

## ABSTRACT

Race, The Role Model Effect, and Bias in the Classroom at a  
Predominantly White Institution

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Do black students at a PWI experience college differently than other students? If so, in what ways? How can black students' experiences be improved? If race creates complexities for Black students at a predominantly White university, what are the mechanisms which affect Black students' learning outcomes and what measures can be taken to mitigate such complexities? The purpose of this thesis is to answer these questions through a literature review of the role model effect and bias in the classroom as well as personal interviews with five Black students and two Black professors. The "role model effect" offers one way of understanding the importance of student-teacher relationships. Results of student-teacher relationships include better classroom engagement and a stronger sense of self-efficacy which lead to positive learning outcomes. Bias in the classroom includes microaggressions, teacher-student misalignment of assessment of effort, and self-fulfilling prophecies.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

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RACE, THE ROLE MODEL EFFECT, AND BIAS IN THE CLASSROOM AT A  
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

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By  
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## DEDICATION

To Dr. Elizabeth Corey, for being my role model since freshman year of college. Thank you for your encouraging guidance and mentorship throughout the thesis writing process and beyond.

## INTRODUCTION

Many people assume they know what the word “diversity” means within the context of higher education. When I started my research process, I had a general idea of what the term meant and where I stood on the political spectrum concerning diversity policy in the university setting. However, as I began researching, the word “diversity” revealed itself to be complex and controversial. In fact, when I asked people in passing what their opinions of diversity were, I found they were quick to think of the political implications. People were more likely to think of diversity as a left wing or right wing agenda, than they were to think of it in terms of the benefits or drawbacks of diversity.

The research began through an independent study class focused on defining the value of diversity in a higher education setting. I began reading articles on the benefits and drawbacks of diversity within a higher education setting. As I read, I realized that diversity in the context of higher education is a subject that many people assume they understand but never research more deeply than perusing a *New York Times* or *The Atlantic* article posted on social media. This alarmed me because the majority of people I talked to expressed opinions that were not based on rigorous evidence-based research. I wondered if there is research that shows the relationship between proposed benefits of diversity and diversity itself? I decided that my thesis should explore one area of diversity in-depth so that I might be able to both understand diversity and articulate my view to others.

My research consists largely of a literature review of academic articles. Additionally I include several anecdotal interviews to provide a sketch of the experience of black students at a predominantly White institution (PWI). I suggest that, as an avenue for future research, a more in-depth interview study take place to include more responses from Baylor students and faculty to quantify the relationship there between same-race teacher-student relationships and what I will later define as self-efficacy. Because of the lack of definitive evidence from the literature review and conversation-based interviews I conducted, it is difficult to conclude where anxiety in black students originates and the many sources of stress that affect black students' experience on campus. This thesis seeks to aid those who are interested in understanding the variables that contribute to black students' performance at PWI campuses.

I narrowed the literature review to the impacts of race on black students at a predominantly White institution. Specifically, I seek to answer the questions: Do black students at a PWI experience college differently than other students? If so, in what ways? How can black students' experiences be improved? I chose to explore black students' experiences with black role models. I understand that other minority groups on campus, including Hispanics, Asians, and others, face unique challenges. The focus of the thesis is narrowed to the college experiences of black students to ask and answer these questions within the parameters of an undergraduate thesis.

I decided to dig further into what became my first chapter, "The Role Model Effect." African American/Black students comprise 8.7% of Baylor's undergraduate population ("Baylor University ||| Profile of Undergraduate Students" 2017) Within this population, what difference, if any, is there between black students' role model

relationships with faculty and white students' role model relationships with faculty? The role model effect encompasses the whole of the teacher-student role model relationship. It includes the mechanisms by which learning outcomes occur. In isolating the mechanisms by which change takes place in the student, one should be able to pinpoint what specifically about role models creates a positive outcome in students. Role model relationships appear beneficial to all students. But are role model relationships particularly beneficial for black students? My question of whether black students experience college at a PWI differently than other students would be answered in part by exploring what role models do for all students and how same-race and differing-race teacher-student role model relationships promote learning outcomes in black students.

It is not clear whether black students' choice of a black or white role model is related to learning outcomes of the relationship. Danesh Karunanayake and Margaret M. Nauta (2004) conducted a study that calls into question whether minority students specifically have a higher need for role model relationships. Karunanayake and Nauta (2004) show statistics which indicate black students' likelihood to choose black role models, but they do not conclude whether this increases success outcomes related to career goals.

Role models of differing ethnicities may have different effects. Black role models may carry a unique "role" in a same-race role model relationship because they have experienced similarly racialized environments to those of their black students. However, as Frank Tuitt suggests, black professors may have partialities that push black students past their comfort zones in the classroom. White role models may provide benefits which are associated with all role models while also opening new doors to "non-traditional"



career paths. Black students may not find black role models due to the scarcity of black professors in non-traditional areas. For example, there are fewer black professors in the STEM fields historically. (“Nsf.gov - Data Tables: Science and Engineering Doctorates - NCSES - US National Science Foundation (NSF)” 2017). Thus, there may not be enough black professors in a department (such as neuroscience) for every black student who desires a black professor as a role model. It is unclear statistically what impact this lack of same-race teacher-student matches has on black students.

Role models of either ethnicity appear to offer benefits to black students. However, the literature reviews and the anecdotal interviews are insufficient to firmly establish a causal relationship between same-race teacher-student role model relationships and black students’ successful learning outcomes. I leave this task for future research.

White role models might be beneficial to black students because some black students, especially females, have not ventured into what are called “non-traditional” areas of study in the past. Thus, any role model (and many times it is a white role model by default) is a helpful influence towards excelling in non-traditional academic careers. However, a black role model can additionally be helpful in ways that a white role model cannot. A black student may be more comfortable with a black professor because of a culturally related connection. However, I found no research to support that. Such relationships have natural positive learning outcomes. For black students specifically, same-race teacher-student role model relationships provide a shared understanding of the black students’ complex backgrounds through the professor’s experiences in education and in a racialized society.

Once I looked at why teacher-student role model relationships are beneficial to black students, I began what I thought would become a chapter on teacher bias. I thought that white professors must have some innate level of racial bias towards their black students. However, I found two important things. First, teachers do not tend to act on racialized understandings on the students, meaning they do not show approval or disapproval based on the ethnicity of a student. Rather, there is a misalignment of assessment of effort that stems from a cultural mismatch between the teacher and student. This puts black students in a “student yes, teacher no” category, meaning that black students are more likely than white students to think they are doing well, while their professors are more likely to assess their effort at a level below par. Second, teacher bias tends to not be the main source of bias that students encounter in the classroom. Black students experience what I call peer-to-peer bias more often than they experience teacher bias. Thus, I decided to incorporate both peer-to-peer bias and teacher bias into chapter two in order to gain a more thorough understanding of the complex difficulties that black students encounter and how professors tend to help mitigate those difficulties.

The third chapter is filled with interviews I conducted on Baylor’s campus with five black students and two black professors. The purpose of the studies was to gain anecdotal evidence of the way that the theories and abstract ideas in the literature review impact black students and professors at Baylor University. I found that the literature review was helpful in putting the black students’ experiences into context. I would add a caveat that while the literature said some things about what black students experience, my research indicated that there is a range of black student responses to each area the literature review assessed. For example, black students who grew up in the suburbs were

less likely to feel attached to the “black” culture on campus than the black students who grew up in racialized areas. This is one reason why it is was helpful to conduct the interviews so that I might “give life” to the otherwise deflated theories and statistical data in the literature review research.

Through this research, I grew in my understanding of diversity in an in-depth, specific topic: the learning outcomes associated with same-race teacher-student relationships and the bias that black students face at a predominantly White institution. I feel that I can better relate to not only my black friends, but black students across campus. I also feel better informed when the topic of the goods of diversity arises or when people ask my opinion about where diversity fits within the context of higher education.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Role Model Effect

The “role model effect” offers one way of understanding the importance of student-teacher relationships. Most people assume that close relationships are important for individual growth over a lifetime. However, a variety of questions may be asked about how exactly role models further students’ growth while in college. For example: What is the essence of the role model relationship? Through what mechanisms are the learning outcomes of role model relationships between professors and students measured? In what ways is the effectiveness of role modeling affected by same-race relationships?

To summarize, the literature describes the essence of the role model relationship to be an ethical template for moral issues, a symbol of achievement, or a nurturing guide for academic or career-related goals. The outcomes of a role model relationship are measured through personal goals, outcome expectations, and self-efficacy. One notable result from a role model relationship is better classroom engagement, through the development of self-efficacy in the student. This self-efficacy might develop through a nurturing relationship with the teacher and achievements over time. Self-efficacy is particularly important and appears to be impacted negatively through anxiety. It can also be an indicator of success in students. Black students particularly may face unique challenges on a predominantly white institution (PWI) campus. “Own group conformity” creates complexities for black students and can affect the effectiveness of a same-race

role model relationship, based on what the student feels is important for his or her education. Based on the critical race theory, black students have inevitably faced racism in some form, which creates different needs that black professors can help to fill. The social learning theory helps one to understand how a role model molds a student through conformity effects. Furthermore, it is beneficial for a black student to choose a black role model, who can help the student navigate previously racialized environments through the role model's own personal experience. It is also beneficial for a black student to pursue relationships with white role models as well, to break into non-traditional career paths that have not previously been held by African Americans. These findings point to a greater understanding of the same-race role model relationships for black students and is critical to understanding and promoting the learning outcomes of black students on a PWI campus.

*What is the essence of role model relationships?*

I turn first to the several different definitions of role models. Anita Allen (1995) says the definition of role models can be ambiguous. Not everyone means the same thing when they refer to themselves or others as role models (Allen 1995, 156). She employs three overarching senses of the word: ethical template, symbol, and nurturer. Within these three classifications, there are more narrow definitions.

Every teacher is an ethical template for her students. This can be acted out in a number of ways, depending on the character of the teacher. For example, if a teacher decides to act immorally, her student may observe this act and internalize the ethical decision, which could conditions the student to act in a similar way. For example, if a

teacher says that she allows food and drinks in the classroom, despite the clear sign on the wall from the dean's office, "no food or drink allowed," it can be a poor example for the students to follow. Although small, these kinds of examples can lead to poor behavior in students. Whether moral or immoral, the teacher is an ethical template for her students.

While all teachers are ethical templates, only some serve as "symbols" of special achievement(Allen 1995, 157). If a teacher has overcome unfavorable odds, she can be an example for her student in pursuing excellence despite difficult circumstances. Such a person might come from a low socio-economic status, but she has managed to overcome obstacles to gain a Ph.D. in physics. She is a symbol her student can observe and copy. With the teacher as a living example, a student "uses" the teacher as a symbol of special achievement, a reminder that challenging milestones should and can be pursued.

Allen describes the final sense of "role model" as "nurturer." Teachers who personally expend efforts to mentor, tutor, counsel, and educate about cultural and scholarly events are role models in a nurturing sense (Allen 1995). They address the specific needs of each student. This tends to be a highly developed relationship through one-on-one interactions between the faculty and student. For example, the student may share with the teacher problems that are occurring in her personal life, stressful coursework for other classes, confusion or reflection on political events, or musings about life after college. The teacher takes on a role similar to that of a parental figure, although still in the professional setting of the university. A teacher can help nurture the student by giving her attention, advice, and encouragement for the student's individual needs. In this sense, the teacher acts as a nurturer for the student.

Allen (1995) admits that these three senses of the word role model—ethical template, symbol, and nurturer—are simply broad themes and are still somewhat ambiguous. She wants educators to acknowledge a deeper and more precise understanding of the essence of role models in order to better articulate the ways in which role models benefit the learning outcomes of students.

*Chung's three definitions of role models*

Kim-Sau Chung (2000) takes the three overarching senses of role models from Anita Allen (1995) and describes three still more specific subsets of role models. These are as follows: moral role model, informational role model, and mentor. Whichever type of role model, a person should exhibit two features. First, the role model should be someone who has achieved something unusual and attracts a lot of imitators (Chung 2000, 641). Second, the role model produces imitators who rationally desire to copy the individual because of his accomplishment (Chung 2000, 641).

The moral role model is someone who affects preferences through conformity effects. Chung's definition of a moral role model fits into Allen's overarching category of a role model as an ethical template. The impact of a moral role model occurs precisely because of student preferences through conformity effects. This means that a student watches the teacher and begins to adapt to their model of behavior. For example, when a student observes her teacher's moral actions, she can decide if she wants to imitate the same actions. Her preferences change based on the example the teacher sets for her (Chung 2000, 640). For example, if a teacher is prompt to class, prepared with class material, and acts fairly with all her students, it may cause the student to copy these

actions. Thus, the student is prompt to class, prepares homework beforehand, and treats her peers with equal respect. The student conforms to the teacher's own habits based on the positive actions she comes to prefer for her own life. This is an example of a moral role model.

The next more specific definition of role model that Chung (2000, 640) gives is the informational role model, which is the most common type of role model. The informational role model provides information about the present value of current decisions (Chung 2000, 640). This definition of an informational role model fits into Allen's broader theme of the symbolic role model category. Also called "role molding" by Chung (2000) this role model relationship occurs when the teacher serves as a symbolic figure of what is possible. This symbol of where a series of career decisions may lead the student is essential to learning process for a student. Thus, the student is "molded" into a person who is career-minded and thoughtfully takes steps in achieving future career success.

The average college student spends a good amount of time thinking about what career she should pursue after graduation. For example, if a student wants to pursue a Ph.D. in economics, she may look to her economics professor as an informational role model. The professor is a symbol of a desired outcome—economics Ph.D.—and a source of information about which steps to take in the future. This occurs both directly, through actions such as developing better study habits and mastering material, as well as indirectly, through efforts of personal development and résumé building. This is an example of the definition of an informational role model.



The last definition of a role model that (Chung 2000, 640) describes is the mentor, someone who can walk alongside a student and help to develop a recognizable result out of nothing. This type of role model can be thought of as a “builder.” They help to build both the intangible feeling of confidence, as well as a palpable result of a final project or thesis with the student. This definition of the mentor fits within Allen’s overarching sense of the role model as a nurturer. A student goes to a teacher when she needs help with research in an area of shared interest, or wants to start a new project and needs a directive mentor.

The mentor demonstrates what Chung (2000) would call “academic midwifery,” or in other words, the ways in which faculty assist their students in producing new ideas and scholarly insights. For example, if a neuroscience student were interested in doing research on the orofacial movements of the marmoset monkeys, who have rich vocal communication, she might go to her neuroscience professor who has a background of work with neurons and vocal communication for assistance in her own research. The professor could then help the student to develop a hypothesis for the study, conduct research, put together an outline, and write an article on the orofacial movements of the marmoset monkeys. Without the nurturing presence of a teacher alongside her, this student might have had the initial idea to research within her major of neuroscience but it probably would not have come to fruition. Thus, Chung’s use of the word mentor is to show a professor who trains the student to produce a recognizable or tangible result.

These three definitions of role model from Chung (2000) help to give a deeper understanding of the initial overarching themes that (Allen 1995) describes. To take the definition of mentor to an even further level of understanding, which Chung (2000)

already explained, it is helpful to look at what (Eby et al. 2008) calls an academic mentor, a more specific version of the broadly understood definition of mentor. Eby (2008, 2) describes the academic mentor as someone who acts using in the apprentice model of education. The professor holds expertise in a specialized area of study and the student desires to learn from the professor, similar to the way a protégé wants to gain a thorough understanding of his master's craft. A professor imparts particular expertise to the student, provides support in the learning process, and offers the student guidance in academic as well as non-academic areas of interest (Eby et al. 2008, 2). Through the apprenticing process, the student undergoes a "psychological adjustment" and discovers "a sense of professional identity" (Eby et al. 2008, 2).

This gradual handing on of knowledge moves a student toward a successful professional life. For example, a student may be studying to becoming a chemist. Before undergoing the transformative experience of working with his academic mentor, he is curious about the area of chemistry and may even have taken the introductory chemistry classes. However, it is through the strenuous and long-term engagement with his academic mentor that he becomes a knowledgeable and skilled chemist. Although still a young professional, he will be well equipped to pursue a graduate degree in chemistry or to work in a chemistry lab after graduation. This kind of nurturing mentor can help a student develop himself for future academic research or professional endeavors. Eby's (2008) definition of academic mentor is thus a subset of Chung's (2000) definition of mentor, which is a more specific understanding of the essence of a role model, described by Allen (1995) as a nurturer.

In sum, there are several discrete definitions for the term “role model.” These tend to encompass both academic success related to class performance, identity, and the impartation of knowledge, as well as non-academic success related to career decisions and other non-academic areas of interest. Keeping these definitions in mind, I will now consider the various mechanisms through which the learning outcomes occur. The transmission of teaching, coaching, advising, and encouraging from the teacher to the student creates a recognizable outcome in the student that can be observed through qualitative and quantitative studies.

*Through what mechanisms are the learning outcomes of role model relationships between professors and students measured?*

The second major question I will answer is how these relationships work in practice: How—through what mechanisms—are the learning outcomes of role model relationships between professors and students measured? In answer to this second question, it is helpful to start with social cognitive career theory (Brock 2015). Social cognitive career theory explains the social aspect that influences career choice. Three factors—personal goals, outcome expectations, and self-efficacy—affect one’s psychological functioning (Brock 2015, 1). Through the framework of this theory, one can see that modeling is a key component of career outcomes because a role model is able to greatly impact these three areas. I have already shown how a role model such as the informational role model or the mentor can nurture, create expectations for success, and help build a student’s confidence in her own ability. Social cognitive career theory is an important way of framing the impacts of a role model on the career expectations of a college student.

Of the three areas of social cognitive career theory, self-efficacy is the most important variable for student success because self-efficacy leads to positive results in outcome expectations, performance results, and ultimately career decisions (Brock 2015, 5).

Self-efficacy is the belief that a student holds which enables him to act confidently when learning new subject material or studying for an exam. It is important for success in an academic setting because the student's motivation to do well comes from a feeling of autonomy and self-confidence. Thus, the student feels he can set academic goals *and* accomplish them. Another key area of the theory is outcome expectations. Outcome expectations are a way for a student to understand what the practical objective of his efforts should be (Brock 2015, 5). Without a clear expectation, it is difficult for a student to productively progress towards a clearly defined goal. Outcome expectations become clear to the student through a process of working, measuring, and comparing results—then repeating the process. Thus, the student can ascertain what the future value of her efforts are before a task is attempted. Through outcome expectations, one is motivated towards a realistic goal, which fuels the effort toward achieving that expectation.

The third important part of social cognitive career theory concerns the student's personal goals (Brock 2015, 4). These goals are both a motivating factor and a natural result of the learning process. One tends to pursue a certain degree or major based on the personal goals set outside of the classroom leading up to college education. For example, if a person has set a personal goal to be the first person to live for a significant period of time on Mars, then he will craft his education with this in mind—perhaps taking all of the

astrophysics and engineering classes that are available. In sum, with the social cognitive career theory as a foundation, one can see how a role model has a direct impact on the self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals of a student.

I turn now to other recognizable outcomes of mentoring relationships. Eby et. al. (2008, 6) provides a cursory view of the various outcomes, based on a statistical study. He finds that there are six categories of protégé outcomes related to mentoring, which vary on a wide scale among the different categories. However, the group of categories was overall a fairly small effect size, meaning that mentoring is not especially correlated to academic or career-related success. The six hypothesized categories of positive outcomes of mentoring relationships are as follows: behavioral, attitudinal, health-related, relational, motivational, and career-related. Eby (2008, 6) uses sub-categories within the six categories to provide additional detail about which outcomes were particularly affected by a mentoring relationship. When measuring the correlation between mentoring and the six categories of outcomes, the most likely outcomes are these three sub-categories: helping others, school attitudes, and career attitudes. Although still significant, the smallest effect sizes were between mentoring and psychological stress or strain, career recognition and success, deviance, and self-perceptions (Eby et al. 2008, 7). In general, health-related outcomes, such as psychological stress or strain, and career-related outcomes are less influenced by mentoring, while attitudes, interpersonal relationships, and motivation are more easily affected by mentoring (Eby et al. 2008, 11). This is helpful when evaluating the specific outcomes of mentoring in a categorical way.

### *Faculty-Student Interactions and Classroom Engagement*

Next, I consider Young Kim and Carol Lundberg (2015) who show that faculty-student interactions lead to favorable outcomes, which affect cognitive skill and classroom learning. Kim and Lundberg (2015) offer a theory for how to think about the outcomes of faculty-student interactions. They hypothesize that frequent faculty-student interaction enhances students' academic self-challenge and sense of belonging, which motivates students' to have a greater level of classroom engagement, thus facilitating gains in cognitive skill (Kim and Lundberg 2015, 289). In academic self-challenge, a cyclical process occurs by which successful students set goals, invest effort to meet those goals, and notice progress towards goal attainment. This cycle helps successful students see that they are capable learners.

Academic self-challenge is the first of two inputs, which will lead to better classroom engagement, and thus to greater cognitive skill (Kim and Lundberg 2015, 289). Because students internalize the goals of the people they admire, this internalization becomes a mechanism for transformation in the student over time (Kim and Lundberg 2015, 292). The faculty-student interaction leads to a stronger determination to achieve the student's goals because the student is driven by the same goals of a mentor, who is in a sense a hero. Not only does the student not want to disappoint the teacher, but he is also encouraged by a united sense of purpose with the person who has already achieved a goal similar to his own. For example, if a student is interested in studying constitutional law, and his mentor is a professor of constitutional law, the student is united with him through a shared sense of purpose. Both the professor and student understand the intricacies of the subject matter and are driven by the sense of importance that it holds. Furthermore, the

student may be interested in an area of research that his teacher is also interested in so that they both decide to research the same topic together. Driven by this, the student has an ignited determination to do well because first, he sees that the person he looks up to is interested in it and second, the professor's interest in the topic keeps the student accountable to do excellent work. This cycle of faculty-student interaction helps the student to internalize that he is a capable learner (Kim and Lundberg 2015, 290).

A sense of self-belonging is the extent to which people feel that they belong and that they are valued members of a community (Kim and Lundberg 2015, 290). Self-belonging is an important indicator of student success is because it is difficult to perform well in a place that feels hostile or unwelcoming. A key factor in a student's sense of belonging is the teacher's classroom demeanor. Student perceptions of their instructors' warmth and openness was positively related to a sense of belonging and to student participation in class (Kim and Lundberg 2015, 291).

Another indicator of successful student learning is classroom engagement, which is a key outcome of positive faculty-student interactions. Students are more engaged in the classroom when faculty members demonstrate behavioral and attitudinal accessibility cues, particularly in terms of humor, care for students, and passion for the topic of the course (Kim and Lundberg 2015, 291). Students also report greater engagement in courses when faculty members communicate that student questions are valuable and when faculty express an understanding of their responsibility to help students succeed (Kim and Lundberg 2015, 291).

Both academic self-challenge and a sense of self-belonging contribute to classroom engagement. Better classroom engagement results in fully recognized

cognitive skill, one of the “most essential outcomes of college education”(Kim and Lundberg 2015, 291). Further, a student with fully developed cognitive skill will process information completely, communicate clearly, reason logically, and make intellectually informed decisions (Kim and Lundberg 2015, 292). Two clear ways to tell if a student has developed cognitive skill through the classroom are critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills (Kim and Lundberg 2015, 292).

Now that one can see how a sense of academic self-challenge and a sense of self-belonging contribute to classroom engagement and thus cognitive skill, it is important to turn to a third contributor of academic success which corresponds to both academic self-challenge as well as a sense of self-belonging: self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a person’s feeling that they are capable of setting goals and executing a plan to achieve those goals. In other words, it is self-confidence or self-esteem. Brock (2015) found that all differences in his study of students with successful learning ability tended to have a strong self-efficacy factor. A student’s self-efficacy level is related to several other beliefs about oneself including academic performance and retention, academic outcomes, and persistence (Brock 2015, 24). For example, students with high self-efficacy show increased persistence in any given task (Brock 2015, 26). Imagine a student who encounters a difficult task, such as an honors thesis and discovers that it is time intensive and meticulous. Where one student might crack under the pressure and quit the thesis, the student with a high self-efficacy factor will stay committed to the long-term task, displaying an increased persistence over an average student. Similarly, a student with high self-efficacy will tend to perform better academically and make more informed choices (Brock 2015, 45).



### *A deeper look at self-efficacy*

There are many aspects of a student's experience that contribute to his self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an internally grounded belief about one's personhood, based on the ability to evaluate one's self, using frames of reference involving a particular situation (Brock 2015, 6). Through a mental feedback loop, one is able to evaluate how well he did, taking into account set goals, his performance on a task, and his comparison to perceived social standards. The social factor is one aspect that greatly affects the self-efficacy of a student. A person experiences a feedback from the people in his surroundings and internalizes what he observes as a message. This message is translated into an evaluation of his action or task performed (Brock 2015, 6). For example, if a math student is asked to demonstrate the solution to the real analysis homework problem on the board during class, he will perform this task while taking in the signs of approval from his professor and the mixed reactions of his peers – acknowledgement, annoyance, wonder, and confusion. The message sent by each person in the student's environment is not a signal that they actively send to the student – it is not an evaluation form that has been filled out. Rather, it is a combination of subtle social cues and people's reactions to the task performed. These cues and reactions are then developed into an intangible signal to the person on the receiving end of the messages. These messages are a strong indicator of a student's level of self-efficacy, although the way that a student processes through social cues can act as a line of defense for negative feedback.

Despite a student's best efforts to counteract negative feedback, the student's social setting can have a strong impact on his self-efficacy beyond what he can control. One can see how it could be damaging to a student's self-efficacy to have anxiety in

connection to a particular behavior (Brock 2015, 7). Environmental factors such as friends, family, teachers, and communities can impact whether a student feels comfortable and confident or anxious (Brock 2015). In many cases, a student has had many experiences that contribute to the self-efficacy he operates by on a daily basis.

*Self-efficacy in African American Students and  
the impact on career-related outcomes*

Because of the lack of understanding between self-efficacy and ethnicity, it is important to examine career-related decisions and outcomes more closely, keeping in mind that African American students encounter different information sources than students of other races. There are four sources of influence that lead to self-efficacy and these four sources particularly affect African American students (Brock 2015, 6). These information sources make it especially difficult for African Americans to develop healthy and positive self-efficacy beliefs according to Brock (2015). The inevitable racism that African American students will face in school comes at a time during the junior high and high school years when self-efficacy beliefs are beginning to form (Brock 2015, 13).

Performance accomplishments, the first source of influence, serves as a key piece of information that African American women particularly take and use to their advantage (Brock 2015, 6). Performance accomplishments occur when a person experiences either success or failure at a given task and then, through reflection, chooses to take action in one way or another based on the outcome she internalized (Brock 2015, 6). Because of the unfair differential treatment that African American women have experienced throughout history, there are clear role models that African American young female students look to for inspiration and endurance in the social environments they encounter.

In this way, they are able to internalize the performance accomplishments of others. This helps to build self-efficacy in young African American women through examples of success in other African American women who themselves have accomplished significant achievements (Brock 2015, 11).

Vicarious learning, the second source of influence, affects African American women as it relates to career aspirations, compared to their non-African American female counterparts (Brock 2015, 12). Vicarious learning is the observation of significant figures in one's life (Brock 2015, 6). Because African American women have had to play non-traditional roles for career attainment, it has set a paradigm of independence and fortitude among African American women, which is assumedly imparted to African American women from a very young age (Brock 2015, 12). African American women tend to exemplify similar traits in their career-related mindsets to the significant historical figures before them. This may be one reason why African American women surpass all other non-African American female counterparts when it comes to pursuing strong independent female career paths (Brock 2015, 12). Vicarious learning is one input that influences the self-efficacy belief in a student, particularly as it relates to career outcomes.

Physiological experience, the third influence, has affected African Americans in perhaps the most recognizable way. The anxiety imposed on African Americans by the distrust and paranoia from the ages of elementary school and junior high school (Brock 2015, 13). This can cause emotional distress and as a result impacts performance and goal setting abilities (Brock 2015, 13). Physiological state is associated with a state of arousal that a person feels in connection to a behavior or task (Brock 2015, 8). Brock describes an inverse relationship between anxiety and self-efficacy. He says that increased anxiety

in connection with a behavior or even will result in decreased levels of self-efficacy in the student. Likewise, decreased anxiety in association with a behavior will produce increased levels of self-efficacy (Brock 2015, 8).

Social persuasion, the final influence, has racial implications as well. African American women are taught from a young age conflicting instructions concerning their education; they are sent to school by hopeful parents encouraging the children's academic abilities and yet, these same parents share their own disparaging accounts of differential treatment in their educational setting (Brock 2015, 6). This can cause conflict in the mind of the young African American and thus, social persuasion negatively influences her self-efficacy belief (Brock 2015, 6).

From these four influences, performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, physiological experience, and social persuasion, one can see how the interaction of self-efficacy belief and both learning outcomes and career-related goals are complicated for African American students. It is important to take these variables into account when analyzing and evaluating African American educational experience. With this understanding of self-efficacy, I will now turn to how role models, same-race or different-race impact the role model's effectiveness with students.

*In what ways is the effectiveness of role modeling  
influenced by same-race relationships?*

With the understanding of academic self-challenge, sense of self-belonging, and self-efficacy in mind, the next question is how same-race relationships affect a role model's effectiveness with students, specifically with black students. Because self-efficacy is a strong indicator of academic success for all students, it is important to look

further into how same-race relationships may impact self-efficacy for black students. Because social learning has a direct impact on self-efficacy, African American students can have a further hurdle to surmount as it pertains to healthy and positive views of schooling (Brock 2015, 11). During adolescence, black students must navigate racism, discrimination, and prejudice in the community in which they learn (Brock 2015, 11). Because of the moldable minds of young students in college, the negative feedback loop that African American students encounter can become a weighty psychological barrier to fully engaging in the learning process. Taking these things into account, one can see how African American role models can be helpful in mitigating the negative information that African American students receive on a daily basis. Because of the challenges that specifically impact African American students, it could be very helpful to have an African American role model who can build up and solidify self-efficacy in the impacted student and help to encourage academic self-challenge and a sense of self-belonging. However, there is a complex “constellation” of factors that fosters self-efficacy beliefs within same-race student-teacher relationships (Brock 2015, 31). Frank Tuitt will introduce a few ways in which the same-race role model relationship is complicated by being black.

How does a same-race role model impact an African American student, in a way that is different from other role model relationships? One can see that role models are the ones who influence the three factors of academic self-challenge, sense of self-belonging, and self-efficacy, so it is clearly important that students have the right role models who are supportive and foster a healthy learning environment. How does the involvement of a

role model who is of the same race as the student help to foster the feeling of self-efficacy within the student? It is a complex mechanism that has implicit assumptions.

Same-race relationships between faculty and students are widely perceived to be positively correlated to the success of black students. This is largely based on that idea that black students are underrepresented in higher education (Tuitt 2012, 187) . Tuitt (2012, 187) would advise anyone who is quick to assume that same-race relationships prompt a positive response in black students to look closely before assuming this is the case. Before going further, one needs to understand the mindset that some black students have, called “own group conformity”, which impacts the way one sees the interaction of oneself with a group he is associated with (Tuitt 2012, 187).

Tuitt (2012, 188) says that own group conformity “indicates that individuals may experience elevated levels of stress when members of a specific racial group perceive that other members of that same group hold expectations about how they are supposed to behave.” If a group member does not feel that he identifies with the group or is less likely to engage in actions similar to the group, he can experience added pressure either internally through pressure from a sense of expectation to conform, or externally as explicit pressure from members of the group (Tuitt 2012, 188). There are varying degrees to which a member self-identifies with a group and this can result in those with a low-level salience moving away from the group and those with high-level salience to self-identify with the group in an even more pronounced way (Tuitt 2012, 188). Because of own group conformity, there can be a broad spectrum of people who identify or associate with a specific group.

In the context of same-race faculty-student relationships, own group conformity can create tense scenarios for black students who do not self-identify with being black (Tuitt 2012, 188). Especially if a black professor identifies more strongly than his black student, it can create pressure for the student to represent his race through higher performance or through activities outside the classroom related to being black. In a Predominantly White Institution, otherwise known as a PWI, black students go through the learning process under a sort of “spotlight” where interactions and learning outcomes are measured at a micro level (Tuitt 2012, 188). Such a mismatch of professor and student in the context of a PWI can create anxiety in students who already do not feel a part of the black group on campus and do not relate to their professors. This anxiety is what Tuitt (2012, 189) identifies as a feeling of “collective threat,” where one feels pressure to conform to a group and threatened when one chooses not to conform. Collective threat can also lead to lower achievement, lower standardized test performance, and dissociation with members of the in-group (Tuitt 2012, 189). Collective threat can be especially bad because it leads to anxiety (Tuitt 2012, 188). Anxiety in the school context is especially damaging, as it is one of the known detractors from a student’s self-efficacy.

Because black students experience more stress on PWI campuses than white peers, this is one way in which same-race relationships may complicate the learning outcomes for black students. If a black student feels anxious on a PWI campus, it can severely lower the student’s self-efficacy. This appears to be a “double-edged sword” because if a black student feels comfortable and welcomed on a PWI campus, the student

is much more likely to succeed. However, if the student feels uncomfortable, it can take a detrimental toll on the student's likelihood for success.

In order to understand how same-race mentoring relationships may impact black students, one must understand the critical race theory. With a clear set of social understandings in mind, it becomes apparent how the experience of black students differs from that of white students. The unifying themes of the critical race theory are the following: Firstly, racism is endemic to American life (Tuitt 2012, 189). Power structures have been in place that disenfranchised many people, including black students. Secondly, the dominant ideology of racism is to approach racism with neutrality through objectivity and color blindness (Tuitt 2012, 189). Through the set of lenses called neutrality, one is able to argue that meritocracy is colorblind. However, the critical race theory views neutrality with skepticism. Thirdly, racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage (Tuitt 2012, 190). In the melting pot of the United States, the differences in socioeconomic status and in benefits received for each individual tends to be related to people's ethnic background (Tuitt 2012, 199) . Fourthly, Tuitt posits that the experiential knowledge of people of color must be recognized (2012, 190). It is clear that the experience of black people is different from other experiences and thus this experience must be acknowledged as unique and valuable. Fifthly, the critical race theory is interdisciplinary. It cannot be implemented in one academic or social area alone (Tuitt 2012, 190). The focus of CRT is elimination of racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression (Tuitt 2012, 190). With the critical race theory in mind, it is easy to see that the experience of black students in higher education can be starkly unique compared to that of white students.



Keeping in mind the critical race theory, how does the experience of black students with faculty differ from those of white students? We know that the relationship between faculty and students can “provide sponsorship, protection, challenge, exposure, visibility, counseling, acceptance, confirmation, and/or coaching and can have a large impact on students’ perceptions of the quality of their graduate experience” (Tuitt 2012, 187). Overall, the concepts of own-group conformity and collective threat offer some insight into how the pedagogical interaction between Black faculty and Black students in PWI classrooms may be complicated by race (Tuitt 2012, 187). Recognizing the impact that positive interactions between faculty and students can have on Black students’ academic success, educational scholars have studied factors that influence the development of such relationships (Tuitt 2012, 187).

### *The experience of 10 undergraduate black students*

In light of the social sciences that contribute to an understanding of black students in higher education, one could suppose that black professors are a vital piece to the conditions that make a black college student successful. I now turn to Frank Tuitt’s qualitative examples of black undergraduate students describing their experiences with black professors, for how same-race relationships affect the learning outcomes of actual students. It is helpful to put theories into the conditions of reality when talking about the way it affects black students, in order to gain a better understanding of how black students approach the complexities of a PWI campus. Tuitt’s (2012) research shows that black students may hold a set of perceptions related to black faculty. These assumptions,

along with the assumptions that black faculty hold themselves, create a complex set of outcomes, which can vary case by case.

There is a set of assumptions that Tuitt (2012, 188) says black students hold: Black students assume black professors will use diverse content in their courses. They think that black faculty will not treat them in stereotypical ways. Black students feel that black faculty hold a positive belief in their academic ability. They feel that their black professors will hold them to higher standards in the classroom and outside the classroom. They have questions of black faculty's credentials. Black students may have increased levels of stress based on their perceptions of black faculty. These are the working set of assumptions that black students, according to Tuitt (2012), have in the higher education setting. It creates a complex set of outcomes as all of the assumptions overlap and create tension.

In further answer to this question, Danesh Karunanayake and Margaret M. Nauta (2004) studied the tendency of minority and white students to choose same-race role models and sought to understand how this choice impacted the career decisions of students in each racial group. The social learning theory (Bandura 1977) in essence says that people tend to learn from observing others. By internalizing the actions of others subconsciously, people will begin to adapt to or adhere to those actions themselves. Consistent with this theory, Karunanayake and Nauta (2004) note that this is one way that role model effects take place between a student and teacher. With this in mind, there are a few implications concerning same-race role models with minority students. If minority students choose same-race role models, they may have fewer role models depending on what field they choose to go into (Karunanayake and Nauta 2004). For example, if a

black female college student chooses a career in any of the STEM fields, it may be more difficult for her to find same-race role models because there tend to be far fewer black women in the STEM fields than other minority or white professionals. Therefore, it is difficult for her to have a wide variety of role models within her own race. This being said, one conclusion is that the black female student should look beyond her own race for a role model. Otherwise, there is another obstacle in her path to succeeding in a non-traditional career path that may have been difficult for black females like her to pursue in the past.

Furthermore, it appears from Karunanayake and Nauta (2004) that it is beneficial and natural for minority students to choose a career role model who is the same race because the role model can offer guidance on how to navigate minority stereotypes in the workplace or how to break a glass ceiling for minorities in a certain career path. This being said, it is also beneficial to have role models who are not of the same race as the minority student. Such heterogeneous role models, according to Karunanayake and Nauta, would open up new opportunities and help to dispel untrue stereotypes. The benefits of a diverse pool of role models, not to the exclusion of any one race, helps to give a fully developed picture of what the student may face in a particular field after college (Karunanayake and Nauta 2004).

*Self-efficacy:*

*The best predictor of career goals and student performance in minority students*

Jonathan Cole and Barber (Cole and Barber 2003) examine the same-race interactions between students and faculty. Cole argues that it is common for people to make assumptions about the necessity of interactions between minority students and minority professors because it prepares them for the occupations they will continue in after graduation. He says that many of these assumptions do not have sufficient evidence to warrant such claims. (Cole and Barber 2003). Mentioned in Cole and Barber's article, Rothstein and Ehrenberg (1994) discovered that students who attended an HBCU, Historically Black College or University, were more likely to stay in school, and were more likely to finish within seven years. However, they found that the students were not more likely to have better success in their early careers immediately following college (Rothstein and Ehrenberg 1994).

In another study by Ehrenberg, Goldhaber, and Brewer (1995), it was determined that same-race relationships do not have a significant impact on the students' learning experience but they do have an influence on how the professor views the student. Therefore, teacher bias appears to be influential in how the teacher evaluates the student. Ehrenberg, Goldhaber, and Brewer (1995) offer two possibly conflicting conclusions from their data: If it is agreed that the only thing that matters for a classroom to be successful is for the student to learn the critical skills necessary for development, then it follows that the professor's race does not matter. However, if the way in which the professor views the student is a variable for the professor's level of support for the student whether in words of affirmation or in actions promoting the student's successful mastery of the material, then it is the case that same-race relationships may be directly

beneficial to the learning outcomes of the student (Ehrenberg, Goldhaber, and Brewer 1995).

The social cognitive construct of self-efficacy (Bandura 1977) is not only a factor in the success of undergraduate students, but it is assumed to be a factor particularly in the success of black undergraduate students. From the literature, one can see that modeling is a key component of learning. Modeling can have a positive influence on students and self-efficacy, a result of modeling, is a predictor of career goals and academic success. The concern of some researchers is that if minority students only have minority role models, they may stick to non-traditional careers. The definition of a role model is that the experience of the role model is passed on to the student. Therefore, it is clear to see that black undergraduate students may benefit from expanding their role model options to that of different-race matches. One can also see how black students benefit from a same-race role model, who can walk the student through their experience which we can assume is different than a white professor's experience, based on the critical race theory.

It is clear that academic self-challenge, a sense of self-belonging, and self-efficacy should be the three outcomes that professors keep in mind when teaching and building relationships with students. Students should feel that they are able to meet with and develop a relationship with their professor, regardless of the professor's race.

### *Conclusion*

To conclude, one can see how role models are in fact useful for black students on a PWI campus, as it promotes a sense a academic self-challenge, a sense of self-belonging, and self-efficacy. One can also see how the critical race theory can create complexities for black students, who almost certainly has experienced racism in some form or fashion and who may carry anxiety related to a racialized society into their college experience. It can complicate the way black students choose to interact and react to black professors who can be overbearing on PWI campuses and who choose to push black students further than they want to be pushed at times. However, it is important to seek both black and white role models, who can inform the black student based on their own experiences and can open up non-traditional career paths for the student. Self-efficacy is an indicating factor that is correlated to success on a college campus. This is important because professors, and thus role models, have an opportunity to encourage self-efficacy or deflate it. Lastly, one can see that the way the professor views the student can be important to how the professor encourages and promotes the success of the student. This will become important in the next chapter on bias in the classroom.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Bias in the Classroom

Imagine a classroom environment with teachers who interact with students by giving lectures, leading discussions, and grading assignments. Such an environment would produce what are now called “learning outcomes.” But imagine that bias is a factor in this classroom. Bias likely disrupts these positive learning outcomes and could cause disjointed participation of some students in class.

How does bias happen, and how do we detect it? Is it truly bias or is it just perceived as bias? How does bias affect the teacher’s impressions of the student, and how does it affect the learning outcomes of the student? These questions are critical for assessing the learning outcomes of students. In this chapter, I will focus on the nature of bias, how it occurs, how race influences bias, and how teacher bias affects learning outcomes.

#### *The nature of bias in the classroom*

First, what precisely is the nature of bias in the classroom on college campuses, specifically in predominantly White universities? Bias in the classroom occurs in the form of what I call peer-to-peer bias, which can be subtle or overt. Peer-to-peer bias originates in one student and is directed towards another student in the classroom setting.

Guy A. Boyesen and his co-authors combined their research experience in teaching, learning, social psychology, intimate relationships, race and ethnicity to

conduct a study and literature review on the perceptions of bias within the college classroom (2009). Boysen uses statistics to measure the amount of observed bias among graduate student teaching assistants and undergraduates students, and added data to a study on professors' observation of bias. While it is important to use statistics to measure bias, it is perceived bias so it is difficult to know if the bias truly exists, as it is a function of perception. Bias itself is not a measurable reality. Thus, it is difficult to connect true bias to our goal of determining how black students' experiences on a PWI campus is different than other students' experiences. This becomes difficult when comparing the link between anxiety and perceived bias, as there is not data yet to prove what specific amount of perceived bias is related to a measurable amount of anxiety in black students. However, it is helpful to use Boysen's study to understand the amount of bias that students, graduate teachers, and professors report on campus.

Boysen observes that there are many forms of bias that occur on university campuses, with 10% of students reporting that they experience a wide variety of bias in the broader campus environment (Boysen et al. 2009, 220). While this is statistically significant, it is less than the 32% of students who observe bias within the classroom (Boysen et al. 2009, 221). Bias may be related to many attributes about the targeted student, including race and ethnicity. Students may also perceive bias that is related to religion, sexual orientation, sex, class, or disability (Boysen et al. 2009, 223). While it is important to note that 32% of students within the classroom have taken notice of bias against students, this is not all racial bias. Perceived bias against black students is reported within the category of minority and racially related bias, so it is not clear what percentage of black students specifically feel bias in the classroom. Boysen et. al. 2009,



220) does note that there is strong research supporting that African American student feel they are in a less hospitable environment on PWI campuses than do white students. Later in the chapter, Green (2013, ii) observes that black students feel isolated and excluded on campus. Green's article does not statistically quantify this either, as her data comes from qualitative studies as well.

The two types of bias that occur are overt and subtle. Overt bias tends to be intentional and unambiguous to the victim and other witnesses in the environment (Boysen et al. 2009, 220). Through yes or no questions, Boysen determined that 44% of undergraduates of a sample of 1747 students at a large Midwestern university reported they observed overt bias. An example of overt bias is one student using a racial slur to refer to a black student or referring to a black student's actions with a racial stereotype (Boysen et al. 2009, 225) Overt bias tends to dehumanize the victim through strong language that is blatantly offensive. Overt bias is direct and causes intentional emotional or psychological harm.

Subtle bias can be unintentional and ambiguous. It does not have the sting of an outright intentional slur, but it does have detrimental affects (Boysen et al. 2009, 220). Subtle bias can occur without the perpetrator's awareness (Boysen et. al. 2009, 220). It appears to stem from deeply held beliefs and a lack of cultural literacy. Subtle biases are also known as microaggressions, which come in the form of remarks or comments that are not intentionally harmful but build up over time to create an oppressive atmosphere for the individual who is harmed. These remarks can be identified because they come in high frequency over time and tend to undermine the human dignity of the victim. Microaggressions also tend to "define reality due to historical power differentials

between race and ethnic groups" (Boysen et. al. 2009, 220). Some forms of microaggressions include social exclusion, making assumptions about intelligence on the basis of race, and denying the continued existence of prejudice on the basis of race (Boysen et. al. 2009, 220). Such events are stressful for students in many ways. They lead to strong emotional reactions, cause conflict about whether to respond, and are exhausting because of their frequency (Boysen et. al. 2009, 221).

Whether overt or subtle, Boysen et. al. (2009) notes the literature shows that students do, in fact, face bias on campus. This could consist of assumptions about a student's intelligence or criminality based on skin color. It might consist in students of color being treated as foreigners when he or she is in fact a U.S. citizen (Boysen et. al. 2009, 220). Black students often hear denials of the importance of race on campus (Boysen et. al. 2009, 221), which they might take to be a microaggressions. One sees how bias can wear on black students' morale and cause anxiety within students on campus. This leads to the next question: who tends to detect bias in college classrooms?

#### *Who observes bias in the classroom?*

Who observes the overt and subtle bias that occurs in the classroom setting? Three sets of people take notice of bias in the classroom: professors, graduate student teachers, and undergraduate students. Undergraduate students observe it most often, graduate students observe it less frequently, and professors take the least notice of bias (Boysen et. al. 2009, 221). In a sample of 333 professors, 38% observed some form of bias related to race, sex, sexual orientation, etc. and noted an approximately equal distribution of subtle and overt bias (Boysen et. al. 2009, 221). Bias related specifically to

race is noticed by 19% of professors, 18% of graduate students, and 21% of undergraduates, a fairly consistent spread. Bias related to ethnicity specifically is noticed 15% by professors, 13% by graduate students, 14% by undergraduates (Boysen et. al. 2009).

Why do professors notice bias less often than students? This may be explained by the difference in age or the difference in priorities between undergraduate students, graduate students, and professors. Younger professors noticed incidents of bias more often than older professors (Boysen et. al. 2009, 221). This suggests that a longer career in academia as well as the age of the professor can influence and potentially blind the professor to incidents of student-perceived bias (Boysen et al. 2009, 222). Another reason might be that the classroom roles and demographics of professors tend to differ from both graduate student teachers and undergraduate students. Boysen does not elaborate on this in much depth and suggests that perhaps professors do notice the incidents themselves but do not classify them in their minds as biased. Perhaps because of their tendency to be white, professors do not see bias as clearly as (for example) a minority student would. Boysen is not altogether clear in this part of his article.

Boysen also researches graduate student perceptions as a comparison to professors. Graduate students are often responsible for the classroom environment (Boysen et al. 2009, 219). For example, a graduate student may be a teacher's assistant in a classroom and help to facilitate class functions such as giving lectures or grading assignments. Because graduate students can be significantly involved in the classroom setting, Boysen surveyed graduate student teachers' responses to bias. He suggests that graduate students have a unique perspective in the classroom because they are just

learning to teach. Graduate student teachers observe slightly more bias in the classroom than do professors, possibly because they are closer in age to the undergraduate students. This allows for a more sensitized perception of the interactions of students in the classroom. Because of their age, graduate students offer a valuable voice in the classroom, as it relates to matters of bias (Boysen et. al. 2009).

The third set of people who observe bias in the classroom, and the group which observes it most often, consists of undergraduate students. Of 1,747 undergraduate students surveyed, 44% observed overt bias and 63% observed subtle bias (Boysen et al. 2009, 225). Such bias can create intellectual and emotional stressors for targets of bias (Boysen et. al. 2009, 221). Although not all students will be the recipients of bias, 34% felt they had been the victims of subtle bias and 22% felt they had been the victims of overt bias. Whether directed at the student observing bias, or observed by an onlooker, students perceive bias in the classroom and are aware of it. Although professors may not take notice as often as undergraduate students, students look to their professors to see how they will respond to bias in the classroom (Boysen et al. 2009, 229).

#### *Response to peer-to-peer bias*

Thirteen different responses were given in response to surveys that asked for professors' reactions to peer-to-peer bias. These include direct confrontation, providing information, group discussion, public discussion, private discussion, changing the subject, changing student behavior, humor, removal of the student, referral to authority, nonverbal response, ignoring, and instructor bias. Of these thirteen responses, the most common responses among professors when addressing bias were providing information, direct confrontation, group discussion, and ignoring the bias (Boysen et al. 2009, 224). It

is also important to note that responses by professors to bias did not differ in approach when addressing overt or subtle types of bias. A substantial group of undergraduates cited instructors' responses to bias as either being a part of the occurring bias or noted that the professor was in fact the source of bias (Boysen et al. 2009, 228).

### *Discussing and defining teacher bias*

While the majority of bias in the classroom appears to come from students in peer-to-peer bias, a small portion of bias comes from professors themselves (Boysen et al. 2009, 228). However, the bias that is recorded in the literature is manifested more homogeneously than that of peer-to-peer bias, which stems from lack of cultural sensitivity and narrow worldviews. Karen Phelan Kozlowski presents cultural mismatch as a reason behind the achievement gap in students, using cultural capital theory to explain disparities in the classroom (2015, 45). Her work implies that professors might have a different view of black students (as opposed to white students) and shows how this type of bias translates to negative learning environments for black students.

Linked to cultural mismatch is the “mismatch of teacher-student effort”, which inherently makes it difficult for students to show their true effort to their professors (Kozlowski 2015). Student effort in the classroom is understood to be a foundational input into the grading scales used by professors (Kozlowski 2015, 45). Student behavior in the form of effort, sometimes referred to as class participation or the student's desire to learn, can factor into the likelihood that a student will succeed in the classroom and tends to increase the student's chances of making an A or B by 14% (Kozlowski 2015, 45). Therefore, Kozlowski argues, student effort is one of the most crucial inputs for students' academic success within the college classroom (Kozlowski 2015, 45).

Importantly, effort impacts the area of teacher-student cultural mismatch (Kozlowski 2015, 44). Effort is linked to culture because cultural “toolkits” (the tools given by the culture the student comes from) help to define how a student assesses his or her own effort in comparison to the expectations the respective culture has of the student (Kozlowski 2015, 44). Depending on the culture the student was raised in, the student will find herself or himself inextricably influenced by the standard for success and how to achieve it. For example, if a student comes from a culture that values quality education, a calculated career path, and professional success, the student might do better than a student who comes from a culture that does not value these things. This may happen simply because the privileged student has received a more in-depth and comprehensive preparation for college, with the expectation that college will be a step in the long-term success of the student. Based on the cultural toolkit given to students by the culture each student inherits, it is clear to see that there could be a variety of toolkits, and thus a variety of expectations and standards of effort.

Cultural capital theory suggests that because African American students (as well as Hispanic students) are disproportionately lower class, they do not have the same access to “cultural codes” about what is expected in the classroom (Kozlowski 2015, 49). Often, African American students will assess their effort in the affirmative when asked whether they are working hard in a class (Kozlowski 2015, 56). According to statistical research by Kozlowski, African American students are twice as likely to be in what he calls the “student yes, teacher no” category (Kozlowski 2015, 55). This category Kozlowski explains by using the cultural capital theory which suggests that the cultural background of the African American students plays a part in a misalignment of assessment of effort

(2015, 55). African Americans are significantly more likely to believe that they are working hard while not meeting teacher expectations (Kozlowski 2015, 57). Kozlowski asserts this finding is a direct result of two causes. First, African American students are overrepresented by 40% in this category because of a lower socioeconomic status relative to white students (Kozlowski 2015, 57). Second, the lower socioeconomic status of the African American students in this category is linked to poorer academic work and study skills (Kozlowski 2015, 57). Thus, African American students in this category are acting on an academic skill set that is lacking according to standards teachers set for all students and it is tied to a lower socioeconomic background (Kozlowski 2015, 57).

However, Kozlowski asserts that not all strategic actions are deemed acceptable by professors and “gatekeepers” who assign passing or failing status to students on college campuses (2015, 45). In fact, a dominant set of strategic actions tends to emerge in which behavioral norms are solidified and perpetuated (Kozlowski 2015, 45). The dominant strategic actions tend to align with middle class cultural norms because of the “fluency” and ease of access that middle class students tend to have on a college campus (Kozlowski 2015, 45). For example, middle class students tend to be more comfortable in asserting their desire to meet with professors during office hours in order to gain help on assignments, while working class students tend to voice uncertainty and concern about meeting with professors (Kozlowski 2015, 45). In such situations such as this example, professors might think that the middle class students are exerting more effort because they are visiting office hours, while working class students might be working just as hard at home or elsewhere on campus. This alone pushes professors towards evaluating working class students on the lower end of the imaginative “effort scale” than the other

culturally segmented groups. The cultural norms that a cultural class displays, Kozlowski says, such as hesitancy to reach out to professors, are linked to the structural disadvantages of the cultural class (Kozlowski 2015, 44). The ideas of academic success that students from a particular cultural class bring with them to college can greatly affect the way that their effort is displayed to professors and can be helpful or detrimental to their success in the classroom.

What is the origin of misunderstanding between teachers and students? When a student and faculty member are not in agreement as to what amount of effort deserves an expected grade in a classroom setting, it is usually because the expectations on the part of the student or the professor are based on differences in prior experiences. This is called the social or cultural mismatch (Kozlowski 2015, 45). Cultural mismatch may also occur through a misalignment in the assessment of effort (Kozlowski 2015, 43). Black students from lower socioeconomic levels are consistently more likely to believe they are working hard, while white professors tend to think they are not working hard. The misalignments of effort assessment differ by large margins (Kozlowski 2015, 57). A black student may have put what he thought to be his best effort into an assignment and when the white professor receives it, he thinks the student put little effort into the task. This is one example of how a cultural capital mismatch occurs.

It is taken for granted that students across the university are not prepared for undergraduate studies in elementary and high school in ways that align with the levels of excellence that professors expect of their college students. The professor may decide a student is displaying a lack of effort but in reality, it may be the student has weaker academic skills than expected (Kozlowski 2015, 49). Because black students at a PWI



commonly are of lower socioeconomic status, black students tend to experience the majority of discrimination from professors. For example, if a black student is brought up primarily through the public school system and taught curriculum geared towards standardized testing, then the student will be less prepared for a class curriculum that involves the more abstract thinking required for synthesizing arguments in a written research paper. The expectations a student has after her previous educational experience may not set her up for success in an undergraduate classroom where the professor expects the students to be on par with his expectations of every student. This is one way a mismatch can prevent students from achieving their highest potential.

Is race the cause of professors' biases? According to Kozlowski, the answer is no. But if this is so, why do more black students end up in the "student yes, teacher no" category of recognized effort? Kozlowski theorizes that white professors do not discriminate against black students, but that they do elevate white and Asian students to unwarranted levels of positive sentiment (Kozlowski 2015). This appears to be a systemic problem (Kozlowski 2015, 57). Notably, Asian students are less likely to be in the "student yes, teacher no" category, meaning that white professors tend to subscribe to the "model minority" narrative (Kozlowski 2015, 49). This affect is mitigated when Asian students are placed with Asian professors, suggesting the difference is with cultural assumptions (Kozlowski 2015, 49).

### *Teacher perceptions related to race*

To summarize: Boysen et. al. (2009) shows that only a small portion of bias results from professors targeting students. Kozlowski (2015) explains that teacher bias can stem from misalignment of assessment of effort and differing expectations from both students and professors. Yet race still does have an impact. The work of Gary Oates (2003) shows that some teachers still have negative stereotypes that may impact student learning outcomes.

It is clear from the previous chapter on role models that positive interactions with one's teacher create favorable learning outcomes for a student. With this in mind, it is understandable that researchers look to the teacher-student relationship for the answer of why African American students overall tend to underperform compared to their white peers on standardized tests (Oates 2003, 508). Oates (2003) seeks to understand whether the outcome of teacher perception is determined singularly by the variable of whether the student is white or African American.

When taking standardized tests, African American students perform more poorly. This gap does not appear to be the result of bias, because the standardized test allows no bias in the grading process. Thus Oates (Oates 2003, 513) suggests that the African American learning gap in white teacher-black student contexts can be overlooked. Oates (2003, 510) would instead like to point to self-fulfilling prophecies and perceptual biases that occur during the learning process which are assumed to lead to lower test scores in African American students when placed in a classroom with a white teacher. There can be what Oates (Oates 2003, 509) calls racial "dissonance", which can lead to unfavorable outcomes for African American students. Although both self-fulfilling prophecies and

perceptual biases occur in the classroom, Oates (2003, 521) argues that one of the two variables (self-fulfilling prophecies) is more strongly related to learning gaps in black students than the other.

The first cause of lower test scores is that of self-fulfilling prophecies, which are a teacher's erroneous judgments of a student. This occurs when a student performs in a manner consistent with his or her teacher's preconceived notions of how well the student will perform based on erroneous perceptions (Oates, 2003, 510). This requires a high level of "teacher input", which means the teacher is acting on his own ideas of reality other than the student's learning demonstrated ability. In other words, a teacher might base his assessment of a student on prior judgments rooted in the performance of students in past classes. Thus, the mindset of a teacher can limit the ability of the teacher to see a student as he or she is, instead causing the teacher to see with lenses of expectation that the student will perform well or poorly based on attributes that the student displays. Teacher input allows the possibility of skewing reality based on the perceptions the teacher holds prior to assessing the student's actual ability (Oates, 2003, 510). This prevents the teacher from evaluating the actions of the student on a case-by-case basis. This occurs because a teacher will often evaluate a student on past performance of students, sometimes over years of teaching experience. For example, a teacher might evaluate a black student on the basis of his interactions with black students who performed poorly in prior classes. When the black student exhibits the smallest signs of struggling with the material, a teacher will automatically revert to the prior experience with the black student in the past. Then the teacher might choose an action associated with that previous student performing poorly such as viewing that student negatively,

assuming the student does not want to learn, or treating the student with expectation that they will fail the class. The student can begin to notice these preconceived notions and will be affected by the negative actions the teacher displays towards him or her. Thus, the teacher's perceptions independently affect the student's performance (Oates 2003, 510).

Oates describes this as what occurs when a teacher has an idea of how a student should or should not be performing in the class and thus once the teacher sees student action that satisfies expectations, the teacher confirms his or her bias (2003, 510). Thus, the teacher will take actions to encourage positive behavior, such as being more pleasant to students he views favorably or giving special instruction on assignments because of the student's actions that align with his own assumptions about good performance (Oates 2003, 510). In this way, the classroom can be filled with self-fulfilling prophecies through teacher action that reinforces good behavior and does not encourage struggling students who need extra help.

The second cause of lower test scores Oates (2003) describes as perceptual biases, which stems from an ongoing dialogue in "the mind of the teacher". This means that the teacher will view the student in his mind through preconceived conceptions. Oates (Oates 2003, 511) argues that when African American students are placed in an environment with white teachers, they are more susceptible to "error" by the teacher based on the perceptual biases. This phenomenon of teacher perceptual bias is rooted in substantial teacher input, and is thus dependent on the teacher's approach to each student. The problem is that because of the biased lenses that the teacher wears, he may be looking for confirmation of an event that simply does not happen the way he imagines it. These inaccurate judgements are justifiable by observable evidence, albeit through distorted

interpretation of evidence (Oates 2003, 509). This leads teachers to evaluate students more unfavorably than is warranted (Oates 2003, 511). Through perceptual biases, Oates (2003, 511) explains, the teacher may have a recurring inaccurate perception of the student and thus the treatment of that student may vary across peers based on preconceived ideas in the mind of the teacher.

With self-fulfilling prophecies and perceptual bias in mind, Oates (Oates 2003, 508) states that positive dispositions towards a student elevate the student academic performance significantly. Although it is unclear whether teacher's attitudes are shaped by anti-black bias, Oates (2003, 508) says teacher perceptions may strongly factor into the underperformance of black students. Regardless of anti-black sentiments in teachers, race neutral attitudes in teachers will inevitably shift unfavorable outcomes towards black students based on the self-fulfilling prophecies alone (Oates 2003, 515). Oates believes this could be why African American students underperform on standardized tests compared to their white peers, thus perpetuating the black-white scholastic performance gap (Oates 2003, 508).

Through research conducted by Oates, there appears to be evidence that there is anti-black sentiment among some white teachers, but no evident bias towards white students (2003). While African American teachers tend to be unbiased towards all students because of the bias they themselves have faced, some white teachers appear to have a natural "dissonance" towards black students which manifests in self-fulfilling prophecies and perceptual bias mechanisms (Oates 2003, 509). Because of evidence that negative feedback is more strongly felt than positive feedback, black students who experience dissonant perceptions by white teachers are more likely to internalize negative

feedback (Oates 2003, 521). They internalize the experience more fully than their white counterparts internalize *positive* feedback, thus strengthening the self-fulfilling prophecy mechanism that Oates describes (2003).

Although it appears that black students experience more obstacles when it comes to counteracting teachers' perceptions in the classroom, Oates (2003, 517) concludes that there is a heightened awareness in the educational community of the negative impact of teachers' anti-black biases. Although African American students tend to be seen by teachers as less capable than their white counterparts, it is important for teachers to counteract internal biases. This can be incredibly important for African American students' educational outcomes, reducing the black-white scholastic performance gap (Oates 2003).

#### *What is helpful for students*

Monica Roshawn Neblett Green from Texas A&M University took a closer look at African American students and white faculty in order to examine the benefits of interacting with faculty in the classroom setting. Green uses qualitative data from a Difficult Dialogue event, as well as in-depth interviews with students from a Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest (Green 2013). Difficult Dialogue is an event focused on student conversations about difficult subjects on college campuses. Green interviewed four African American students and two white professors. She found that there is a lack of communication between African American students and white professors at a PWI campus. She provides suggestions for mitigate the communication

barriers and promote healthy and beneficial relationships among these two groups (Green 2013, 1).

Green begins by stating the benefits of interacting with faculty. She observes that African American students who interact with faculty receive the natural benefits that come with having a relationship with a faculty member of any race. Further, research suggests that African American students specifically benefit more substantially from relationships with white faculty than they would without such student-faculty relationships (Green 2013, 2). Most researchers in this area agree that African American students' relationships with white faculty could be part of the retention solution for African American students on PWI campuses (Green 2013, 2).

Green identified two themes in African American student responses, two themes in white professor responses, and one shared theme between the two groups (Green 2013, ii). African American students felt a sense of ownership in their responsibility to talk to a professor while also feeling a sense of isolation or exclusion. White professors felt a lack of awareness of the isolation and exclusion that African American students felt and acknowledged a need to step outside of their professor comfort zone. Both groups shared a theme of awareness of one another's feelings (Green 2013, ii).

First, Green found that students consistently internalized feelings of isolation or exclusion as a part of being an African American on a PWI campus. One student mentioned his experience as the only African American student in a classroom of all white students. He commented that he felt as if he stood out like a "fly in the buttermilk" (Green 2013, 118). It is understandable that black students such as this one feel intimidated and thus are determined not to speak in class and do not seek help from

professors (Green 2013, 113). African American students also feel that curriculum should be better shaped to fit the backgrounds of all students (Green 2013, 38). One student mentioned that a course about ethnic backgrounds should be accepted as a history course, not simply a humanities elective (Green 2013, 93). Because of feelings such as these and based on the collected data from the Difficult Dialogue event, Oates concludes that the group of African American students on the PWI campus lacked self-advocacy in the classroom, which was harmful to their experiences as students (Green 2013, 121). Despite lacking self-advocacy, students did acknowledge that it was important, showing that they are aware that it is something lacking and that it is a key to academic success (Green 2013, 116). African American students felt that it was up to them to talk to professors (Green 2013, 116).

Second, Green found that there was a lack of understanding in how the other feels between African American students and white professors (2003, ii). Professors expressed they had no idea that students' were feeling isolated and excluded (Green 2013, 89). Some of the most pronounced responses were the fact that professors had no idea that students carried these feelings with them and that they felt excluded from areas of their education such as the curriculum itself. Professors noted a need to get to know students as individuals as well as a need to be more strategic in how they assign groups for group work for all students to work together on projects. Other comments about the dialogue were that professors were interested in tools for how to involve and interact students in their classes (Green 2013, 127).

Third, Green found that both groups were surprised by the lack of awareness of the struggles of each group. Students were surprised by how the professors were unaware



of their feelings (Green 2013, 127). However, professors responded by collecting feedback from students on curriculum decisions, mindsets on communication between students and faculty, and awareness of the struggles and needs of various types of students across campus (Green 2013, 118). African American students recognized the lack of information that professors had about the student experience on campus and made an intentional decision to communicate more fully with professors (Green 2013, 119).

Green found that the insights from these interviews were helpful in identifying the problems that African American students encounter on a PWI campus (Green 2013, 121). The feedback solicited from students supported the current literature on the retention of African American students by revealing that African American students lack a strong sense of self-advocacy and possess feelings of isolation and exclusion (Green 2013, 121). Interactions such as these between students and faculty are important for furthering an understanding of the racial and ethnic differences that African Americans face when interacting with professors on campus (Green 2013, 123). Research such as this could help identify the keys to African American students' academic success and failure.

Green concludes that communication is the key to groups with varying backgrounds to develop a common understanding of each other (2013). Dialogue is the fundamental way that people begin to change their minds and accept new realities (Green 2013, 126). The feedback gained from this research shows that there was a fundamentally discordant understanding between the white professors and black students and both groups were surprised at misunderstanding the other (Green 2013, 125). Professors noted a desire for help in teaching students from a variety of backgrounds, while students took responsibility for self-advocacy and communication with faculty (Green 2013, 125).

While Green finds that there is a lack of communication between black students and white professors, he admits that more research needs to be done on this area in order to more fully understand both groups' needs. However, it is clear from Green's research that connecting students and teachers with the purpose of stronger communication enables students to feel more comfortable despite the known stressors that black students experience such as peer-to-peer bias, teacher-student cultural mismatch, and self-fulfilling prophecies.

### *Conclusion and my suggestions on bias in the classroom*

What can a teacher do? First, professors must recognize that students come from widely varying origin points. They must also realize that classroom bias does exist and that they must create an environment where that bias is not tolerated. Additionally, teachers should make themselves as available as they possibly can for their students, especially reaching out to black students, who might otherwise not pursue such relationships.

Graduate students also have a unique position in the classroom. I suggest that professors ask graduate students to be looking out for bias that they may not perceive and that the teacher's assistants and professors communicate clearly about the state of the classroom. Because graduate students can sometimes feel uneasy about the classroom, I suggest that professors empower and encourage graduate students to take a commanding role in the classroom, especially because of both the closeness in age with the undergraduate students as compared to the professors, and because they are more aware of social dynamics in the classroom.

Lastly, I suggest open and structured communication between black students and faculty in order for both groups to more fully understand each other. This mitigates potential misunderstandings such as cultural mismatch and self-fulfilling prophecies because the students' needs, goals, and effort to achieve those goals are more fully recognizable by the faculty. Also, the students should work to understand the faculty in order to know that faculty need help getting out of their comfort zones as well as realizing that black students do tend to feel more isolated and excluded than other students on campus.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Interviews with Five Black Students and Two Black Professors

Note on purpose of the interviews – the strength and usefulness of the interviews is not found in quantitative data or statistics showing the experience of black students overall. Instead, it is an opportunity to dive into very real scenarios of things that happen every day, regardless of if an honors thesis student is paying attention. These experiences are lived by these students and professors on a regular basis and can provide insight into how other students might be experiencing life as a black undergraduate student at a PWI.

#### *Introduction*

According to the literature review, the role model effect and bias in the classroom are two dimensions through which to view the experience of black students at a predominantly White university. Although the literature can be helpful in defining and categorizing abstract ideas such as the essence of a role model relationship or the nature of classroom bias, I wanted to hear first-hand how theories related to race in higher education affected black students and how black professors are thinking about these issues. For example, Young Kim and Carol Lundberg describe academic self-challenge

and a sense of self-belonging as contributors to learning outcomes through better classroom engagement (2015). Yet, how do black students view their own academic goals and in what ways do they feel they belong in a predominantly White setting? I turned to five black students and two black professors across six areas of study at Baylor University, a predominantly White institution, to hear real-life experiences as they relate to the research I have done in the areas of role model effects and bias in the classroom.

*Role Model Relationship Themes: Respect and Admiration*

The black students I interviewed had both white and black role models who helped with both academic and career-related goals. The themes associated with role models throughout the interviews were respect and admiration which appeared to be foundational for the teacher-student relationship to develop. One student, a sociology major, said he does not have role models. Instead, he gives an appropriate amount of respect to those professors who he thinks are worthy of recognition. For example, his white history professor had bookshelves full of black history texts, dialoguing what this student called the “struggles of my people.” This student had a great amount of respect for this white professor who had invested his time in learning and teaching black history in an in-depth and educated way.

Another student, a health sciences major, when asked if he saw his black professor as a role model, said that while he did not see him as a role model, he “definitely respected his achievements – especially as a black man.” When asked why this student did not see his black professor as a role model, he replied, “I didn’t want to be a professor.” This student did not see his professor as a role model because the student

did not see himself as a future academic. Instead, he was someone he looked up to because of his achievements, setting a symbolic milestone for other black males.

This student, along with others mentioned that their role models were people in the community, in one case out of state, doing jobs they hoped to one day be doing. The health sciences major, now pursuing a career in church ministry, said his role model lives in Atlanta. The role model in Atlanta is someone who developed and promoted the Reach Records movement and serves as a symbol of a black man in the evangelical world for this health sciences major. “He took me under his wing” and served as an example of “how to stay true to the gospel” as a black man.

Other outside role models include a local pastor and a local pharmacist. The sociology student said his role model is his pastor. A third student, studying biology and applying to pharmacy school said her role model is the pharmacist at the local CVS who she has had experience working with. The pharmacist is from Nigeria, which encouraged the biology student because she is from Zimbabwe.

I asked each student who their role models were and each one named a mentor outside of the university setting. When prodded further, most talked about professors who they felt they had a meaningful teacher-student relationship with. When sorting through the interviews, I wondered: What *does* qualify for someone to be considered a role model in the university setting?

*Types of Teacher-Student Role Models*  
*Informational, Moral, Symbolic, Nurturing*

One student majoring in international studies, talked about her white professor as a role model who helped her choose a minor in Chinese, one step towards admission to

the U.S. State Department which she would pursue after graduation. Of her professor the student said, “[She] knew that I wanted to pursue that goal.” This professor advised her that the international studies students she talks to after graduation wished they had taken more language classes. The student said the professor knew that applicants to the State Department “pick up extra points on the foreign service officer test if you list an extra language.” In this way, the professor helped this student in two ways. She helped her with career-related goals by pointing out that as an applicant to the State Department this student would have a stronger chance of admission if she listed another language. Then, the professor helped her set academic-related goals by helping her to choose which language to take and deciding how to work the additional classes into her undergraduate schedule. Reflecting on this decision and her role model’s advice, the student said her professor was “definitely be the type of person who walks through the different stages of life with me and helps me with career goals.”

The international studies student also found this same role model to be a nurturer of her academic ideas. During our interview, she mentioned she was about to travel to California to present a paper on the European Union, written in the professor’s class. “She had been mentoring me throughout that,” mentioning that they met over lunch to discuss the paper and plan the presentation. This professor walked alongside the student, helping her to cultivate her ideas and polish them for presentation for an audience out of state. The student concluded, “she was definitely a mentor” as a professor shared advice on career-related decisions and helped to mold some of the student’s own ideas on the subject material.

This example above seems to fit well with Kim-Sau Chung's definition of an "informational" role model (2000, 640). The informational role model acts as a source of information about desired outcomes, in this case the international studies student's career-related goals of working for the State Department. Chung states, the direct actions of an informational role model help a student to choose the best decision based on the information available to her through the role model (2000, 640). Here, the Baylor student benefited from her role model through her professor's advice to pursue a language minor, which would help in her future career. The professor also acted indirectly to help her develop and polish her paper to be presented at a conference in California. Here, the Baylor student experienced personal development as her international studies writing skills were developed and honed through meetings with her role model. In this way, the Baylor student experienced a relationship with an informational role model – someone who helped her make informed decisions and who helped her develop personally and professionally.

One student majoring in professional selling met his role model in the business school. The student was deeply impressed by the professor's achievements at MIT academically as well as athletically. "He actually set the record for something in football at MIT." This student thought it was incredible that even though the professor had accomplished great things before coming to Baylor, he did not talk about these things publically. "He is so humble...I love Professor [name]. He is a huge role model."

The professional selling student cited a recent experience with his white professor. The student went to him for advice on what to do in a situation. However, it was not a career-related or academic-related decision. It was a relationship decision and the



professor brought a spiritual dimension to the conversation. “He used examples from his own life and his own marriage with his wife to help me understand.” Through talking to the professor, the student relied on the framework the professor gave him to understand an upcoming decision he had to make related to his girlfriend. The student recalled, “[He] dumped so much wisdom on me.” He said he found peace and value in the framework that the professor shared, one of sacrifice that he will hold onto after college.

The relationship the business student had with his professor was one that Anita Allen (1995) would call an “ethical template” or what Chung (2000) would call a “moral” role model. Allen describes an ethical template as a person who the student observes and acts on according to the actions displayed by the role model (1995). More specifically, Chung refers to a moral role model as someone who effects preferences through “conformity effects” (2000). This is seen through the business student’s desire to use his professor’s decision framework for his own relationship with his girlfriend. He watched his professor’s behavior and adapted that behavior to his own life (Chung, 2000). Interestingly, this exchange offers a third way of viewing the way role models interact with students. Role models tend to interact with students in either an academic-related or career-related dimension. This relationship of the ethical template provides a third “spiritual” dimension to the ways a role model relates to a student. The professor was a symbol of what it means to be a good husband to his wife, which the students mirrored in his relationship with his soon-to-be fiancé.

One female biology student found that a black chemistry graduate student serving as a Teacher’s Assistant in her chemistry lab was her role model. “[She] was the first black person I had seen teaching in the science departments.” The student said the

chemistry graduate student was good at “making sure we came to see her in office hours. That’s something she really wanted.” She said that the TA built relationships with each of her students which made all the black students in her class feel comfortable. Importantly, through the teacher-student relationship with the chemistry lab TA, the biology student discovered for the first time she wanted to go into research. “Seeing what she is doing in graduate research in chemistry definitely opened the door for me. I thought, ‘this is a career I can put my foot in’ because that is not always the case, especially with STEM fields.” The biology student explained that black students tend to go where there is money to be made. “That’s one thing you see in a lot of trends in black people is that we tend to go after careers with the most money.” This student felt she would go into Pharmacy to make money. After developing a relationship with the black female TA, she realized that research was something she cared about and she now believed she could pursue a Pharm.D. and a Ph.D. so she can pursue a career as a pharmacist and also pursue academic research. The TA became a role model for the student. She recalled, “A lot of it was just talking about what I wanted to do and her supporting that and letting me be open about that with her...she was definitely my support system.”

The biology student’s role model was symbolic of career-related goals the student had not considered. Another way to phrase it would be to say that the TA was performing “role molding” by allowing the student to see what would be possible on her own (Chung 2000). The biology student was “molded” into a confident black female who started to believe she could pursue research, despite the lack of financial promise, while still pursuing her Pharm.D. to become a pharmacist. The student also saw the TA as a

symbolic role model as someone who was a successful black female in the STEM fields. This is another way the TA was able to serve the student as a role model.

Thus, the essence of a role model from the interviews I conducted appear to be the three overarching areas of informational, ethical template, and symbolic role models. Each of the three examples discussed had an element of respect for the accomplishments of the professor, which is the basic requirement of a role model, regardless of type. The role models listed were white and black. The black mentor had a special contribution to make to the student's understanding of her role in pharmacy and helped her decide to pursue research, despite her previous idea that she should only pursue a career that was financially promising. The other role models listed provided information about career-related decisions and served as an ethical template for one student's understanding of his relationship with his girlfriend. The students respected their role models and admired them for their humility as well as their accomplishments.

#### *Professors Describe the Teacher-Student Role Model Relationship*

The two professors I interviewed saw the teacher-student role model relationship as an opportunity to inform, encourage, and nurture. One black female religion professor developed a relationship with a student who requested her help on a thesis relating to liberation theology, which the professor describes as an informational role model. She said the student was a social work major who was wondering how the professor's liberation theology framework fit into her project. She directed the student to a set of books that would help her research liberation theology. The professor recalls the

student's excitement at discovering liberation theology. "This particular black woman who came to ask me about this project was very excited to hear that there is this theology by and for people who looked like her." This student-teacher relationship developed during a time of tension on campus surrounding President Donald Trump's election. The professor took the opportunity to share with her student reflections from her own experience as a black female during a time of racial and social tension. The professor recalls sharing her own life experience as "it related to the material of liberation theology, of how you can survive and thrive in a moment like this." The professor and student had an "automatic connection" through a shared interest in the material, which related to race in the context of theology. When it developed into a deeper relationship, the professor found herself with a significant care and concern for the student's well-being and emotional health.

This type of teacher-student role model relationship is both informational and symbolic. The black female religion professor shared her expertise in the area of liberation theology and also shared her knowledge of how to react in tense situations. A symbol of special achievement is someone who has overcome obstacles to accomplish goals and who passes this on to those struggling in similar ways (157, Allen 1995). The professor fit this role model description because of the way she passed on the subject material to the student and used her own story of struggle as a black female to narrate the material.

I asked one black male biology professor if any interactions with black students turned into role model relationships while teaching? He replied, "always." The professor says at his previous university, a Christian PWI, there might be no more than four

minority students in a science class of 300 students. Instead of spending time purely researching in his lab, he wanted to be in front of students. “Otherwise they would never see [a black professor].” He made a habit of calling out his minority students during the beginning of the semester and requiring them to see him. “I would say, ‘You have to come see me.’ Because they won’t come on their own.” This process would sometimes end with the first visit and sometimes it would cultivate a four-year relationship.

One four-year teacher-student relationship, this black male professor recalls fondly. “I think I was pretty instrumental in that relationship. He is completing his Ph.D. at the University of Washington in biology.” This black student ended up working for the professor in his lab because of the relationship they established. He had a low GPA and was struggling in his classes. Another student from India worked in the lab as well, and the two minority students became friends. The two students developed a camaraderie and the Indian student’s study habits “sort of rubbed off on [him].”

The professor was involved and was encouraging the black student. The professor believed the black student simply needed confidence that he could do the work. The professor remembers watching the development of the student as he soared from a 2.3 GPA to a 3.01 GPA, an impressive marginal change over a short one year period. “Having that friend, and being in my lab, working on a research project, gaining confidence in terms of what he would actually do, and also having a friend who wasn’t his race necessarily... they developed a close friendship.” The professor shared with me that this same black student had been told, “You shouldn’t be a science major.” Watching him hold onto the program was rewarding for both the student and professor.

The relationship between the biology professor and student fits within both the symbolic and the nurturer categories. The biology professor was a symbol of special achievement as the black student pushed through a challenging program. He saw his professor, as well as his peer in the lab, as symbols that encouraged him that he could achieve similar accomplishments. The professor was also a nurturer. A nurturer is a role model who gives special attention to the unique needs of the individual student and tailors their interactions to advise and encourage positive behaviors in that student (Allen 1995). Because of the student's working position in the biology lab, he was able to receive one-on-one nurturing attention from the professor. The learning outcome from this teacher-student was a clear leap from a low GPA to a stronger GPA, which was a sign of a higher level of confidence in the student's own ability.

In conclusion to the role model section, one can see that each role model relationship experienced by the individuals interviewed followed a similar format but with variations on the dynamics of each teacher-student match. It simply confirms Anita Allen's observation that while there are broad "tracks" of where each role model generally fits, the definition of a role model can be ambiguous (1995, 156). No two role model relationships are exactly alike. Perhaps this is one reason, when asked, the black students I interviewed could not think of role models on campus. Instead, they cited role models in the community or in their hometowns. Once I pushed the students further to think of role models, they either listed professors who they "respect" or they quickly recalled experiences from a teacher-student mentoring relationship. The professors viewed the teacher-student relationships as an opportunity to inform, encourage, and nurture. Each professor was different in the way he or she approached creating

relationships with students. Although attentive overall to each student in class, one professor waited until students asked questions about the material before diving deeper into the material and eventually a personal relationship. The other professor sought students intentionally with the knowledge that black students may not meet with him otherwise. Both approaches have merit, especially considering the notable lack of black and minority students in the sciences. Given this environment, it is reasonable that the biology professor actively pursued relationships with black students, while the religion professors based relationships on curiosity or questions surrounding the subject material. Regardless of approach, students felt encouraged by their interactions with professors. In the next section, I will discuss the way students describe their self-efficacy and motivation to do well in an academic setting.

*Self-Efficacy: Originated in Individuals, Nurtured or Harmed by Environment*

I was interested in learning more about student self-efficacy from my interviews. I found that students' feelings of self-efficacy originated in either their upbringings or their innate personalities. Although self-efficacy does not necessarily originate in teacher-student relationships, it does seem to be negatively impacted by the stress black students encounter in adverse cultural environments on campus. If this is true, it appears that the role of the teacher-student relationship as it relates to self-efficacy is for the professor to be encouraging and understanding of the strains their black students undergo at a PWI. When a professor is understanding and open to communication with black students about these dynamics on campus, it creates a sense of ease and sense of belonging for the students, which promotes learning outcomes. I see a special alignment of creating a sense

of comfortability and ease for students on Baylor University's campus because the mission explicitly states that students will learn in a caring Christian environment. Because of this positioning of Baylor's Christian mission, I see Baylor as the perfect institution to be at the forefront of black student promotion and retention.

Below are a list of phrases associated with five black students' feelings of self-efficacy, confidence, and motivation as it relates to being a student at a PWI:

"I grew up my whole life thinking you have to work twice as hard to get half as far."

"It is very much self...I know what I want to do and I know how to get there so I will do whatever I need to do to get there."

"When I was three-year-old my mom told me I couldn't tie my shoes and that day I learned to tie my shoes. I am very determined and very hard on myself. If I set a goal, then in my mind there is no question of whether I am going to achieve it – it's just to what extent will I surpass my expectations, meet my expectations, or fall short. Being average just has never been good enough for me."

"...My mom had a very bad drug addiction and my dad was gone...In terms of my self-efficacy, I think my drive, growing up it was a positive and a negative. I had to become very independent early on."



Self-efficacy comes from within or from upbringing. One student in particular, was forced to develop independence which he refers to as self-efficacy because his father left their family early on and his mother had an advanced addiction to drugs. This student explained that he has what he feels is an unhealthy level of independence and he has learned to rely on his friends instead of taking on full responsibility for everything he does. He recalls, “My dad wasn’t coming to basketball practice because he was gone. My mom was out – she was gone in a different way. So, I really had to keep myself accountable. That really instilled a strong internal drive.” He believes that the Christian call is one of dependence on one another. He uses his philosophy of dependence on one another to describe his feelings about race. “We need each other, we need dependence on other people... we need our white brothers, our Asians, just as much as we need each other.” He says he has a strong internal drive because of his background but he is still learning a healthy level of dependence on others, even in terms of leaning on those who are different than him.

What does the literature say about self-efficacy? Chapter one says self-efficacy is an internally grounded belief about one’s personhood, based on the ability to evaluate one’s self, using frames of reference involving a particular situation (Brock 2015). Self-efficacy is affected by messages received by the student from peers and teachers which tell the student how peers and teachers are reacting to them (Brock 2015). For example, if a student is asked to give a presentation in front of the class, he or she will get feedback from the stares of peer students, which could translate their feelings of interest or boredom. Messages are subtle and become internalized in the student over time. The

result of messages from factors in the environment, such as teachers, friends, and peers, can be anxiety, comfortability, or confidence.

Rueben Brock lists four sources of influence on a person's self-efficacy, of which internalization of performance accomplishments is the strongest factor (2015, 6). Although the students I interviewed say their self-efficacy is innate, and it may start that way, according to the literature, this level of self-efficacy can be affected through the environment. Whether a person succeeds or fails at a task will ultimately impact him or her profoundly (Brock, 2015, 6). The person's ideas about that task is internalized on an "appraisal" system the individual sets for himself or herself (Brock, 2015, 6). This appraisal results in a revised viewpoint of the person when he or she goes to complete the task a second or third time. If a task is completed and the student receives an internal "failing" grade or falls short of expectations, the student's self-efficacy will be negatively impacted. This happens internally, so it is unable to be observed except by the person himself or herself.

The biology professor I interviewed recalls this situation occurring almost constantly at his previous PWI. "None of the African Americans were doing well in my class. At best they were doing C-level work." When I asked him why this was the case, he said there is a lot going on for a black male in the sciences. Many black males are being told the sciences are too hard for them and they should quit. Additionally, the top grades these students received in high school are not meeting the standard of the rigorous classes in the sciences. He explained, "The classes at [the PWI] are graded on a curve. So it doesn't matter whether you think you know your material – it's do you know it better than this person over here?" Although a C-average grade in the science class meant the

student was performing at a high level, it was discouraging once the students received those grades and internalized them as falling short of expectations. “I would say more than three quarters of those African American males who start off as science majors, wind up changing majors. All you are getting are C’s and there is no one there giving a positive, “you can do it.”” The internalization of performance accomplishments can be severely detrimental to a student’s morale.

Another source of influence on a person’s self-efficacy is vicarious learning, a largely environmental factor. Because African American women have had to play non-traditional roles for career attainment, it has set a paradigm of independence and fortitude among African American women, which is assumedly imparted to African American women from a very young age (Brock 2015). Through vicarious learning, one looks to significant figures in his or her life, especially in early adulthood (Brock 2015, 6). The student vicariously views himself or herself as a person who can accomplish similar goals to the significant figure and internalizes messages about their own abilities which powerfully affects their self-efficacy (Brock, 2015, 6). A perfect example of vicarious learning is the female biology major who internalized messages from her chemistry teaching assistant. From these messages, the student was encouraged that she could accomplish similar goals to the TA, despite the lack of financial promise from performing research. Thus, the student decided she should pursue research as well, because she saw herself vicariously through the TA.

Social persuasion, another environmental factor that impacts self-efficacy, is an internalized message system similar to vicarious learning. However, social persuasion involves the verbal and identifiable messages from the people in one’s environment

(Brock, 2015, 6). They can be either encouraging or discouraging messages. These messages typically come from parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins (Brock, 2015, 52). For example, if a student's families did not attend a PWI, they might be proud of the student for the accomplishment of attending college, but they also might send negative messages about their own views of college or a PWI. The student can internalize these messages as well, through social persuasion.

The physiological state of a student is the fourth source of impact on self-efficacy as Brock explains it. Physiological state is associated with a state of arousal that a person feels in connection to a behavior or task (Brock 2015, 8). Brock describes an inverse relationship between anxiety and self-efficacy. He says that increased anxiety in connection with a behavior or even will result in decreased levels of self-efficacy in the student. Likewise, decreased anxiety in association with a behavior will produce increased levels of self-efficacy (Brock 2015, 8). Thus, social anxiety, which can impact the physiological state, can become a detrimental factor or an encouraging factor for a black student's self-efficacy.

Through these four environmental factors, one can see the specific ways that one's self-efficacy is impacted. When thinking of the Baylor students I interviewed, it seems that each student starts with an internal motivation to do well in academic and career-related dimensions. They start with a certain headstrong mindset centered on independence and a natural will power. According to the environmental factors and after listing a few specific examples from the interviews, it seems that these sources of self-efficacy can affect the self-efficacy that students already have, either adding to or subtracting from the levels they already internalize. The next section will examine the

environmental factors at Baylor as a PWI that cause stress to the black students I interviewed. This is one way of understanding the complexities that black students at a PWI face.

*The Environment on a PWI Campus: Majority Culture vs. Black Culture*

Because a predominantly White institution is dominated by a white student presence on campus, the majority culture tends to come with certain roles that students fit into. The majority culture tends to be white and characterized by preppy clothing, etc. The black students I interviewed interacted with the white culture in a few ways. Some students assimilated to be more “White” and some were averse to changing from the culture they grew up in. Still others, saw no reason to fit into a black or white category. These students grew up in the suburbs and were surrounded by a white community for the majority of their lives.

Many students said they did not think the jokes that their white peers told were funny. One student going into ministry did not get the jokes from the white students with an evangelical “Billy Graham” background. Another student felt that her background made other students unable to relate to her. Each quote below is from a different student.

“It's not bias, but it's a shared culture that comes with being white... The jokes that were made were things that I really couldn't relate to.”

“Being at a PWI you look around and realize that no one has the same experience as you.”

“I learned how to talk the talk and laugh at things that are not necessarily funny. You learn to make them funny.”

“One of my triggers is racist jokes – no matter which race it is about. I’m a person who is interested in culture. It frustrates me that people have to act a certain way based on stereotypes.”

Each student I interviewed seemed to choose which crowd to assimilate into. One student explained his assimilation into the majority culture. “Culturally, especially when it’s an overwhelming culture around you, you either assimilate or actively run away from the culture around you.” He decided it was better to learn about to fit in with the majority culture instead of running away from it. “Not all minority students are willing to culturally assimilate. But for me, I learned how to assimilate, especially being in Penland Hall and things like that.” Another student is just the opposite. He explained that he carries with him a sense of what he refers to as “sankofa,” which means “going back to where you came from.” He described the idea that some black students leave the black culture in order to make progress in the network of college students. “In the black community, you get the idea that a black student goes to a PWI and sells out to wear Vineyard Vines, to have the opportunity to appease the son of a governor or a judge.” Yet, this black student chose to remain true to what he believes is the black culture, while still venturing into new friendships. He has kept in mind that he wants to venture into non-traditional friendships and has not been afraid to meet people his other black friends might not pursue. “You have at PWI, the amount of connections, which is a very alluring

attractive thing for me as a student... You are furthering your culture and the people coming after you, you need to venture into these areas.”

Another student expressed her frustration with having to choose a group to be a part of. Growing up in the suburbs of Dallas, she was surrounded by a mostly white population, although she had friends of every ethnicity. “I didn’t pay attention to race and my friends were always diverse. People are people and I decided I was going to be a darn good human.” This student treats everyone she meets with respect, regardless of ethnicity. However, she explained that she only associates with black students at Baylor. “I never felt like I had to make choices about the “black” culture.” However, once she joined a black sorority, she realized that her friend group became polarized. There is a sort of scale of “blackness” that this student described. “...They aren’t stereotypically black. Like I said, if you go to college as a black person you already don’t fit that mold. By societal standards, they are much more black than me.” This student recalled attending a movie titled, “*Not Black Enough*.” She thought it was a good way of describing the black dilemma that students face. “...It is really something people in the black community face because there are these black stereotypes of what “black” is.” When the student returned home for a semester break, her diverse friends in the suburbs were shocked to hear she only spent time with black students at Baylor. The student felt it was a complicated reality to explain to her friends and reiterated their shock when she showed them pictures of her social media account.

In conclusion to cultural complexities that a black student must navigate on a PWI campus, one student’s observation sets an important tone to the conversation “Especially if you go to college, you automatically don’t fit what that stereotype is” of fitting into the

“black” culture. Black students on a PWI campus are occupying what I call an in-between space. The complexities arise from both the white majority culture and the black culture. Black students are left to “choose” which stereotypes to adjust to, leaving some feeling “not black enough” and other defending the culture of their ancestors.”

### *Complexities Black Students Face*

It is clear from the cultural tensions and complexities on campus that black students are left in a strange environment which they must navigate. Many professors lack an understanding of the anxieties that black students inherently face. However, when asked, one student said he wished there were more black professors on campus. “I definitely think that black professor play a role in how we perceive ourselves in the classroom.” Another student was very excited about the idea of more black professors teaching at Baylor. He said enthusiastically, “I think that would be awesome!” He said that if more white students took classes from black professors, it would change the peer-to-peer environment. He said that white students might act differently if they learned from black professors. “...If you grew up never being exposed to certain types of people, there will be natural effects of that, inevitably...So I figure if there are more black professors, we can naturally counteract that. For our white students to sit in class and learn from a black person, there will be more opportunity for a relationship with a black person.”

One complexity that a student mentioned is his relationship with the police. Because of his mother’s drug addiction, he always viewed the police in a positive light. “Cops were refuge for me. When I came home and saw they were there, I knew



everything was going to be ok. It was a sign that she was not dead.” He recalled that he grew close with the police. However, his positive view of the police did not protect him from discrimination because of his skin color. He recalled “The time I was discriminated against by the police...” when he was having car trouble at night. He said he was thankful the police had showed up because he needed help replacing his battery. The police had a very different idea. The student was actually arrested because of an outstanding traffic ticket, but the police would not have known he had an outstanding ticket just by his appearance. “Looking back, the only reason he came over to my car is because I looked suspicious in my car, hunched over. I looked like a problem to him.”

Black students’ discriminatory interactions with police is something that most white students have never experienced. According to Frank Tuitt, this should not come as a surprise (2009). Critical race theory says that racism is endemic to American life and power struggles have disenfranchised people, specifically black people. Thus, black students are inherently navigating the racialized culture of American society, which creates a layer of anxiety and complexity they must face.

One professor I interviewed could relate to the student above who was discriminated against by the police. He started to ask me, “How many times have you been stopped by the police, had a gun pulled on you, or had security follow you in a store?” I replied that I had never been pulled over because of my skin. This professor, a Harvard educated man, had been discriminated against by the police four times, one of which he felt was a life and death experience. “I’ve had all of the advantages that this country can give you, but I still have experienced things that most people, fortunately, have no experienced, just because I have dark skin.” The professor says that many black

students come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, but race can create additional barriers.

### *Mitigating Anxiety for Black Students*

Because of the complexities created by race and the choice of majority culture or black culture on a PWI, as well as the literature from chapter two on communication between teachers and students, I think the best way to mitigate anxiety for black students on a PWI campus is to make them feel comfortable, welcomed, and make professors accessible to each black student.

One black student explained her view of anxiety in the classroom. She believes it does not only come from peers or from teachers, but that both are involved. “I think they [student bias and teacher bias] play hand in hand... Who you have in that class affects what you take away from that class, what you are willing to take away from that class.” She says the willingness to engage in discussion or voice an opinion comes from a comfortability in the classroom setting. That is created by the students and while professors might not be able to choose or affect the opinions of the students in the class, they can be aware of the potential tensions and try to address them as they surface.

One black female professor explained her pedagogy for each student in the classroom. Because she has felt like an outsider in the past, she approaches her teaching with what she calls a “contemplative pedagogy.” In this approach, she intentionally gives attention to each student as they walk into the room and sit down. While taking role, she checks to see if each student has the assignment prepared. If a student is absent, she takes special notice in order to check on them later. She does this in order to create connections

with her students. “In our ethics classes primarily, we get to sensitive subject matter so it is important to get to that sense of ease. It is wanting students to be comfortable by establishing trust.” The establishment of trust and ease is an important environmental factor when creating a comfortable place for black students on campus.

One student explained his own discomfort with his professor because of a lack of cultural understanding. “I think it was a culture thing more than anything else. In the span of the interactions of the span of the course, I feel my peers were more comfortable with the professor than I was.” He explained he felt uncomfortable around his peers as well. “It's not anybody's fault necessarily, at least directly, but I wasn't the most comfortable in the class. I couldn't relate to anybody in the class.”

The complexities that black students face, their unlikeliness to ask for help from a professor, the subcultures of being black enough, the uncomfortable classroom setting, and a professor's busy researching and teaching schedule all lead to what one professor called, the “perfect storm.” He said, “It is not trivial to say you need diversity sensitivity training. You would hope that we would understand that. But it is not something that is easy to accomplish, given the demands that are placed on people.” He also said that it is “a tall order” to ask 18-year-olds to do all the things we are asking of them. It is difficult for a student under that much pressure to have self-efficacy and push through the barriers he or she faces. “The undergraduate students that are coming into a white environment – is it realistic that they are going to have that self-efficacy, that confidence level to say I am so comfortable with my own skin, literally, that I will do what I need to do to accomplish my goals.” The professor said one way to assess a black student's likelihood

for success in such an environment is if they ask, “Do I really belong here?” He explained, “That is one question that betrays that particular anxiety.”

### *A Sense of Belonging*

The literature I reviewed in chapter one explains that of the three factors contributing to student learning are academic self-challenge, a sense of belonging, and a sense of self-efficacy, citing self-efficacy as the most important factor. However, based on the interviews I conducted and the anecdotal narrative that these stories tell once compiled, I argue that a sense of belonging is the most important contributing factor to learning outcomes. This factor is carried out by teacher-student interactions (Kim and Lundberg, 2015, 290).

In a sense, there is a multifaceted connection between three factors. It is not exactly an equation or a formula, but it is a way to think about what is needed to allow black students to thrive on a PWI campus. Culture, a comfortability level, and self-efficacy seem to be interrelated. These factors are largely determined by outside forces that professors cannot control. However, there seems to be small input which accounts for a large potential for success and that is a sense of belonging. If a student finds himself in an in-between place in black culture, and already has an innate level of self-efficacy, he may find himself experiencing a low comfortability level. Thus, he will experience high anxiety which leads to lower self-efficacy and negative learning outcomes. However, if the student finds himself in the same in-between place in black culture, and has the same innate level of self-efficacy, a small input of a sense of belonging by a

professor can carry a long way to make the student feel secure, at ease, and confident they belong on campus.

Recall the example the biology professor gave of the black student who spent time in his lab which resulted in raising his GPA significantly. The professor said, “All it took was giving him the confidence that he could do it.” That is the self-efficacy piece. However, looking back even further, the student would not have had the confidence he could succeed unless he felt he belonged in the lab in the first place. Here lies an opportunity for high margins of success in retaining black students and helping them thrive. A professor who understands the complexities a black student faces, creates an environment where they can feel comfortable, and instills a level of confidence through encouragement, is one who accomplishes a significant feat.

I think one reason why initially when I asked black students who their role models are, they immediately referred to role models off campus. The immediate thought is that each of these students has had one or two black professors while at Baylor. These black professors are the point of access where the student can feel comfortable to seek help or develop a relationship. Thus, because there are few black professors to choose from and most professors at Baylor are conducting research and lack an understanding of the complexities of black students, there is little to choose from in the form of a black mentor. Thus, black students either choose white professors or develop a relationship with someone off campus who can relate to their goals and experiences.

I do not think that hiring more black professors at a PWI is the only solution to the complexities black students face on campus. I think that all professors need to be actively involved in their students learning processes, including reaching out and making

black students come to see them. I think that professors also need to be aware of the peer-to-peer bias that takes place in the classroom from both black and white students, as well as their own biases towards black students. Once professors realize there is a “perfect storm” occurring right in their classrooms, they will be able to mitigate the sources of anxiety and discomfort to create a sense of belonging and maintain a strong sense of self-efficacy.

## CONCLUSION

Do black students at a PWI experience college differently than other students? Do black students have a higher need for role models than other students? It is clear that black students tend to choose black role models over white role models according to Karunanayake and Nauta (2004) and that black professors who could fill this “role” in the black students’ college experience because tend to be more scarce than white professors.

Black students are also more likely to assess their effort in a more positive light than white professors do (Kozlowski 2015). Effort is understood to be a foundational input of students’ grade in a college course and was documented to affect students’ grades by up to 14%, equaling a whole letter grade. Kozlowski suggests that the differences in effort stem from differences in cultural background, putting black students in the “student yes, teacher no” category for assessment of effort.

While this thesis does include some statistics which quantify things related to black students’ experiences on a PWI campus, such as the likelihood to choose black professors as role models over white professors or the likelihood to assess their efforts as higher than noted by their white professors, it is unclear statistically that black students’ experiences differ greatly from white students on a PWI campus. These issues appear far more nuanced than they are assumed to be.

The interviews conducted with five black students and two black professors on Baylor's campus are helpful, as they provide examples of how students and professors feel about their experiences being black at a PWI. However, the interviews are limited to anecdotal contributions to the thesis because of the lack of a way to properly select each interviewee through a scientific approach, as well as a way to vet questions beforehand to eliminate my own biases. Thus, the interviews reflected in some way my natural biases and may have steered interviewees towards particular answers. With this in mind, I think that another study may need to be conducted with a larger sample of black students on Baylor's campus with vetted questions.

The purpose of such a study would be to examine whether there is a causal relationship between black students' experiences at a PWI and their learning outcomes. Specifically, can the anxiety that black students experience at a PWI be categorized according to its respective causes (being black at a PWI, overall stress of being a student, stress from family situations at home, etc.) and then be measured in a meaningful way? Then, the amount of anxiety measured should be directly linked to each student's feelings of self-efficacy. This way, there would be a way to say that self-efficacy is correlated to a specific amount of anxiety or comfortability.

I encourage readers of this thesis to not approach the subject of black students' experiences on a PWI campus in an emotional way. Rather, readers should seek evidence through quantifiable findings in order to avoid biases of their own. There is much work to be done in the area of black students' experiences on PWI campuses, specifically in documenting causal relationships that one can consistently rely on, instead of anecdotal



examples of either 10 undergraduate students, such as Tuitt presents, or the five students and two professors I interviewed.

This thesis contains pertinent information in helping one piece together whether black students' experiences differ from other students and gives a shared language for talking about abstract ideas related to this topic. However, it appears that while there are various papers citing things pertaining to my question, there is not a way to specifically answer my question. Thus, I conclude that while it appears that black students' experiences on a PWI campus may in fact be very different from other students, it is unclear that there is data to support this.

Because the findings in the literature review are highly nuanced, it shows why the work in this thesis is important. Through this literature review and interviews with black students and professors, one can see that role models do have inherently good outcomes and one can see that role models come in different forms. Self-efficacy is one tool by which to pinpoint the internal mechanism by which students operate and achieve success. However, there is not a way to inherently measure the link between low self-efficacy, or perceived anxiety, to perceived bias. Similarly, there is not conclusive evidence that having a black professor increases self-efficacy or mitigates the complexities that black students may face. Thus, this topic requires more data in order to confirm that black students' experiences at a PWI differ from other students.

## APPENDICES

Below are two lists of questions which I sent to students and professors as a preliminary outline for the interviews. I allowed each interview to take direction according to what the interviewees wanted to share. The answers interviewees gave helped give a qualitative understanding of their experiences as black students and professors at a PWI. However, it is important to note that while the questions were developed based on the issues raised in the literature review, they were not developed to quantify in any sort of way the feelings or experiences of black students and professors on a scale of one to ten. It is also important to note that while I purposefully chose to interview black students from different areas of the university (no two majors were the same), I did not pick interviewees in a scientific manner.

## Appendix A.1 Interview Questions for Students

### Questions

#### General questions about faculty-student relationships

- Do you have close relationships with your faculty? Do you see any of your faculty members as role models?
  - Why or why not?
- Which faculty member are you closest to?
- What is attractive to you about your faculty role model?
  - Is it their accomplishments?
  - Is it their dedication to help you accomplish your own goals?
- What types of goals have professors helped you to accomplish?
  - Academic?
  - Career-related?

#### Questions related to race of role models

Think of your experiences with black professors.

- As a black student, do you feel your black professors hold you to a higher standard?
  - Does this motivate you or does this cause you anxiety?
  - Are you indifferent to the standards placed on you by black faculty?
- As a black student, do you feel your black professors hold you to a lower standard or allow more flexibility in your interactions with him or her?
- Do you feel more relaxed around your black professors? Why or why not?
- Do you feel a certain level of comradery with your black professors?
- Describe any experiences you have had with black professors, whether positive or negative, and how that influenced how you view your capabilities as a student?
- Have your black professors helped you to feel more confident as a student?
- Do you see your black professors as pioneers in their respective fields? Does this motivate you to act in a similar way to them or pursue career-related goals because they first led the way?
- Do you feel that you are connected by your same-race experiences, whether that be racist experiences, shared accomplishments by black individuals of the past, or other experiences you can think of?

Think of your experiences with white professors.

- Do you feel that your white professors had bias against you as a black student, whether they realized it or not?
- Do you have white professors who are role models?

Think of a role model who is a white professor:

- Does this person hold a career similar to a career you want to pursue? For example, if you are a political science major, and wish to serve in state politics, does your professor role model teach state politics?
- Does this person encourage you in your academic pursuits and career-related goals?
- In what way do you feel this person changes you?
- Are you inspired by his or her achievements?
- Does this person help you to craft and develop your own intellectual or career-related work?

#### Classroom Bias

- Do you feel bias from students?
- Would you say the students in the class should affect what the professor should be doing?

#### Self-Efficacy

- Where do you get the motivation to work hard?
- Do you feel your belief in yourself contributes to your academic performance?
- Do you feel you have anxiety being on a PWI campus as a black student?

## Appendix A.2 Interview Questions for Professors

### Questions

#### Teaching at a PWI as a black professor

- Can you explain a little bit about your educational background?
  - Have you spent time at a PWI before teaching at Baylor?
  - Have you spent time at an HBCU before teaching at Baylor?
  - How have either of these experiences affected your pedagogical approach as a professor at Baylor?
- How does being black affect how you see your role as a professor?
- How do you feel your teaching goals are affected by teaching at a PWI?
- What are your objectives as a professor?
  - Do you spend your time researching, creating an effective lesson plan, developing relationships with students, etc.?

#### Role model relationships

- Do you consider yourself a role model to any of your students?
  - How many students would you say you have a role model relationship with?
  - What are their races and what are your interactions like?
- Role model relationship related to career goals of the student
  - How have you helped a student with their career goals?
- As a black male professor, how have you seen your role be helpful for your black male students?
- Can you describe any experiences you have had with black male students who have been able to connect with you related to either academic or career-related topics?
  - Has this been in the form of advice you have given based on your own experiences?
  - Have you helped a student to form his or her own ideas in a tangible way, whether that be a thesis, project, or perhaps pursuing a scholarship or conference acceptance?
- Do you feel that black students should have black mentors, white mentors, or both?
- Do you feel that black students are reaching into non-traditional career options or that they are staying in careers that have been traditionally held by black professionals?
- Do you encourage your students to expand their horizons to non-traditional careers?

### Standards in the classroom

- How do you view your black students compared to your white students?
- As a black teacher, do you hold black students to a higher standard, either consciously or subconsciously?
- Have you heard any reflection from students on how your teaching style affected them?

### Bias in the classroom

- Have you perceived bias related to race in your classroom by the students?
  - This could come across in overt or subtle ways.
- Could you describe any incidents of racial bias by other students towards black students in your classroom?
- In incidents of bias in your classroom, how have you responded?
- Did you feel your response was effective? Why or why not?

### Your understanding of black students

- Do you feel you understand the cultural backgrounds of your black students better than your white colleagues?
- Do you feel that your black students come to you with matters of academic support, questions, or concerns, more readily than your white colleagues?
- Think of specific black students who you have had a relationship with. Did the student feel more comfortable asking questions in office hours than asking questions in class.

### Teacher bias

- Have you ever perceived teacher bias related to the race of your students?
- Has anyone ever mentioned to you that they felt you were biased?

### Assessment

- Do you feel you are able to assess the effort of your students?
- Do you feel the effort of black students differs from white students in your classroom?
- Do black students struggle more in your classroom than white students?
- Do you feel you consider the education and cultural backgrounds of your students?

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