Historical Context	Research Connection
Identity Conscious of Others	32	21.3%	"It aches my heart when I see privileged, suburban, well versed & well-spoken black girls attending HBCUs"	Rooted in educational segregation history and integration challenges	Williams et al. (2018): "identity monitoring" as coping mechanism
Student Alienation	24	16.0%	"Being a black kid at a PWI is experiencing constant alienation when the professor asks for everyone to get in groups"	Classroom segregation and the act of bussing Black elementary students to colored schools during the Jim Crow Era has had lasting social impacts on racial integration in schooling.	Chen et al. (2014): Black students, particularly at PWIs, identify feelings of isolation and alienation that lead to higher dropout rates
Institutional Criticism (HBCU)	17	11.3%	"Howard University should be ashamed for the housing crisis at hand"	Higher expectations for institutions created specifically for Black students	Amanishakete Ani (2013): Productive and Progressive attitudes lead Black students to remain hopeful while pushing for better educational resources and opportunities.

Institutional Criticism (PWI)	15	10.0%	<p>"Attending an elite PWI this past semester has severely depleted my mental health because of the intense anti-blackness"</p> <p>"I had never been to a predominately white school until college...it was still psychological warfare"</p>	Legacy of explicit exclusion followed by reluctant integration	Chen et al. (2014): Black students at PWIs encounter both overt and covert racism from various sources
Intraracial Judgment	14	9.33%	<p>"Black PWI students appropriate HBCU Culture everyday"</p> <p>"Are we not supposed to have fun because we're black and attending a PWI that's not even classified as a PWI anymore? Going to a university with Caucasians does not make us any less black than students who go to an hbcu."</p>	Reflects tensions about educational choice within Black community; Identity policing has historically been performed to create more positive perceptions of Blackness and combat stereotypes	Larry J Walker (2018): Mental health stigmas within the Black community can prevent mental health support and perpetuate a hurtfully-quiet mindset
Self-Identity Conscious	13	8.66%	"One of my fears coming to a PWI as a Black woman was trying to fit in professionally"	Fear of racial-uniqueness in any environment is not new to American society; any "out-group" in American society has been discriminated against until assimilation.	James Earl Davis (1994): Necessary attention to identity development in educational contexts

Student Connection	11	7.33%	“HBCUs are such an experience... everybody was a smart black kid...I’ll never experience something like that again”	HBCUs historical-ly created spaces for Black community building; racial congruence contributes to comfort	Williams et al. (2018): Importance of same-race peer networks for retention
Institutional Appraisal (HBCU)	9	6.0%	“Sometimes I be forgetting racism even exists when I’m at my hbcu”	Recognition of HBCUs’ historical mission and cultural significance	James Earl Davis (1994): Black students tend to receive greater support, and they seek out this support more to great rates of satisfaction
Intraracial Appreciation	6	4.0%	“Black students at PWIs please do not let anyone make you feel like you deserve to deal with racism because you don’t attend a HBCU”	Reflects solidarity within Black educational communities	Amanishakete Ani (2013): In-group support systems
Interracial Judgment	6	4.0%	“If you aren’t BLACK AMERICAN, you will NEVER understand the depths of the SOUL people”	Reflects ongoing racial tensions in integrated spaces	Sue et al. (2007): Normalization of racial discrimination can manifest in less acceptance, equality, and diversity.
Institutional Appraisal (PWI)	1	0.66%	“If a black university refused to care for their own, yet you expect PWI school to treat them better. My son is at PWI and he does not have all these issues. It is disgusting what [the administration is doing].”	Historical context of PWIs as sites of exclusion	Leath et al. (2022): Strong intraracial-support networks and engaging activism are necessary in acknowledging and combating systemic racism at PWIs.

Interracial Appreciation	1	0.66%	“So say a white person that grew up in the area knows most of the people of color in the area and is most comfortable around them... you think that white person is weird for wanting to attend [an HBCU]?”	Racial integration has become more and more common as diversity has been normalized through policies, like the Civil Rights Acts of 1964.	Amanishakete Ani (2013): Hope Theory—the stated importance within Black Youth of remaining hopeful towards a greater political and social future.
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Quantitative Observations

The *Identity Conscious of Others* code was the most frequently observed code at 21.3% of observations. *Student Alienation* followed with 16.0% frequency, while *Institutional Criticism (HBCU)* and *Institutional Criticism (PWI)* appeared at similar rates of 11.3% and 10.0%, respectively. *Intraracial Judgement* was coded at 10.0% of observations. *Self-Identity Conscious* followed with 8.66% frequency, with *Student Connection* at 7.33%. *Institutional Appraisal (HBCU)* appeared at 6.0% of observations. Both *Intraracial Appreciation* and *Interracial Judgement* were coded at 4.0%. The least frequent codes were *Institutional Appraisal (PWI)* and *Interracial Appreciation*, each at only 0.66% of observations.

Putting these quantitative values into the context of the qualitative research, the significant gap between *Identity Conscious of Others* (21.3%) and *Self-Identity Conscious* (8.66%) suggests individuals were more attuned to navigating their racial identity in relation to others than to internal identity processing. This external focus coincides with the disparity between *Student Alienation* (16.0%) and *Student Connection* (7.33%), revealing environments where belonging remains challenging. Despite different institutional contexts, criticism rates for HBCUs (11.3%) and PWIs (10.0%) were similar, though the subjects of the tweets with those codes differed—resource and administration at HBCUs vs. social climate and discrimination

at PWIs. This contrast is further emphasized by the substantial difference between *Institutional Appraisal* rates, with HBCUs (6.0%) receiving nearly ten times more positive appraisal than PWIs (0.66%). Within racial dynamics, judgment outweighed appreciation in both intraracial contexts (10.0% versus 4.0%) and interracial contexts (4.0% versus 0.66%), highlighting persistent tensions around educational choices, authenticity, and cross-racial relationship development in higher education settings.

Thematic Triangulation

The pre-coding categorization process of evaluating tones and subjects of tweets was purposefully inductive in order to gather the direct opinions of the students with the experience in these institutions and develop the appropriate codes. Through combining the historical context of Black education and past studies, both past and present experiences, opinions, and perspectives on the racial environments that higher learning can create for Black students were triangulated.

Identity Navigation (Identity Conscious of Others 21.3%, Self-Identity Conscious 8.66%)

The most frequent codes reflect Black students’ heightened awareness of racial perception in educa-

tional spaces, with external consciousness appearing nearly three times more frequently than internal identity discussion. This consciousness stems, partially, from the legacy of educational segregation, where Black students' transition to predominantly white spaces created what Williams et al. (2018) terms "Identity Monitoring" as a coping mechanism. Chen's research connects this to "stereotype threat," creating cognitive burdens that impact academic outcomes and social comfort (2014).

Belonging Dynamics (Student Alienation 16%, Student Connection 7.33%)

Experiences of isolation significantly outpaced those of connection, with alienation appearing more than twice as frequently, particularly at PWIs. Despite racial integration, Black students remain psychological outsiders at many institutions, reflecting the reporting that Black students feel heavily isolated within PWIs due to non-racial congruence—the lack of seeing peers of the same race—and at HBCUs due to the higher expectations some subsections of the Black community hold each other to (Everett et al. 2016, Chen et al. 2014). Still, positive reinforcement amongst Black adolescents in higher education supports high morale and student connection (Ani 2013).

Institutional Evaluation (Criticism HBCU 11.3%, Criticism PWI 10%, Appraisal HBCU 6.0%, Appraisal PWI 0.66%)

Criticisms appeared at similar rates despite different focal points of discussion—HBCUs for resources/administration and PWIs for social climate/discrimination. Notably, positive appraisals of HBCUs appeared at much greater rates than at PWIs. The dual criticism reflects Black students' nuanced position; they are critical of PWIs for lacking inclusion while holding HBCUs to higher standards despite their historical underfunding. Sue and Williams' work on racial microaggressions explores how everyday interactions at PWIs create hostile and unwelcoming environments, while public opinion demonstrates the many benefits HBCUs provide despite resource limitations (Sue 2007; Williams 2018). Sylvia Hurtado's (1992; 2007) campus climate research reveals the gap between institutional diversity statements and ac-

tual Black student experiences at PWIs, explaining the dramatic difference in positive appraisal rates.

Racial Relationship Dynamics (Intraracial Judgement 10%, Intraracial Appreciation 4%, Interracial Judgement 4%, Interracial Appreciation 0.66%)

Judgement consistently outpaced appreciation in both intra- and interracial contexts, with positive cross-racial interactions appearing particularly rare. Dating back to the debates between Black scholars Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois on the purpose of Black education, the choices surrounding adequate education within the Black community remain politically charged. This tension reflects DuBois' "double consciousness" concept, expanded by contemporary sociology research by Cherise Harris and Nikki Khanna on racial authenticity where educational choices become "proxies" of identity politics (Khanna and Harris 2014). The minimal positive interracial experiences echo America's segregated educational history, while Sue's microaggression framework helps explain the subtle forms of interracial judgement, and historical racial identity development clarifies why positive interracial connections remain challenging.

Post-Triangulation Findings

Historical Continuity and Institutional Impact: Despite decades since legal desegregation, the psychological impacts of educational segregation persist through high rates of identity consciousness and alienation. The nine-fold difference in positive institutional appraisals (6% HBCU vs. 0.66% PWI) demonstrates how institutional histories directly shape student experiences of belonging. Despite resource advantages at many PWIs, the cultural affirmation provided by HBCUs offers psychological benefits that Davis (1994), Ani (1997), and Pascarella and Terenzini (2013) connect to overall Black student satisfaction and wellbeing.

Complex Identity Navigation and Discourse Evolution: The high frequencies of External Identity Consciousness, Intraracial Judgement, and Self-Identity Consciousness reveal what extends beyond DuBois' "double consciousness" to a what could be coined a

"triple consciousness"—an awareness of perception by institutions, by fellow Black peers, and self-reflection on how educational choices affect identity. Adding this third dimension of self-reflection is important to acknowledge because it addresses the individual's choice to identify themselves based on their own merit and achievement rather than just how their institution or their peers perceive them. This "Triple Consciousness" framework can assist Black students in triangulating where their own idea of Blackness fits with the broader spectrum of Black people. There is no "correct way" to be Black, even if a considerable amount of *Identity Conscious of Others* codes say otherwise. The significant gap between judgement and appreciation codes across all relationship types suggests that contemporary racial discourse in higher education remains problem-oriented rather than solution-oriented. This complex identity navigation appears most pronounced in discussions about institutional choice (HBCUs vs. PWIs), where students negotiate between cultural affirmation and perceived professional advantages that reflect the evolving expectations of a new generation balancing racial consciousness with career/education/professional aspirations.

Conclusions and Implications

Connecting past literature with contemporary sources and the codes developed for this research revealed how Black college students in this sample appear to navigate racial identity at different institution types. This research bridges the gap between isolated studies of either HBCUs or PWIs by comparing Black student experiences across both racialized learning environments.

The most significant patterns in the findings reveal a complex landscape of Black student experiences. First, the frequency of *Identity Conscious of Others* (21.3%) over *Self-Identity Conscious* (8.66%) indicates Black students invest considerable time in managing external perceptions rather than internal identity development. This extends beyond what previous literature concluded, suggesting a "burden of representation" that persists, regardless of institutional/racial makeup. Second, while criticism rates were similar for HBCUs (11.3%) and PWIs (10.0%), their foci differed as mentioned—resource allocation and administra-

tive inadequacy at HBCUs vs. social climate and racial discrimination at PWIs. This suggests Black students hold different expectations of these institutions that reflect distinct historical goals. Third, the disparity between institutional appraisal rates (HBCU: 6.0%, PWI: 0.66%) quantifies the significant psychological benefit HBCUs provide despite resource challenges, which supports James Earl Davis' (1994) conclusion that HBCUs offer superior social support, similar to the conclusion of Ani and what is supported by the racial-congruence framework leading to greater resilience found in the results of Leath et al. (2013; 2022). This research introduces the concept of "triple consciousness"—extending DuBois' "double consciousness" to include the awareness of institutional perceptions, fellow Black peers, and self-reflection on how educational choices affect one's racial identity. This helps in explaining the frequency of negative/judgement codes and highlights complex identity navigation Black students persist in higher education.

Implications

For PWIs, the near absence of positive institutional appraisal codes coinciding with high student alienation signifies an urgent need for change/expansion in diversity initiatives to address systemic issues in campus climate. These institutions should provide more resources in creating genuine and welcoming spaces for community-building while addressing microaggressions and social isolation discussed by Sue et al. (2007), Chen et al. (2014), and Williams et al. (2018). For HBCUs, the mixed perceptions of institutional criticism and appraisal suggests that these institutions provide crucial cultural and racial affirmation, but that administrative and resource challenges need to be addressed. Policymakers should address this historical funding inequity that has impacted HBCUs. For Black high school students considering college options, this research provides evidence-based insight into institutional choices. PWIs offer resource advantages, as evident through history, and HBCUs provide significant psychological benefits through racial and ethnic congruence. The high frequency of intraracial judgement codes (9.33%) still suggests that navigating identity politics within the Black community remains a challenge, regardless of institutional choice.

This topic of inquiry and its data collection required maintaining a level of distance from the opinions and experiences of these Black college students, as stated within the positionality statement. There are parallels between the lives of the students/alumni and the lives of students who identify as Black within my own educational environment.

Limitations

Personal bias can be a limitation within this work; maintaining the proper tone in order to collect and assess tweets from these students was a crucial strategy for objectivity. Similar to possible researcher bias impacting research conclusions, the biases of X’s algorithm could have possibly impacted the tweets collected during the data collection process. This was combated through the creation of a new account on the platform in order to reduce algorithmic bias. It’s also important to note that the smaller, more concise number of tweets chosen does not represent all Black college students. So, a greater sample size of tweets could be targeted, possibly including more positive instances, if this research project was expanded upon.

Other notable limitations that persisted were the site’s common recommendation of accounts, people, and news organizations that had a right/far-right political ideology—some include Donald Trump Jr., Tucker Carlson, Elon Musk, and Fox News—and the keyword-searching method of my data collection phase having varying degrees of consistency; the longer it took to find quotes for data collection, the more the algorithm could impact the recommended tweets to what it believed the account used for research was most interested in. The X (Twitter) algorithm is constantly changing through adaptive technology and evolving free-speech regulations, which creates challenges in deducing reliability.

Conclusion

This research bridges previously separate conversations about the Black student experience, which reveals both consistent patterns and crucial differences in racial identity navigation across institutions. The high rates of external identity consciousness, persis-

tent alienation, and patterns of institutional criticism show that, while legal segregation has long since ended, its psychological legacy continues to shape Black educational experiences today. The contrasting experiences of students across the two racialized learning environments suggests Black students face a largely implicated choice between institutions offering greater cultural affirmation versus greater resources despite a more complex racial climate. By focusing on Black student voices through this social media analysis, this research adds to the understanding of contemporary higher education as experienced by those simultaneously navigating racial identity, institutional contexts, and educational excellence.

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