

A Descriptive Case Study of Belonging at a Predominantly White Institution among Students of
Color and White Students

By

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Abstract

Research has shown that students from varying racial backgrounds display different levels of belonging in the college environment. Scholars have found that belonging is context-dependent and associated with identity. While belonging is viewed as a developmental need, there is little research examining how Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) address students' need to belong. Building on this work, this study applies the Person-Environment Fit theory to measure belonging at PWIs according to group membership. This qualitative study examined the narratives of 22 Students of Color and White students from varying racial and ethnic backgrounds attending a PWI. Participant interviews focused on their belonging at the institution. The results showed an exchange between identity and context that influenced belonging. Students oriented their belonging with salient identity dimensions. There were distinct differences in how they engaged in belonging as belonging needs were identity-based. Identity dimensions that were incompatible with the PWI environment resulted in unmet needs. Findings provide an understanding of why Students of Color and White students exhibit differing outcomes of belonging. This study also provided a new analytical perspective for capturing students belonging needs and what the PWI affords to meet needs.

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Introduction

The empirical work on belonging has identified the following three basic understandings of belonging. First, belonging is a human need and a right (Strayhorn, 2019, Silver 2021). Second, belonging is a cognitive process that shapes feelings and behavior, and third, belonging is relational and reciprocal (Strayhorn, 2019, Silver 2021). Therefore, understanding belonging is very complex for researchers. Belonging is not simply fitting in. Empirical work has established that students can still integrate onto a college campus without feeling belonging (Silver, 2021). While belonging is highly predictive of student success, it is not simply solved. This study takes a deep dive into understanding all the complex processes that go into experiences of belonging among White students and Students of Color. This study focuses exclusively on the belonging experiences of domestic students attending a predominantly White institution.

Among researchers belonging has been hard to define and conceptualize. Throughout literature, belonging has been mainly defined as the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment through which a person feels themselves to be an integral part of that system and environment (Freeman et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2002; Strayhorn, 2019). However, given its varying definitions, researchers struggle to outline exactly what belonging as a construct means to students.

Also, belonging, by definition, emphasizes context as a key component. Students must navigate, negotiate, and traverse multiple spaces and contexts during their college careers (Strayhorn, 2019). When examining the relationship between context and belonging, scholars heavily focused on institutional belonging (i.e., belonging to the institution), recognizing it as an element to thriving in college. In the PWI environment, contextual factors such as diversity, campus climate, inclusion initiatives, diverse institutional support, and student engagement are

connected to belonging (Hoffman et al., 2002; Means & Pyne, 2017; Strayhorn, 2018; Strayhorn, 2019). For example, Means and Pyne, (2017) examined how institutional support facilitated belonging to social and academic spaces among first-year students who identified as low-income, first-generation. For these students having support from spaces such as need-based scholarship programs, identity-based student organizations, residential communities, and academic resources enhanced their belonging, which ultimately promoted their achievement.

Similarly, Cooper (2009) argued that belonging is formed from student engagement with commitment and investment in interacting with the environment, which cultivates affiliation with the institution. These studies emphasize the positive impact of belonging to one's university which increases matriculation, learning outcomes, and persistence toward graduation (Cooper, 2009; Hurtado et al., 2015; Strayhorn, 2019). Since belonging has been noted as a critical aspect of the collegiate experience, there has been growing research examining belonging at the collegiate level and in the various micro spaces of universities (Freeman et al., 2007). In correspondence to the research literature, this study also examines students' sense of belonging to the institution. While I expect student narratives to portray how they belong to the institution, I also hope to identify the benefits and disadvantages of belonging to the institution versus belonging to the various spaces and peer communities in the PWI between White students and Students of Color.

Research has also shown that different racial-ethnic groups exhibit varying experiences of belonging. One's membership to social groups has an impact on belonging. (Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Faircloth, 2009; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado et al., 2018; Means and Pyne, 2017; Strayhorn, 2008; Strayhorn, 2019). This body of work reveals the differing levels of belonging among racial-ethnic groups alongside educational outcomes. Results from studies have mainly

revealed that White students have a stronger sense of belonging to the PWI environment than their minority peers (Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Hausmann et al., 2009; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2018; Strayhorn, 2019; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). This is often due to the additional racialized experiences Students of Color face in the PWI environment that challenge their connection to the university (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hausmann et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2007). This empirical work suggests social group membership may play a special role in how students experience belonging.

Racial and ethnic groups exhibit differing belonging outcomes in the educational environment. Scholars acknowledge the importance of identifying the processes by which these outcomes occur among students in differing racial-ethnic groups. A missing piece of this work is understanding how these different outcomes occur. Given the significance of context and social groups to belonging, scholars stress the need for a deeper examination of their direct connection and how the two variables work together to influence belonging (Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Strayhorn, 2018; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015).

Purpose of Study: Research Questions & Propositions

To address this gap, I apply the Person-Environment Fit framework to examine the interactions and processes between the individual and the various contexts of the PWI environment that result in varying outcomes of belonging. I propose a model for belonging that identifies students' belonging needs based on their social group membership and personal characteristics alongside what the PWI context supplies to meet those needs. I examine interactions between the self and environment during processes of belonging and how they result in negative and positive outcomes for differing social groups, specifically Students of Color and White students. With this study, I aim to examine 1) what salient dimensions of identity matter to

the belonging needs and outcomes of Students of Color and White students, with a focus on social categories and personal characteristics, 2) how salient dimensions of one's identity interact with the varying macro-spaces and the holistic institutional environment during processes of belonging and 3) the differences between needs, engagement, and outcomes of belonging among Students of Color and White students. I ask three main research questions to address these three goals.

Before, presenting the research questions, I underscore two main points. First, this study acknowledges the complex dynamic and distinct components that makeup students' identities. I use the psychological approach to conceptualizing identity within this study, which asserts that identity is made of a core self that encompasses multiple components/dimensions (Winkle-Wagner, 2012). While these dimensions of one's identity may alter across various contexts and timepoints, their core self remains constant. Second, within this study, identity is defined as one's social group membership consistent with social categories identified in Tajfel's (2010) social identity theory (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, etc.) and personal characteristics that encompass one's beliefs about one's values, goals, and aspirations (i.e., interests, values, and attributes) (Gonzales-Backenet al., 2015). Scholars have established that identity is multifaceted and includes components of both personal and social identity (Deaux, 1993; Erickson, 1994; Gonzales-Backen et al., 2015).

This study also adopts Deaux's (1993) conceptualization of identity, referencing social categories in which an individual claims membership and the personal meaning associated with those categories. This conceptualization of identity considers both categorical membership and personal meaning in defining identity. Personal and social identity are interpreted in the context of group membership as internalization of group membership is informed by aspects of personal

identity (Deaux, 1993; Gonzales-Backen et al., 2015). Given the varying outcomes of belonging among students from different racial-ethnic groups, this study views identity as the association with a social group, along with any associated self-descriptive characteristics that feature personal characteristics and other dimensions of one's identity. Recognizing the fact that other dimensions of students' identity will influence belonging, I not only focus on social categories and personal characteristics but also consider the possible impact of dimensions such as role identity, vocational identity, political identity, and cultural identity (Stryker, 1968, Stryker & Serpe 1982).

This research is a descriptive case study of a predominantly white university addressing three main research questions, which hold three propositions. Specifically, I am interested in exploring how context and identity coalesce to produce belonging outcomes in the following capacities:

1. What dimensions of their identity do Students of Color and White students describe as salient to their sense of belonging in the PWI environment? This research question proposes that group membership is connected to belonging and that various dimensions of one's identity are positively and negatively associated with belonging. Therefore, identity dimensions meaningful to belonging will differ between White students and Students of Color.
2. How do students describe the interaction between the campus context and identity in how they impact their belonging? This question holds the proposition that the PWI context is connected to belonging. Students engage in social and academic contexts related to their salient identities to develop belonging.

3. How does the process of belonging in the PWI context occur and differ among White students and Students of Color? This question proposes that due to their varying salient identities and engagement with varying contexts in the PWI, Students of Color and White students will display varying needs, processes, and outcomes of belonging.

Collectively, this study's questions constitute an agenda for advancing our knowledge of how identity and environment combine to influence belonging in a PWI.

This study is a descriptive case study with two analytical parts when answering these research questions. Case study research is described as concrete and more contextually based because it is rooted in context and involves getting close to the subject of interest through direct observations in natural settings that give access to the subjective experience (Baxter & Jack, 2015; Merriam, 1998; Cresswell, 2018; Hyett et al., 2014). Therefore, it involves the holistic description and analysis of a single phenomenon, making it applicable to this study. Appendix A contains the study measure for data collection.

Literature Review

Defining Belonging and Why it Matters

Belonging is a new and growing research area that is increasingly recognized as a key element of student success. So far, empirical work has linked a sense of belonging with critical educational factors such as academic achievement, retention, persistence, and commitment to education (Cheng, 2004; Cooper, 2009; Freeman et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2002; Strayhorn, 2018; Masika & Jones, 2016; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). For example, studies show that belonging built through involvement and engagement increases student confidence in learning (Masika & Jones, 2016). For students, especially those in their first year of college, belonging is a strong predictor of student grades. Among Students of Color, this effect is two-fold due to

experiences of racialized stigma (Strayhorn, 2019; Freeman et al., 2007; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015). Morrow and Ackerman (2012) evaluated the connection between students and the university environment concerning persistence and retention. They revealed belonging and motivation were strongly associated with retention and students' intent to persist (Morrow & Ackerman, 2012). Studies also show that belonging is critical to making informed decisions about educational experiences such as choice of major, involvement in student organizations, and building peer relationships (Smart et al., 2000; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Strayhorn 2019). Due to such findings, scholars now stress the growing importance of belonging in student developmental and educational outcomes (Strayhorn 2019).

While belonging is a critical piece of students' success in higher education, there is still limited understanding of the characteristics that make up a belonging for students, especially for students of minority backgrounds. The complex processes of belonging that produce the educational outcomes exhibited in empirical research are yet fully explored (Strayhorn, 2019). Given the significance of belonging in student success, scholars acknowledge the necessity for further investigation into understanding factors that make up belonging for students and how it manifests within students' everyday collegiate experiences.

Scholars also emphasize some existing challenges in the current work on belonging. Scholars have debated the distinctions between the different elements that make up a sense of belonging. Throughout empirical literature, belonging is defined using a variety of terms. Its definition has included descriptors such as students' perceived social support (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), feelings of mattering and connectedness to one's environment (Cohen & Garcia, 2008), being seen as valuable or important to a group, personal involvement in a system (Hoffman et al., 2002), and feeling connected to others in academic spaces (Freeman et al., 2007; Meeuwisse

et al., 2010). As a result, scholars debate the varying significance and components of each factor in belonging among these definitions. For example, some scholars emphasize the significance of fitting into a group or context, making belonging rooted in community, affiliation, and membership (Strayhorn, 2019; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Other scholars also recognize value as a fundamental attribute of belonging, by which one's characteristics are congruent and valued by others (Hoffman et al., 2002). For example, when investigating belonging among first-year students, Hoffman and colleagues (2002) discovered that freshmen students most often felt overwhelmed by academic expectations when coming to college. To manage this, students relied on interpersonal relationships as a source of support and guidance. These relationships provided a feeling of being cared for and membership to that network. This increased students' comfort level and abilities in dealing with academic matters, thus making students more comfortable in the university environment (Hoffman et al., 2002). These findings emphasize the significance students place on their needs being valued in the university environment as a vital part of feeling a sense of belonging. This study aims to contribute to this debate by illuminating on what characteristics students describe make up their belonging and how current empirical descriptors of belonging appear in students' experiences at a PWI.

The next critical issue is understanding why students exhibit differing levels, meanings, and beliefs of belonging in particular contexts and situations. Research shows that student perception of belonging matters and varies depending on the individual and their background experiences (Strayhorn, 2019; Murphy and Zirkel, 2015). When examining the differences between Students of Color and White students, Murphy and Zirkel (2015) found that social representation of themselves in the university environment was a potent predictor of connectivity and belonging to the university. For Students of Color, race was a highly significant factor in

how they anticipated and perceived their sense of belonging to the university environment (Murphy and Zirkel, 2015). Scholars agree that belonging is vital to all students in the educational environment.

It remains unclear how students from differing racial and ethnic backgrounds experience belonging in the PWI context and the connections between identity and context in promoting, building, and fostering belonging among students. The work on these issues has only just begun. While research has started to map the differences in feelings of belonging among students during college, scholars agree more work is needed to explain why these differences exist and the developmental mechanisms by which critical factors such as context and student background shape belonging for students.

Group Differences in Belonging: Associations between Identity and Belonging

Compared to their White peers, Students of Color tend to report less belonging at PWIs (Hausmann et al., 2009; Strayhorn, 2018; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016; Museus et al., 2017). So, scholars stress that intersectionality matters. Social identities intersect in novel ways to create unique realities for building belonging among students (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Therefore, it is important to understand the experiences of students as they perceive themselves as marginalized or privileged in belonging within the PWI environment (Johnson et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2008; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Social identities (i.e., generational status, social class, race, ethnicity, sex, religion, etc.) are connected with the basic needs of life (Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Strayhorn, 2019). Social (group) identities such as race and ethnicity, along with characteristics of personal identity such as personality traits and interests, have been directly associated with students' sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2019).

This work suggests that a closer look into the influence of identity is a critical first step to understanding student differences in belonging.

When it comes to the PWI environment, scholars have begun to produce evidence suggesting that cultural identity significantly matter to students' experiences of belonging. For example, in a large comprehensive study on college students' sense of belonging, Strayhorn (2019) showed that Black males at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) often have a greater sense of belonging than those at PWIs. Much of this is due to feelings of strong cultural support in the HBCU environment. Strayhorn (2019) concluded that Black students place significance on establishing a sense of fit that validates their racial identity and promotes their educational success. Among Latinx students', factors such as strong familial obligation and SES are additional social factors influenced belonging (Strayhorn, 2018). Mainly, literature shows that cultural experiences are relevant when measuring sense of belonging among Students of Color and may account for the adverse outcomes exhibited in the educational context, given the complex associations between student identities and the educational environment. Examining such components alongside belonging requires an additional focus on cultural influencers, especially when examining the experiences of Students of Color.

Belonging in the Educational Environment

Another conclusion of the empirical work is that belonging is domain- and situation-specific (Silver 2020b, Strayhorn 2019). In other words, the characteristics of an individual and the space in which the person currently exists can facilitate one's sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2019). This notion is a critical consideration when trying to understand belonging among students. Belonging can be highly dependent on context for providing optimal conditions for building and fostering belongingness (Hurtado et al., 2018). Sense of belonging is said to be

socially constructed and informed by students' experiences in their existing spaces (Strayhorn, 2019). This is mainly because belonging in the educational environment is a complex construct that relies critically on students' perceptions of their experiences in the educational setting (Johnson et al., 2007; Johnson, 2012; Means & Pyne 2017; Murphy and Zirkel, 2015). Recently, developmental scholars have begun to examine environment as a serious aspect of belonging, deeming contextual factors such as culture, society, peers, education, occupation, and family as significant influencers of belonging (Hurtardo et al., 2018; Smart et al., 2000; Strayhorn, 2012; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016).

During college, the specific contexts in which students develop can act as opportunities for developing belonging as students interact with new situations and the changing contexts of the collegiate atmosphere. (Cooper, 2009; Johnson 2012; Renn, 2000; Renn, 2008). In his extensive evaluation of college students' belonging, Strayhorn (2019) notes that the educational setting is a particularly sensitive place for belonging. The need to belong guides students' behavior toward achievement and success. When students find themselves in spaces where they feel marginalized or unsupported, lack of belonging becomes heightened (Hausmann et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2007; Johnson, 2012).

Contextual factors can work independently and simultaneously to impact students' sense of belonging. Means and Pyne (2017) examined institutional structures that increase students' understanding of social and academic belonging. They defined institutional structures as academic and social spaces (including university staff) designed to support learning and achievement at the university. They identified significant institutional structures that increase students' belongingness. These included need-based scholarship programs, identity-based student organizations, community-building in residence halls, supportive faculty, academic support

services, and high-impact educational practices. The work of Means and Pyne (2017) showed that, in the social and academic realms, students often seek belonging and connectivity to an institution by building bonds of support, mentorship, and friendship with peers, professors, and support services staff. Such relationships are meaningful to students' experiences as they rely on these relationships for sound decision-making, utilization of campus resources, and navigating the developmental challenges of college life. (Strayhorn, 2012 p. 38).

This empirical work shows that students engage in belonging by interacting with the various contexts of the college environment. Such interactions can determine if belonging needs are met or unmet. With this in mind, this study not only seeks to examine the belonging needs of students based on their identity, but it also considers how students engage university contexts to achieve belonging. I also consider the impact of the relationship between the two factors on belonging. For this reason, the study is conducted with a strong focus on students' descriptions of their experiences in the PWI space. I try to understand and describe the macro- and micro-processes that foster belonging among students in the PWI environment. This will result in an in-depth understanding of belonging processes engaged by Students of Color and White students and how the PWI fulfills students' needs in order to achieve belonging.

Person-Environment Fit Framework

My study applies the Person-Environment-Fit (P-E fit) theoretical framework to understanding student experiences and processes of belonging in the PWI environment (Caplan & Van Harrison, 1993; Feldman et al., 2004; Smart et al., 2000; Tinsley, 2000).

The P-E fit framework (Caplan, 1987) features three properties applicable to this study. The first is assessing characteristics of the person and of the environment along commensurate dimensions to define the goodness of fit between the person and the environment (Caplan, 1987).

Applying this property, this study seeks to utilize students' narratives of their own identity and descriptions of the PWI context to assess fit. As such, student narratives are used as the metric for defining the person and PWI environment within this study.

The second property is a focus on subjective measures of fit: individuals' perceptions of their experiences, as opposed to objective evaluation of physical and social situations as they exist independent of one's perception (Caplan, 1987; Eccles et al., 1993; Kristof, 1996). A significant amount of the empirical literature on college student development provides evidence of objective evaluations of students' experiences in the PWI environment. Most of these studies involve quantitative measures that display objective empirical facts about the university environment and the ways by which academic and social disparities exist among Student of Color and White students in PWI settings (Caplan & Van Harrison, 1993; Eimers & Pike, 1997; Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascerella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Evans, Forney, Florence, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Carter, Locks, & Winkel-Wagner, 2013). Capturing student perspectives can be utilized to identify gaps between students' subjective experiences of belonging and how empirical work has portrayed belonging. Identifying such gaps will be helpful for understanding the dissonance between institutional practices and student outcomes in belonging.

The third is property views fit in two distinct ways, namely, one's abilities and their fit with the demands of the environment (demands-abilities fit) versus one's needs or desires and their fit with the supplies afforded by the environment (needs-supplies fit). Within this property, fit occurs through the exchange process, defined as the interaction between an individual and the environment (Caplan, 1987; Tinsley, 2000; Smart et al., 2000) (See Figure 1). In P-E fit theory, needs-supplies fit can represent the perspective of an individual within an environment and how well the environment meets their needs (Caplan, 1987; Caplan & Van Harrison, 1993). Since its

inception, the P-E fit framework has grown into several variations as its applied across multiple disciplines, including counseling, psychology, and sociology (Caplan, 1987; Caplan & Harrison, 1993; Tinsley, 2000).

Although the original model contained two approaches to fit, abilities vs demands and needs/desires vs supplies, current empirical work and present applications of the model often separate them to examine differing outcomes of fit, especially as P-E fit has grown popular and been continuously expanded in multiple disciplines (Tinsley, 2000).

Additionally, scholars have developed extensions of the P-E fit framework to measure fit in several capacities. These include person-vocation fit (Holland, 1985), person-job fit (Van Vianen, 2018), and person-organization fit (Caplan & Harrison, 1993). Person-organization fit examines how people fit into an organization relative to their needs, values, personalities, which in turn can define organizational structures, processes and culture (van Vianen 2018). The types of fit compare personal value with those of the organization and measure job choice, turnovers, adjustment, and job satisfaction ((Caplan & Harrison, 1993; van Vainen, 2018). When applying P-E fit developmental scholars have commonly focused on person-organization fit to capture developmental outcomes based on student fit with the collegiate environment. This type of fit has been applied in the educational field to measure outcomes such as school choice, adjustment, persistence, retention, and academic success ((Eccles et al., 1993; Feldman et al., 2004; Porter & Umbach, 2006; Hutz et al.,2007).

In the educational context, P-E fit theory can be applied to examine the fit between the needs of students and the opportunities afforded them in their collegiate environment. This analysis centers the needs of the students alongside the services and opportunities universities supply to meet those needs. (Eccles et al.,1993; Smart et al., 2000). A fit or match between the

person and environment happens when individuals' needs are met by the supplies afforded by the environment they inhabit (Caplan, 1987). Fit occurs through the exchange process, defined as the dynamic interaction between an individual and the environment (Caplan, 1987; Caplan & Harrison, 1993; Tinsley, 2000; Smart et al., 2000). Another way of conceptualizing this idea is using a client-provider perspective. Institutions act as providers, offering services to students who are clients. The university provides specific services that either meet or don't meet students' needs. Therefore, negative educational outcomes result from a poor fit between students and social and academic spaces (Eccles et al., 1993). Given this study's focus on the educational environment, the framework measures person-organization fit by applying the need-supplies property of P-E fit to capture fit between the students and the university environment when addressing students belonging needs.

In developmental psychology, application of the P-E fit framework to measure person-organization fit is exhibited in two distinct ways. The first views both the student and the university as fixed entities with specific supplies and needs. Fit relies on whether students' needs are compatible with what the university offers. Students have certain dimensions of their identity that matter to their needs. The university supplies intrinsic and extrinsic resources, opportunities, and rewards that may or may not fulfill students' needs. As students engage the campus environment, their needs are either met or unmet, if they are compatible with institutional norms, expectations, and standards. Given students varying identity dimensions, as they engage the PWI, having one's needs met may occur more easily for students in certain social groups more so than others. For example, Hurtz and colleagues (2007) examined the relationship between students' ethnocultural person-environment fit and college adjustment in a PWI. They investigated how a population of students fit into the institution as an organization, hypothesizing

there would be differences in P-E fit between ethnocultural minority students versus majority students. They found ethnocultural differences related to perceptions of P-E fit. Specifically, first-year White, European American students perceived a higher level of fit in their adjustment than their counterparts who belong to diverse cultural backgrounds. In addition, their results showed ethnicity moderated the relationship between perception of P-E fit and adjustment for both majority and minority students. Minority students dealt with an environment that produced perceptions of a racially hostile climate, social isolation, and an overall sense of incongruence with the PWI, which resulted in a lower ethnocultural P-E fit. However, minority students still perceived similar levels of adjustment as the majority students. Minority students were able to successfully adjust to the institution without necessarily feeling a sense of fit. These findings showed the incompatibility between students' cultural identity and the unaccommodating PWI environment as they navigate college life.

The second way illustrates a reciprocal relationship between the student and the university context. Both students and the university space impact each other during the exchange process, which causes fit to occur. Fit is achieved by changing either the environment, the individual's self-identity, or both (Caplan & Harrison, 1993). Scholars acknowledge that both individual characteristics and situational factors can influence an individual's response to a given situation (O'Reilly et al., 1991). During this, identity dimensions of the individual (i.e., personal identity or social identity) and facets of context (i.e., systems, norms, atmosphere) can not only independently affect an individual's attitudes and response to the environment, but can also do so simultaneously (O'Reilly et al., 1991).

Both approaches presume universities have a set of expectations, norms, and provided services. As students navigate and orient themselves in the college environment, dimensions of

self either fit or don't fit with the environment. This can result in unmet needs and adverse educational outcomes. Scholars note that, in P-E fit theory, subjective P-E fit leads to positive or negative psychological, physical, and behavioral outcomes. Discrepancies between personal and environmental supplies reduce positive outcomes (van Vianen, 2018).

Under both of these presumptions, this study examines the connections and interactions between identity dimensions, the PWI context during the exchange process, and their influence on belonging (i.e., fit). I propose a model that applies the person-environment fit framework to understand belonging among Students of Color and White students at a PWI, given their personal characteristics and social group membership. I term this the Sense of Belonging through Person-Environment Fit (SOB-PE Fit) framework (see Figure 2). The following sections will explain the proposed framework by 1) outlining the theoretical perspectives applied to the framework and 2) articulating the elements and dimensions that make up the framework.

Application of Social Identity Theory

This study applies social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) and the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) to the proposed SOB-PE Fit framework when defining identity. My study takes a multi-dimensional approach to defining identity. The proposed framework incorporates multiple dimensions of identity when addressing students' personal needs. Deaux (1993) paved the way for multidimensional analysis of identity by recognizing the significance of both personal identity and social identity and their fundamentally interrelated nature. Social identity is one's conception as a member of a social group (Hogg et al., 1995; Jones & Abes, 2013; Patton et al., 2016). Social identity is made up of multiple dimensions (i.e., race, ethnicity, social class, family, education etc.). Personal identity refers to traits and

behaviors that an individual finds are self-descriptive (Deaux, 1993; Gonzales-Backen et al., 2015).

Adopting this perspective within the proposed model, identity is defined as one's social membership and self-descriptive characteristics. Thus, membership in social categories is infused with personal meaning within this definition of identity, making personal and social identity interrelated (Deaux 1993; Gonzalez-Backen et al., 2015). Meaning, when individuals think about their identity, they not only consider their social categories, but they do so in relation to personal characteristics. For example, a Student of Color in a PWI may engage in a particular context, not only based on their racial identity but also in conjunction with their personal characteristics such as interests or values. Such is the case for underrepresented students in STEM, who, due to their minority status, seek out peers that share their racial identity and interest in the STEM field (Strayhorn, 2013; Strayhorn, 2017).

Identity dimensions are also organized in a salience hierarchy depending on the presence of identity in a particular context. An identity dimension can become especially salient if not represented in a particular context. For Students of Color in PWIs, being in a White setting increases awareness of their minority status within their everyday experiences. In reverse, a White student attending a historically Black university (HBCU) can become more cognizant of their White identity from being a racial minority in such an environment. Due to the salience of identities, aspects of personal identity are going to be perceived or interpreted by the self in terms of their social categories. Merging the two constructs, social categories are infused with personal meaning as personal identity is also defined by group membership (Deaux, 1993). This perspective allows for capturing individuals' salient social categories along with any personal

characteristics associated with them. Using this definition of identity, one can address the question about positionality and salience, making it applicable to this study.

According to social identity theory, social identity is based on in-group and out-group characteristics and norms. Ingroup and out-group relations determine and describe attributes as a member of a group through the socio-cognitive process of categorization (Hogg et al., 1995). Categorization outlines in-group boundaries by producing distinctive group norms and actions in a given context. Ingroup and outgroup characteristics drive behavior. Group behavior is influenced by the structure of society and one's social category (Stets & Burke, 2000). Social identity theory conceives the self as a continuum of individuating characteristics at the personal level and social categorical characteristics at the societal level. If identity dimensions are salient to the self, an individual is aware of the features that distinguish them from others. (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Therefore, social identity theory focuses on intergroup relations and processes of identity to determine categorization. When social identities are salient, individuals behave in accordance with group expectations (Jones & Abes, 2013; Patton et al., 2016). The proposed model asserts that ingroup and outgroup characteristics from membership to salient identities will guide engagement in belonging. The relationships and interactions students experience according to their social membership will be meaningful to their belonging. This will result in varying outcomes of belonging for Students of Color and White students. Salience implies that individuals are likely to define situations in ways that make a highly salient identity relevant; the process enables them to enact that identity (Stryker, 1968). I predict the same will occur as students engage in belonging processes. There will be distinguishable features in how Students of Color and White students experience belonging given the characteristics of their identities in

social groups. Therefore, the application of the model will display the group norms, perceptions, and behavioral characteristics of students belonging, given their social membership.

To understand the student experience at PWIs, one must pay attention to the interconnectedness of the various dimensions of identity that students hold simultaneously. The model also recognizes that other dimensions of identity may intersect with social categories and personal characteristics as students experience belonging. A fulfilling student experience would engage multiple dimensions of identity. The interplay between various dimension is correlated with the way the students engage academically and socially in the environment of a PWI.

Proposed Model - Sense of Belonging through Person-Environment Fit Framework

The proposed framework applies the concept of the exchange process from the PEFit theory to examine the exchange processes between the PWI context and student identity that cause belonging to occur, a framework which I term, Sense of Belonging through Person-Environment Fit Framework (SOB-PEFit Framework). The proposed framework operates on two primary features. First, belonging is necessary for all students attending a PWI. Second, it defines the exchange process as the interaction between students' needs for belonging according to their identity and what the PWI supplies as an affordance to those needs. The model also considers a student's ability to accommodate the institution's expectations, norms, and standards. The model is a macro-level understanding of the ways Students of Color and White students experience belonging in the PWI environment; it achieves this by examining students' micro-level descriptions of belonging.

The model consists of 3 main parts which 1) establish the essential identity dimensions and environmental factors that make up the needs and supplies of students belonging experience, 2) examine the specific connections and relationships between identity and context that impact

belonging, and 3) identify differences in how positive and negative outcomes of belonging occur among Students of Color and White students. (See Figure 3 for description and directional relationship of Identity, Context, and Belonging Elements).

Part 1: Needs, Supplies, and Salient Identities

The SOB-PEFit framework assumes that the core self/identity comprises of multiple dimensions that are salient to the individual and will therefore be salient to their belonging. Specifically, the study examines membership to social categories (i.e., race, class, gender, etc.) and self-descriptive personal characteristics (i.e., one's interests, roles, values, goals etc). Focusing on the person, the proposed model indicates that students enter the PWI environment with membership in various dimensions of their identity and diverse background experiences that set the foundation for their belonging needs. Therefore, students' needs are identity-based. The framework assumes that for belonging to occur the PWI must satisfy students' needs by supplying whatever is necessary to meet those needs. In the same fashion, students must accommodate the university norms and expectations that accompany the services and opportunities afforded in the PWI environment. Student belonging needs are based on the overlap and intersection of their identities and their perspective of the PWI institutional structure. As a result, students have individual requirements of belonging that preside over whether they have a positive or negative experience of belonging. If identity dimensions are present in students' belonging needs, they will also be salient to their overall belonging and appear consistently in their narratives.

The model also posits the PWI itself has standards for belonging in the opportunities supplied that would allow a student to feel belonging. The PWI comprises various contextual spaces that make up its structure. These spaces are meant to connect students to the institution

and address students' developmental needs. In the model, space is defined as not just physical space but institutional support structures: contextual spaces (i.e., academic offices, campus resources, multicultural offices), including individuals who work in those spaces (i.e., faculty, academic advisors, administrative staff), formal and informal social and academic environments (Mean & Pyne, 2007). What the PWI environment supplies for belonging should be associated with students' salient identities to satisfy needs appropriately so fit (i.e., belonging) occurs.

Part 2: The Exchange Process

Part 2 of the framework investigates the interactions between a student's identity and the PWI context. It explicitly examines the interactions between context and identity dimensions during the engagement in the belonging process. According to the proposed framework, students will engage in various processes to belong. This engagement will occur in specific contexts that will tap into the characteristics of various identity dimensions in which they claim membership. Processes of belonging are defined as how belonging occurs for individuals. They describe how students engage in the PWI environment to experience belonging and involve an interaction between the person and contextual factors.

Part 3 Fit/Belonging

The exchange process results in a negative or positive outcome of belonging (meaning fit or unfit) and reveals consequences of belonging. If belonging needs are satisfied, students exhibit belonging that is positive. The model allows for examining the similarities and differences between White students and Students of Color, addressing the final research question in this study by explaining how belonging occurs for White students and Students of Color. This question holds the proposition that, due to their marginalized identities and varying interactions

with the campus context, Students of Color will display different ways of belonging from their White counterparts.

The Current Study

The proposed model views belonging as a process in which students engage with favorable and adverse outcomes to the overall experience in a PWI. To test the proposed model, I applied it to individual student cases, examining their belonging experiences. During analysis, the objective was to create a process map of students' belonging experiences, which outlined how students generally experience belonging and create a template examining each student's individual experiences to identify the connections and links between identity, context, and belonging.

Methods

Participants

Participants for the current study were drawn from a larger sample containing 58 domestic undergraduates attending a PWI in the U.S. Midwest. Of the 58 students, 31 identified as White/Caucasian European, and 27 identified as Student of Color (10 African American, 5 Asian American, 8 Latinx, 2 Middle Eastern, and 2 multi-racial). Also, 23 of these individuals identified as cis-male, and 35 identified as cis-female. The study employed a stratified sampling procedure to obtain approximately equal numbers of participants by cis-gender and racial/ethnic category (Students of Color versus White). This study focuses on a subset of 22 cases that provided in-depth responses addressing my specific research questions. The sample included 11 participants who identified as Students of Color and 11 who identified as White; 37% of these cases were males and 63% were female. They ranged from first year through fourth-year students (See Table 1).

Procedure

Participants were recruited in two waves (the first wave in 2014/15 and the second in 2017/18). In the first wave, students were recruited through university courses in the Educational Psychology Department. They received credit for a research participation course requirement. Recruitment in the first wave yielded a participant pool of primarily White cis-female students. To achieve a better gender and racial/ethnic balance, the second wave of recruitment focused on Students of Color and cis-males. These students were recruited more broadly through announcements in undergraduate courses in a variety of academic disciplines and several student organizations. These individuals received a modest honorarium for participating.

All participants were interviewed individually after completing an informed consent process. In most cases, the interviewer came from the same racial-ethnic category (i.e., Person of Color or White individual) as the participant. Interviews were conducted by trained undergraduate or graduate students. The interview last 45 minutes, on average (range: 30 minutes to 95 minutes). All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim to prepare for data analyses.

Initial analysis of the transcripts indicated that there was substantial variability in the extent to which responses fully addressed the issues pertaining to this dissertation. Using inclusion criteria each interview transcript was rated based on its richness and the amount of in-depth information provided in response. The inclusion criteria included the following: 1) The participant provided concrete in-depth responses to interview questions. 2) Responses stayed on topic with interview questions. Some transcripts were excluded because the interviewer or participant discussed hypothetical scenarios, rather than the participant's own experience,

therefore nullifying the response. 3) responses provided data addressing the study research questions. This process identified cases that provided data fit for this study.

Measures

The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of 38 items on student belonging, divided into four sections focused on the influence of the following developmental factors: autonomy, academics, social integration, and identity. Modest revisions were made to the interview protocol for the second wave to include more follow-up questions that could clarify key issues (Appendix A provides the interview protocol). Following the standards for qualitative research, questions on the interview protocol acted as a guide for conversation. Student responses and reflections directed the flow of conversation during interviews and the order in which topics were addressed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The data were managed using a database in the University box drive, approved by the University IRB. The database consists of pertinent study materials such as interview transcripts, recordings, and researcher notes that I managed and organized. During the cleaning and preparations of interviews, audio files were transcribed. Transcriptions were edited, de-identified, and verified. Each phase of preparation was tracked and documented using tracking grids. During the cleaning process, transcripts were organized based on the interview year and randomly assigned identification numbers to maintain participant anonymity. Transcripts were segmented in preparation for analysis, which means portions of the text were grouped together based on the following criteria 1) response to a question or 2) shared topic and themes. This allowed the coding of segmented text to capture the coherence and co-occurrences of codes as they related to a particular topic or theme in the text. Cleaned transcripts were then systematically organized into MAXQDA coding software. This setup in the analytical processes

allowed for running qualitative analytical queries in MAXQDA. Given that transcripts were segmented before coding, all analytical queries and theming conducted in MAXQDA were based on the co-occurrences of codes in a given segment.

Data Analysis

The process of sorting meaningful units of data into categories is known as coding (Saldana, 2015). Analysis of the sample consisted of 2 parts, the first cycle coding process, and the second cycle coding process. My analysis followed the analytical instructions outlined by Merriam (1998) for descriptive account. The research team participated in a month-long intensive training on data cleaning and preparation, exploratory and descriptive coding, and conducting peer reviews.

Part 1: First Cycle Coding

The first level of analysis consisted of category construction and identifying meaningful units of data. During this process, transcripts were reviewed by five research assistants and me. The research team was divided into coding pairs to code and examine recurring patterns that cut across the data and capture them. The coding process consisted of three rounds of coding, all of which resulted in creating a unified codebook of categories that was applied to the entire dataset. Coders were assigned 5 of the 22 cases to review when making the codebook. Each member of the research team reviewed each transcript individually. Following the individual review of each transcript, peer review was conducted in which the research team met to discuss and define identified meaningful units to be coded. This process was repeated until patterns and categories were captured to formulate the codebook capturing all aspects of the raw data.

During each round of peer examination, categories in the codebook were created, sorted, and organized using the following criteria by which meaningful units emerge: the frequency at

which a unit was mentioned or arose, units that stood out based on their uniqueness and units that provided new or further insights into belonging (p. 185).

Categories were named, defined, and organized by using participants' own words, identifying units in the data that reflected previous empirical work and the purposes of the study, and/or creating names that were exhaustive and mutually exclusive, meaning that all units of data that are coded were able to be placed into a clearly defined category or subcategory. The resulting categories comprised the codebook, which was then applied to the rest of the student transcripts. The codebook encompassed 38 categories (codes) that emerged from students' descriptions of the belonging experiences.

Following the development of the codebook, the research team was divided into coding pairs to apply the codebook to the 22 cases in the sample. Cases were assigned to pairs, whose members coded their cases individually and then met to conduct peer review and resolve any differences in their coding decisions. If the pair had questions or could not reach a resolution on a segment, the issue was examined, discussed, and resolved by the entire research team.

I used MAXQDA analytical software to organize and conduct analysis of the coded transcripts. I inputted categories (codes) and their definitions, then uploaded transcripts, organized by sex, race/ethnicity, and interview year. Then, I transferred peer-reviewed coding to MAXQDA.

MAXQDA Visual Analytical Queries. MAXQDA organizes codes within each transcript in a structure that allows for analyzing combinations, positions, and different groupings of codes in a document. The software facilitates examination of data from various analytical viewpoints, including examining where codes intersect and overlap in a document. Such viewpoints provided a lens for capturing which categories in the codebook made up

students' belonging experience. This also led to identifying factors most critical to students belonging. After coding was transferred to the MAXQDA, I ran three visual analytical queries—a code matrix, code relations matrix, and code map—to examine the data from three perspectives. This set the foundation for validating the elements in the SOB-PEfit model. As I previously mentioned, the segmenting process was based on coherence and consistency in the data text pertaining to the themes or topics in each segment. Given that transcripts were segmented prior to analysis, findings are based on co-occurrences of codes.

Code Matrix. When run, a code matrix provides a visual representation of which codes are most prominent in the experiences of each student group (i.e., Students of Color and White students). It displays the concentration of each code in transcripts, allowing us to see which codes are most prevalent within Students of Color and White student experiences. It is a visual of the frequency at which codes appeared in Students of Color and White students' experiences and therefore are relevant to the belonging for each student group.

Code Relations Matrix. The code relations matrix displays which codes are most related to belonging by evaluating how codes co-occur in the text. It was utilized to confirm which categories of the codebook were most related to belonging and, therefore, should make up the basic elements of the proposed SOB-PEfit model. The code relations matrix incorporated all coded text that applied to the primary factors found in each section of the interview responses (i.e., autonomy, academics, social integration, and identity) and any context codes that emerged from the data.

Code Map. A code map shows the links between codes in all the categories and displays if categories in the codebook are connected. It provides a visual representation of which factors are either directly or indirectly linked to belonging. Code maps display codes that have been co-

assigned to a segment, revealing the frequency with which codes are similarly applied to the data in the text. This provides visual confirmation of which codes intersect with belonging directly or indirectly and therefore hold association to students' belonging experiences. A code map of primary codes associated with belonging provided a visualization of which primary codes linked to belonging.

Part 2: Second Cycle Coding Process Reduction Analysis & Thematic Analysis

First cycle coding was followed by reduction analysis, which identified emerging themes that detailed 1) how codes directly or indirectly connected to belonging, 2) descriptions of students' individual and group belonging experiences, and 3) validation of the SOB-PEfit framework. The first cycle of analysis was followed by re-evaluating previously coded transcripts and codes to create thematic categories. Thematic categories act as descriptors of themes that emerged and revealed the details of the causal links and relationships between codes through direct interpretation of meaningful units of data identified in the first cycle analysis. The first cycle analysis confirmed which categories make up the key elements of the proposed SOB-PEfit framework; when applied to the model, the second cycle codes explained the distinct connections between identity dimensions of the person and the PWI context that impact students' individual belonging. The analysis also revealed group differences and similarities between Students of Color and White students.

Theming began with data reduction. Analysis involved pulling identified meaningful data units in the first cycle coding process and recoding to capture themes. The retrieved data was used to make individual grids which contained specific text describing each student's overall experiences related to belonging, along with their associated codes. The captured data were examined to create thematic categories by reviewing each student's individual case.

During the second cycle coding process, I applied the empirical typology for thematic analysis outlined by Vaismoradi and colleagues (2016), which involved identifying the conceptual codes, relationship codes, and descriptive codes that make up the essential themes of participant experiences. I applied this typology to create a specific coding structure that allowed for examining each student's individual experiences. This resulted in thematic categories that outlined students' belonging processes, links between elements of belonging identified in first cycle analysis, and each participant's specific set of salient identity dimensions, influential contextual factors, and the connections between the two that either disrupt or solidify belonging.

Two research assistants and I conducted the second cycle coding process. Conceptual categories used for theming were developed by reviewing each student's case. First, the meaningful units of belonging from 1st cycle analysis were identified and synthesized into a grid of each participant's belonging experiences. Similar to the first cycle coding processes, each research team member coded each participant grid, applying the coding typology of Vaismoradi et al., (2016). I developed eight analytical queries based on the study's research questions and propositions that were applied to each grid and developed thematic categories. When coding, coders captured meaningful data that addressed the following:

- 1) What mattered to/comprised belonging for this student?
- 2) Did identity matter to this student's belonging? What identities mattered to this student?
- 3) What did this student describe as necessary for their belonging?
- 4) How did this student go about belonging? What processes did they engage?
- 5) What helped to belong?
- 6) Did context matter to belonging (yes or no)? What about the university environment was meaningful to belonging?

- 7) Did the student express belonging? What characteristics did they express? Was their expression of belonging positive, negative, or both?
- 8) Does this student exhibit sense of belonging to the whole university or individual spaces on campus?

Applying these reflective questions to the sample, the coding team conducted peer reviews to develop categories that created thematic descriptors of each student's sense of belonging. Seven thematic categories emerged from this analysis that made up what came to be each student's "belonging profile." Belonging profiles were micro-level descriptions of each student's belonging experiences that consisted of the following.

- 1) Belonging needs that are described as individual and environmental criteria for belonging to the PWI.
- 2) Salient identities that were activated in all aspects of the student belonging processes and the intersectionality between salient identities and affordances of the PWI environment.
- 3) Belonging processes students engaged to belong in the PWI environment.
- 4) Factors that were facilitators and impediments either helping or limiting belonging.
- 5) Spaces and context where belonging occurred, or students describe experiencing belonging.
- 6) Negative and positive outcomes that are products of the exchange process and engaging in belonging.
- 7) Overall belonging to specific contexts in the PWI or the institution holistically.

Each thematic category also contained subcategories that further delineated the interactions and links between the elements in the SOB-PEfit framework model. When applied to the SOB-

PEfit model, categories belonging profiles explain the links and relationships between context and identity during belonging processes for each participant.

Following the creation of themes, thematic categories were created in MAXQDA and applied to each participant case. After reviewing each case, belonging profiles of Students of Color and White students were grouped and applied to the proposed model. Individual belonging profiles allowed for a micro-level examination of critical factors unique to each student's sense of belonging. While application of individual profiles to the framework display group trends and disparities in belonging.

This process was initially conducted on six transcripts—three Students of Color and three White students—to verify the analysis structure. Once verified, the analysis process was then applied to the rest of the sample. Overall results displayed both a macro-level and micro-level understanding of students' sense of belonging, resulting in a novel perspective for examining belonging.

Peer examination and double coding (i.e., re-coding data at different time points) were applied to ensure validity and reliability. We applied joint coding to the analysis process by assigning multiple coders to code and peer review each transcript. This process was also applied when creating the codebooks. Each transcript was coded at two times points, once during the first cycle coding process and again during the second cycle coding process. At each stage of analysis, the research team met to discuss and peer review all codes applied to the data set at each stage. The result of this was the ability to look at the data repeatedly at different points of analysis. This systemic and repetitive approach allowed multiple opportunities to examine the data from various analytical perspectives to affirm analysis. Through peer examination and double coding, consistency and dependability were established by having multiple research team

members come to a consensus about the emerging codes and categories to ensure themes were nonbiased, reliable, and valid (Yazan, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Results

The findings of this study are presented in two parts. First, I briefly describe the PWI context in this study and its history of racial issues. In part one of my results, I present the general belonging characteristics, identity dimensions, and the PWI contextual spaces that make up students' experiences. I illustrate how they make up the core elements of the proposed SOB-PEFit model. Finally, in part two, I explain the thematic sequence of connections between elements in the model. I elaborate on how identity dimensions and the various contextual spaces coalesce during engagement in belonging. Results paint a picture of the dynamics between students' needs and supplies of the PWI environment and the compatibility between students' identity dimensions and contextual spaces that result in belonging.

In addition, White students' narratives are often portrayed as the normal experience in empirical research. Scholars of intersectionality call for more attention and focus on the perspectives of the marginalized individuals to highlight oppressive and privileged dynamics of identities within Institutions (Duran & Jones, 2019). Given that the White experience is often seen as the norm, as a means to raise awareness of the experiences of marginalized populations, I center the experience Students of Color when sharing findings. This study's results showed Students of Color experienced the same themes and process of belonging as White students. However, there were distinct differences between the two groups. Therefore, as I report the findings of this study, I bring attention to areas where the experiences of Students of Color differ from the norm as a means to center and spotlight their narratives.

Description of this PWI Context

The study took place at Monument University (MU), a highly competitive research institution and home of the "Bobcats." Located in Uniontown in the Midwest, it is rated as the number one school in its state and recruits high-achieving students from across the country and the world. Even with a prestigious reputation, MU also has a legacy of being one of the largest party schools in the country. Given its reputation, MU is also a highly selective institution. For the average high school student living in the state, MU is the dream school for only the best.

Students are recruited and sold on MU's diverse student body and top academic programs as one of the leading research institutions in the country. Along with academics, MU prides itself on its athletic programs, specifically football and basketball. On games days, scores of students, parents, alumni, and fans dressed in maroon and white make their way to Ridge Stadium. During festivities, hordes pour around campus landmarks to commemorate these traditions.

Along with the party culture, sporting events are a prided tradition at MU. Many MU students connect to the school before attending by partaking in such festivities. Most students typically described these as selling points in their decision to attend the university. Given its notoriety and affordances in terms of opportunities and prestige, a degree from MU puts one ahead of the game. When asked about their decision to attend Monument University, most student replies mirrored the following. Jill, (White freshman in 2014) states,

I feel like I've always wanted to come here, so I feel like it just fits. It fits everything I've wanted. Like extracurricular-wise, it's one of the top academic schools, which turns out to be harder than I thought it was. But I really like that too. I really like the sheer amount of people here. I really like that we're within the bigger city, but we're like a smaller contained version of it.

Similarly, Isabella (White, junior in 2014) echoed,

I sort of always had it in my mind that Monument University had good vet school. So, I wanted to go here before I even knew the process of applying for college and doing undergrad... Well, I know MU is a better school in terms of ranking, and I had investigated multiple different paths. But I was pretty focused on MU. I was also looking at all the different things at MU that I was vaguely interested in. One of those things was psychology, and MU has a really good psych. department. They also have a great vet school. So, I thought MU was the best school closest to me.

In their descriptions, students listed the affordances of the university that drove them to attend. Under the assumption that the university would be a good fit, students specified opportunities such as extracurriculars and academic programs that match their interests or educational goals.

Students of Color highlighted the same selling points in their decisions to attend.

However, their reasonings also contained a different perspective. Financial convenience drove them to MU rather than a desire to attend. They emphasized the academic opportunities and financial benefits of identity-based scholarship programs that drew them to the school. Akira and Elijah shared their perspectives. Akira (Hmong, senior in 2018) referred to her socioeconomic status as part of her decision-making.

They gave me a scholarship, so I'm also a PROMISE scholar, so I got a full-tuition scholarship to study here, which is like a diversity scholarship. So, it's mostly underrepresented students or those in need of the money to go to school. So, it was just mainly that scholarship because my parents didn't have a lot of money, and I didn't want to have to take out too many loans.

While Elijah (African American, senior in 2018) also mentioned tuition costs. He stated,

Growing up in this state, it's known as the best academic institution. So, being in-state cost-wise was also an incentive than choosing a different college that was out of state. So, that's the two main factors that made me come to MU.

Upon entering MU, students are taught the MU mission, which defines what it means to be a bobcat and live out the university ideals. MU's mission holds the principle that education

should impact individuals' lives beyond the classroom. Students are encouraged to use their education to improve their home communities. Faculty and campus staff routinely inspire students to be high-achieving bobcats as it is the cornerstone of the bobcat identity.

Through this practice, MU encourages students to get involved in structural opportunities and engage in university norms that are meant to integrate them and build belonging. Such opportunities included going to sporting games, engaging in student organizations, and conducting impactful research. Part of the student slogan at MU was to live the "Bobcat idea." The "Bobcat" identity equated to belonging at MU. Isabella (White, junior in 2014) describes this perspective, stating

I have a sense of I deserve to be here. I worked hard in high school, I'm smart, and I have the drive. Also, they always talk about the "Bobcat idea" and the MU experience. I like everything about MU. I like the image that the university has. I like the family nature of it. I think that I've always thought of MU as Mecca. Like, it is the pinnacle college. Because even before I went here and experienced it at all, we had the sports teams, and you have that opportunity to scream for something you support. But then, on the other side of it, there's the intensity of all our academics and how proud and how focused we are on discovering new things and bringing that to the world, sharing that, and making the world a better place. Yeah, I feel like I want to embody that. I don't want to do every single thing on this campus. Like, I do not want to do research. But I want to bring what we do and our research to the world. I am proud of everything that we do here, and so I want to embody that pride and then share it with the world, basically.

While MU was advertised to students as a diverse institution, it is a Predominantly White Institution. White students comprise 73%, with international students at 10%, and Students of Color (i.e., Asian-American, African American, Latinx, Native American) comprise 17% of the leftover student body. The average student at MU was in-state, White, and of middle to high socioeconomic status. In-state students regularly described being legacies, having multiple

family members who graduated from MU, a trend more common among White students than Students of Color. Lily (White, junior in 2014) shared her experience as a legacy,

My dad attended Monument, and my aunt and uncle, and grandparents. It's a family school. Since I was a little kid, I've known that I wanted to come here. We would visit my grandparents who lived in Uniontown, and we'd race up The Lawn [a physical landmark]. My dad would tell me, "If you work hard, you can go here when you grow up." From that point on, as a first grader, I was, like, "I'm going to get all A's, and I'm going to go to MU. That's my plan." From when I was six years old, I knew that I wanted to come here.

MU's reputation attracts students from across the country, resulting in a considerable size of out-of-state students. To increase diversity among the student body, MU has several scholarship programs and opportunities to finance tuition for underrepresented students. These programs improve recruitment and maintain retention among that population of the student body. Also, in recent years, the university president created the PROMISE Scholarship, which covers tuition for students who fall within the low-income bracket.

With over 900 student organizations, the students often say, "there is something for everyone." Various identity-based programs existed, along with an abundance of social, academic, and sporting events for students to engage in. Such opportunities were meant to support students' academic success, integrate them into campus, and promote belonging.

Throughout the past decade (between 2012 -2018), MU has experienced several racial issues reported on national and local news, which significantly impacted the student body. In 2014 a spike in racial incidents on campus caused underrepresented students to call for mandatory diversity training of staff and the student body. In 2016, incidents of hate and bias in the residence halls occurred. In these incidents, the rooms of underrepresented students were vandalized with hate speech. These, along with many other incidents, led to a student campaign

during which students shared their stories of discrimination, microaggressions, and bias on campus. This campaign led to the development and implementation of a campus climate survey at MU to capture the general experience and issues with diversity in student life. The campus also developed and released strategic plans to engage faculty, staff, and students in diversity and inclusion efforts. Also prompted by the series of racial incidents, the campus administration was forced to implement a bias reporting process to support students who experience hate and bias on campus. Before these incidents, there was no such protocol in existence at MU. Recent surveys also indicated that sense of belonging among underrepresented students during the transition to college had decreased by 10% even with these initiatives. Improving students' sense of belonging was a pressing issue at MU.

Part 1: Links & Relationships between Identity, Context & Belonging

Findings confirmed the PE-Fit theory as an applicable framework for examining belonging by confirming identity, belonging, and context as the basic core elements of the SOB-PEFit framework. The definition of elements and direct links between them are shown in Figure 4. These basic elements consisted of 1) the person and their membership to various identity dimensions, 2) the environment, consisting of social and academic spaces that made up the PWI environment, 3) belonging characteristics, which were students' conceptualizations of the components and behaviors that make up belonging, and 4) Social, academic, cultural, and support experiences, which mediated the link between identity and context as they influenced belonging. Meaning there was an exchange process between identity and context that led to varying outcomes of belonging between Students of Color and White students. Results from the first cycle analysis revealed the following main findings:

- 1) Identify dimensions consisted of role identity, social categories, personal characteristics (i.e., interest, values, attributes, career interest, and aspirations), and health conditions. Students engage in belonging according to their social membership. However, Students of Color and White students differed on which identity dimensions were most salient in their belonging.
- 2) Students engaged in social and academic realms of the PWI related to their identity dimensions to develop a sense of belonging.
- 3) There was an exchange between identity dimensions and contextual spaces when belonging. As students engaged in social and academic spaces, they encountered social, academic, cultural, and support experiences that contributed to their belonging in some way
- 4) White students and Students of Color described similar characteristics, behaviors, and conceptualizations of belonging. But there were differences in experience.

In the following sections, I elaborate on each of these main points alongside discussing similarities and differences between Students of Color and White students in each of these areas.

Beginning with the first main finding. When students described belonging, they often mentioned their identity dimensions. Identity dimensions that emerged from student descriptions were personal characteristics (i.e., interests, values, and attributes), social categories, role identity, and health. The most frequent identity dimensions present in belonging experiences were personal characteristics for White students and social categories for Students of Color. Table 2 displays the frequencies at which identity dimensions were most present in descriptions of belonging.

Both groups cited social categories and personal characteristics when describing belonging. White students like Caleb frequently underscored their personal characteristics. When describing expectations of his fit at MU, Caleb (White, sophomore in 2014) centered his personality traits and political views,

I enjoy it here. I feel like it was the perfect fit for me. Even more so than I thought it would be because I was skeptical. Like I said, I only applied here. I was just, like, “Okay, I’ll just go to college.” I had certain criteria, but I was also like I’ll see what happens. I was kind of not expecting it to be as fitting for me as it was. Especially because, I’m pretty open minded, but I’m also relatively conservative. So, coming here was, like, “Oh you’re going to MU, good luck with all the crazy liberals” I didn’t know how well I would fit in, but I fit in really well. Yeah, I find that there’s a diversity of opinions.

Only a few White students associated their social categories with belonging. In contrast, most Students of Color were quick to identify social categories alongside personal characteristics when describing their belonging. Take Jorge (Latinx, senior in 2018), who explained aspects of his race that appeared in his belonging. Finding a place in his academic life that incorporated his race and ethnicity provided a “home.”

I think the Chicano/Latino studies certificate (CLS) has done that for me. One good example is once a week, there’s like this community gathering where they put on a free lunch, the CLS staff does. You come in, get this free food, and they always have this speaker as a resource. It could be a professor talking about their research. You get free food because a lot of people rely on that to get by. So just from that standpoint, it’s been really fulfilling. I felt really at home. I come from a Mexican background and a lot of people don’t get that here. So being able to have that community is special.

These results showed the frequency at which identity dimensions appeared in belonging differed. Students of Color express social categories frequently in their belonging, while personal characteristics are more frequently among White students.

In the second main finding, students engaged in social and academic contexts to belong. Social contexts included the social environment, student organizations, and living facilities, the general campus community, campus sports, and non-academic support services. While academic contexts included classrooms and major areas of study, academic resources, and jobs. Students also identified the city of Uniontown community which housed the university and along with their own home communities in belonging experiences. Table 3 shows the frequencies at which contextual spaces were associated with belonging. Living environments, student organizations, the social environment, classrooms, home, and the campus community emerged as the contextual spaces most frequently associated with belonging.

Among Students of Color and White students, the social environment and student organizations were a primary contextual space associated with belonging. In contrast for Students of Color, the classroom, major, job, one's hometown, non-academic support services, were the most frequently mentioned contexts associated with belonging. They also often noted living facilities (e.g., residence halls, apartments) as a place of engaging in belonging with White peers. Such contexts were grounds for positive and negative belonging experiences with White peers, faculty, and campus staff.

In addition, Students also engaged spaces that were identity-based organizations. For example, Akira (Hmong, senior in 2018) describes her attempts to join groups connected to her various social categories.

Yeah, so I joined VSA (Vietnamese Student Association) for a while, and then I dropped out of them because they were so tightly knit. Then I joined Students of Color Voice magazine, a new organization as their media director, and I was also a part of GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) for a while, but then I stopped going because my friends all graduated. I was also part of K-Pop Dance Team, but I was part of their filming unit. K-Pop Dance Team productions. But then I stopped filming for them for

a while, I joined mostly because there are a lot of people in the groups that were a lot like me. They were people of color. We could make jokes about things only we'd understand. It makes me feel closer to home or at least closer to a second home. I can feel free to be myself and be as dumb as I want.

In contrast to Students of Color, White students consistently identified the PWI environment as a community of peers connected through their interests and values. They often described belonging that engaged the larger PWI campus community. Therefore, their conceptual understanding of belonging was often associated with belonging to the campus community as they navigated experiences. Similar to Students of Color, they portrayed most often belonging in their living facilities. Their living environment was a space students could feel comfortable and affirmed in their belonging. Throughout their descriptions, both Whites students and Students of Color described valuing the communities they created in their residence halls and apartments and the relationships they shared with their roommates. Brittany (White, freshmen in 2014) explains the importance of one's living environment to their sense of belonging,

Because if your roommate doesn't even want you and that's supposed to be your safe haven. You're supposed to be able to go to your room if you need to get away from something. Or if you just need to go in your room to be by yourself. But if you can't even go in your room, then where do you go? You don't really have anything. You don't have anywhere. That would suck. So, yeah. That would definitely affect how well you feel like you belong. Like, I would be going home every weekend.

Like, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday morning. That would suck.

Each of these examples identify the PWI environment and the various contexts they experience belonging. Also witnessed in these examples are the different interactions and relationships that develop in these contexts. When students described engaging in belonging in these spaces, they also identified critical interactions or relationships that formed in those settings that positively or negatively influenced their belonging.

Also witnessed in these examples are the various interactions and relationships that develop in these contexts. When students described engaging in belonging in these spaces, they also identified critical interactions or relationships that developed in those settings that positively or negatively influenced their belonging. Such interactions included formed peer and faculty relationships, support received from resources, and specifically for Students of Color, cultural experiences related to diversity. In students' narratives, there was always some kind of social, academic, cultural, and supportive experience that mediated their belonging in contextual spaces. This was the third significant finding of the first cycle analysis. Table 4 displays the frequencies at which social, academic, cultural and support experiences appeared in belonging experience. Cultural experience rarely mattered to White students, but the cultural experiences were apparent in their experiences navigating belonging for Students of Color. Students frequently mentioned racialized experiences in classroom settings or major studies. Akira (Hmong, senior in 2018) shares her experience,

So, I am a communication arts major. I used to be a computer science and computer engineering major. Also, just in general on campus, it's predominantly White on-campus students. So, finding a voice above everyone else trying to get heard is really hard. Because I feel like a lot of professors sometimes just listen to the White students and their opinions about certain things. In a lot of my classes, I feel like I've been used as a case study where professors would point out and ask me how my experiences are. They wouldn't say it, but I am visually not White. So, it kind of brought my confidence down a lot because I felt like I couldn't go to my professors or TA's about even just basic stuff, like homework. Because I just felt there is a disconnect and the difference in my background and the way that I look versus other students and not being able to connect with my professors on that level.

Akira cited her race in belonging to her former major and struggling to be supported as a Student of Color in the major created a disconnect between herself and that academic

environment. But Students of Color also described some instances of acceptance and positive engagement in the classroom with White peers and staff as the only Person of Color that resulted in belonging. Elijah (African American, senior in 2018) told of feeling valued by his peers and instructors.

I think they do, especially when it comes to classes with topics like racial equality or anything of social justice. I've had a few classes involving that. I'm in a geography course right now, which is called Introduction to the City. So, sometimes, especially in my discussion, which is 12 to 15 people at most, being the only African American or minority in there is interesting. Because you have a different perspective than the majority of the students there. Whether it's from your geography or your upbringing. So, I think they do. But I've also been in situations where you're hesitant because you're the only person giving that type of outlook. So, it kind of seems like you're doing too much wake people or something like that.

Similar to Akira, Elijah acknowledged his race and background and how it plays into the interaction in the classroom setting. However, he further elaborates on why depending on the context, such an interaction would be perceived negatively.

Similarly, White students frequently mentioned relationships and partaking in social activities in contextual spaces. For example, Caleb (White, sophomore in 2014) talked about his first weeks on campus and how his floor randomly gathered for an activity. He found this on several occasions to be what assisted with his belonging,

We had floor meals right away. We all just decided to go over to the dining hall randomly, and it was like 25 of us. Just right away, everyone was nice and pretty chill and friendly. So, that was one. Then, one night randomly we went down to Main Street and grabbed Pizza Palace as a group 20 of us. So, that was cool. The cookout that I met the Navigators at was one of them. Just because right away, people were chill and accepting. I was wearing a t-shirt of an organization that I was in during high school, and one of the dudes was, like, "Oh dude, that organization?" So, right away, we were just

chilling and felt pretty accepted. He was, like, “Hey, here’s my other friends,” there are four other guys, and it was, like, “Oh, nice to meet you guys,” and instantly they were super welcoming, super nice. So that was cool too.

Specifically, students described social experiences (e.g., connections, friendships, activities, effort, adjustment, and satisfaction), academic experiences (e.g., adjustment, challenges, interactions, and satisfaction), cultural experiences, which were consistently related to students' social categories and supportive experiences that affected engagement in a particular context. Therefore, the impact of these factors depended on students' unique identity dimensions and contexts of events in which belonging occurred.

Lastly, the fourth significant finding of first cycle analysis showed White students and Students of Color identified similar conceptualizations of the components and behaviors, that make up belonging. Table 5 shows the frequency of the belonging characteristics identified the two racial groups of this sample.

Belonging characteristics that were most notable in the experiences of both Students of Color and White students were comfortability, authenticity, membership, person-context fit, affirmations, and declinations. Authenticity—specifically, being oneself—was an essential characteristic of belonging among all students. Belonging meant being able to express or be oneself in all campus environments. Students stressed finding people and places where they felt safe expressing themselves. Malik (African American, senior in 2018) illustrates the connection between self and context, indicating that being oneself allows for connecting with people and spaces that best fit them.

.... I think you'll have a hard time if you try to be something that you're not. It sounds corny and cliché, but honestly, genuineness is not hard to come by, but it's something that when you see it, you're, like, "Wow, that's awesome. That person is genuine about who they are." It makes you feel

better. Don't do the whole fake it till you make it thing. It may work in other contexts, but in terms of just fitting in. I mean, it may work for a while. But I think you're doing more damage to yourself if you're not being true to yourself, trying to fit in somewhere that you probably weren't meant to be in the first place. Whether that be in a student organization that you don't like or you're just doing it because your friend's doing it. Find something that you enjoy, and then eventually, you'll find people or people will come to you that you can bond with.

He continues to describe his own experience, ultimately concluding that being oneself was the best approach to his belonging.

I think I initially felt that I had to act like something I wasn't or hold back aspects of myself. But I think I've grown in that, I think over my college career, I've learned that's just kind of a waste of time and effort. It's tiring to act not like yourself. It's easier just to be yourself, so why put effort into doing something you're either not a fan doing, or that's not you? I try not to think about doing things that aren't me, or at least now that I'm a senior, especially now that I'm about to graduate, it's like I don't care about trying to fit into certain crowds. I know I'm comfortable where I am and who my friends are, so I'm not trying to please anybody.

Authenticity appeared in several variations, including displays of acceptance and understanding, expressions of self (i.e., language, clothing, etc.), and commitment to one's true self regardless of pressures in the university environment.

Membership or affiliation to a group or organization was another strong characteristic of belonging among both White students and Students of Color. Jill (White, freshman in 2014) describes her participation in Greek life. She highlighted building her social skills and engaging in social activities that give her affiliation,

Yeah. Greek life, they have chapter every week and then they do socials with other groups. So, by the end of the year, you have a close social group with every fraternity on campus and other sororities. So, you meet everyone in Greek life. Then, they also do things with the community, like their fundraisers, so you'd just really be out on the campus doing things... I don't feel like I need it, but I feel like it's a

great thing to have. Like the socialness of it and the philanthropy and the service work. So, it really, not forces you, but it promotes leadership, service, and philanthropy all in one organization, which I think is great.

Among White students, belonging through membership was most often associated with personal characteristics, while Students of Color sought membership to spaces and organizations associated with their social categories.

Students also described challenges to their belonging, for example, Sophia (White, senior in 2014) transferred to MU as a sophomore and struggled to decide her major, which led to missed opportunities which negatively impacted her belonging.

I didn't know that I wanted to study education. But I love being here. I'm really excited to graduate in May and say that I graduated from here because it's such a nationally ranked university, and it's a big deal. I wish that I would have been a freshman here so that I would have had the dorm experience and maybe gotten more involved because transferring was hard. I didn't have a place right away where I belonged. I guess the only other thing I wish I could do is, if I had known my major right away, maybe I would have had more time or more time to be in groups. I would have loved to be involved in different organizations or different groups or something. But because I didn't know my major right away, and I didn't really know what direction I was going, and I had just moved here, it was kind of overwhelming. So, by the time I knew what I wanted to do, I was already a junior, and I felt silly trying to join groups then. So, that's the only thing.

Such challenges of belonging were common among students belonging. Lastly, students frequently emphasized person-context fit as a belonging characteristic. The person-context fit was feeling a sense of an alignment between the self and the university. Essentially, the student felt belonging when they recognized an aspect of themselves that fits into the MU environment. Most White students pointed to mainly personality traits and interests more frequently than social categories when referring to fit. While Students of Color collectively referred to their

social categories and personal characteristics when referring to fit. All students referenced their fit into student organizations. White students also experienced more affirmations of their belonging than Students of Color. This finding is not surprising as White students were more likely to engage in campus norms and traditions and felt more fit between themselves and the MU culture

The first cycle analysis revealed elements that make up the SOB-PEFit model and the connections between elements (See Figure 4). More so, the analysis showed there is an exchange process between identity and context as students engage in belonging. The second portion of the analysis provided a more in-depth explanation of how identity dimensions connect to student needs, what the university supplies as affordances for belonging, and the specific interactions to meet students' needs during the exchange process.

Part 2: The Dynamics of Belonging

Part 2 of the analysis explains what exchanges occur across elements of the SOB-PEFit framework while also capturing the difference in belonging between Students of Color and White students. In this section, I outline students' needs according to their group membership, layout processes of belonging, and identify the interactions between identity dimensions and context during the exchange process.

Students' individual belonging profiles emerged from the 2nd cycle of analysis. Belonging profiles consisted of seven core components that outlined the needs and demands of the individual and the environment critical to belonging. Profiles provided a micro-level perspective of students' belonging experiences.

Following the creation of belonging profiles, they were synthesized and applied to the SOB-PEFit framework, which provided a macro-level understanding of group belonging

experiences. When applied to the framework, belonging profiles created a unique blueprint of students' belonging by revealing a codex of the critical connections between the individual and the PWI context, solidifying or disrupting belonging.

In the sections to come, I extrapolate the components that make up belonging profiles and provide two cases with narrative descriptions that sequence their belonging. I then apply profiles to the SOB-PEFit framework, which identifies the needs, demands, and compatibility between identity dimensions and PWI contextual spaces that produce belonging (i.e., fit).

Creating belonging profiles and applying them to the model allowed for a general understanding of groups trends. It also provided a new analytical and theoretical understanding of belonging.

Individual Belonging Profiles: A Micro-level Examination of Belonging

Categories emerged from student descriptions that described seven facets that chronicle the belonging of each participant. Each part of the students' belonging profiles touches on the interlockings between contextual spaces and identity dimensions that are salient to their belonging experience.

Belonging profiles consist of the following facets: 1) Belonging requirements which are the list of criteria needed for a student's sense of belonging. Belonging requirements focused on the individual and their belonging needs alongside the environmental demands and affordances of belonging. 2) Belonging processes described interactions that occurred when students engaged in belonging. 3) There were facilitators and impediments that either assisted or disrupted the belonging process. 4) Belonging spaces which were spaces students expressed belonging. 5) Belonging products were positive and negative outcomes of belonging and consisted of the aforementioned belonging characteristics. 6) Salient identities, defined here as identities

meaningful to the student's belonging. Identity characteristics that frequently appeared in each facet of a student's belonging profile were deemed salient and therefore meaningful to their belonging. 7) Lastly, the student's overall belonging, which describes whether the student expressed belonging to the holistic institution or specific spaces of the MU's environment. In essence, belonging profiles outline, in detail, a student's needs for belonging and how needs are satisfied as they engaged with the campus.

Belonging Requirements. As predicted by the model, students described their own set of requirements necessary for their belonging as did the institution. Belonging requirements are defined as the needs and demands of the individual or environment to belong. See Table 6 for code frequencies and group differences in belonging requirements. Student's belonging requirements were made up of seven main themes, which consisted of 1) acceptance, 2) feeling valued, 3) having the resemblance of a family on campus, explicitly having people who support them and provide community, 4) competence in measuring up socially and academically 5) social connections and relationships specifically having a core group of friends or close relationships, and 6) deal breakers, which were needs deemed as finite to belonging. 7) Students of Color described one additional requirement associated with their social categories. Students of Color demanded diversity, specifically "more people who looked like them." They frequently cited the need for representation among the student body and diversity in the campus community. They also expressed the need for less racism, discrimination, and more equity in the opportunities and services afforded in the campus environment.

Social connections were the most mentioned criteria among students because of the support and acceptance allotted from peer relationships. For example, Malik (African American, senior in 2018) described the importance of having close relationships to his belonging.

I think having solid friend groups is as pretty big a foundation as having fun. People may think of friends as, like, "Oh, social outings and going out or playing board games or going to a movie or drinking or whatever." But I think a big part of friendship is making friends that you can confide in and support and kind of can be an emotional ground for you. I'm not very good at expressing my emotions, or when something is upsetting me, I usually keep it to myself. I've made friends who notice that. I think it would be hard to get through college without a solid friend or a foundation of people you can talk to that are your own age. I think having people your own age because obviously, you can relate best to people who are going through the same thing with you.

Formulating relationships and having a community that felt like family were strong criteria for students. This requirement showed up throughout their experience, as finding relatable peers was critical in meeting this need. It was essential to find a community of people who shared one's interests and experiences. Mai (Asian American, sophomore in 2017) shared her struggles unsuccessfully forming relationships, while illuminating on the importance of this criterion

I mean, I think friend groups are definitely important in making you feel like you're wanted. Because sometimes, I would have these conversations with people, and they would go so awkwardly. I was just like, "Okay, this is super weird. I mean, I want to be your friend, but this is awkward, and I don't know how to approach this." So, I think having friends that you just click with right away is such an important thing to have in college because you meet so many people, and it's so hard to find people that you just click with. I think just being able to be comfortable with them. Being able to accept anything I say and accept how I am is just a really big aspect of that. People who understand what I'm like or my experiences. I think it's really important to be able to identify with other people. I would say that's what makes me feel like I belong.

Some students also provided criteria that they viewed as "deal breakers" of belonging. These necessities of belonging were nonnegotiable and often consisted of conditions that were finite to belonging. For most students, authenticity was their deal-breaker. Students consistently expressed they would not compromise their core self to fit in regardless of the environmental

demands. They stressed the importance of staying one's true self. Lily (White, junior in 2014) explained being always unapologetically herself,

Yeah. I don't change myself for anything, so I am what I am. I get along with people really well, People tend to get me right off the bat. I don't change for anyone. I have slightly different sides but I'm always the same fundamentally. I can hold a conversation with pretty much anyone and find something in common and like branch off of that, so it really helps people understand.

Students mentioned the need to express themselves and be accepted for who they are and emphasized the need to be oneself when belonging. White students were more likely to emphasize their interests, values, or attributes and while Students of Color emphasized their social categories, specifically their race and ethnicity alongside interests. Caroline (White, senior in 2014) shared her experience fulfilling this need throughout the years,

I really kind of grew up over that first semester of my freshman year. Maybe not during that semester. But I just, sort of, remember switching over to thinking, "Who cares about what I do verse what everyone else does." I think freshman year, I kind of realized that pretty quickly. I shouldn't care what other people think, and they shouldn't dictate what I do. Then that was able to bring me closer to people who were more similar to who I am. Now I have no problem telling people or making my own decisions for myself. So, I think that helped draw me closer to those people that are similar to me and that community base for sure

While White students expressed the need to be accepted by peers who were similar to themselves and shared interests, Students of Color express the need for peers who shared their experiences. Diversity and representation were needs exclusive to Students of Color. They cited various reasons why diversity and representation mattered to their belonging. They placed the value on the support of being around peers who shared their social categories. They also recognized the isolation that came with holding minority status on campus. When asked what would make her feel a sense of belonging at MU, Akira (Hmong, senior in 2018) explained this need, saying,

Probably seeing more students that are also like me. Not even just Hmong women. It can be other people of color, Black folks, Latinx folks, and international students. It's really isolating being in a sea of a bunch of White people.

Akira identified specific racial groups she perceived were underrepresented on campus. Students of Color recognized the need for diversity as part of their belonging and usually found this need was incompatible with the lack of diversity at MU.

As I previously mentioned, belonging profiles also revealed the environmental requirements of the PWI context. Environmental requirements were contextual demands of belonging. Six characteristics emerged that identified the standards demanded to belong at MU (See Table 6). Environmental requirements consisted of the following demands: 1) Students needed to be engaged and “make an effort.” Numerous students in this study cited the expectation of having to engage in campus life to belong. 2) Students needed to engage in campus norms and traditions, such as showing school pride or attending spectator sports. 3) Personal characteristics mattered. Students needed to be open-minded to meeting new people and extroverted enough to participate in new activities. 4) Students needed to display competence, meaning they should be hardworking and academically driven. 5) Students needed to express themselves. 6) Lastly, students needed to find a social group. Compatibility with the university environment was likely if one could adhere to several or all these requirements.

Three environmental requirements stood out among the two racial groups in this sample. They both displayed an awareness of academic standards and social expectations of fitting in. Expectations mostly centered on academic performance, making an effort to belong, and exhibiting specific personality traits such as extroversion. Students frequently commented that a person who lacked an extroverted personality or couldn't “put themselves out there” would have

trouble belonging. They specifically noted “making an effort” by engaging in campus norms and activities. For example, Brittany (White, freshmen in 2014) highlights this in her experience.

You want to fit in. Make an effort. On the first day of class to go up to your professor and tell them your name, and be, like, “I’m really excited to be in this class.” Do that. Make an effort to eat at every dining hall on campus, not just stay at one dining hall because it’s right there. Spend time at the unions and the libraries. I didn’t go to a library all of the first semester. It was weird because everyone else was so used to the libraries, and they were so familiar with them. Then I started going there this semester and it just felt like first semester all over again. So, spend time at the unions and spend time at the libraries. I feel like it’s a good way to fit in. If you’re passionate about something and you join a club that is about that. I feel like it’s going to reinforce a) your passion for it and b) friendships that you make there are going to be based on a common interest.

As Brittany described, being engaged was the best way to belong, mainly because it connected one with peers and environments that matched their interests. Those who struggled to do this mentioned social pressure and isolation. Mai (Asian American, sophomore in 2017) illustrated how her insecurities and fear of rejection initially prohibited her from engaging with people, leaving her feeling excluded. She recounted,

I would say my own insecurities, in a way. Because when you're insecure about whether you belong or not, it's going to prevent you from putting yourself out there because you don't want to get rejected. No one wants to. While there are some people who aren't always going to be your cup of tea, I think the process of putting yourself out there is going to get more positive results than you would expect. So, I think, for me, in situations where I haven't put myself out there, I haven't really expressed myself in the way that I really am. I feel like I did it because I was insecure about how other people would perceive me.

In Mai's description she also highlights how demands can overlap such as needing to express oneself when making an effort to belong. This was an example of how environmental demands played a role in belonging as students navigated the various contexts of the PWI.

Students also frequently questioned their competence and how they measured up to MU's social and academic standards. Therefore, competence emerged as an essential environmental requirement. Measuring up socially and academically was a norm recanted by most students, describing the university lifestyle as a "play hard, work hard" mentality. Due to the academic landscape, students felt pressure to achieve academically spending weekdays studying rigorously and weekends engaging in party culture or social activities offered at MU. When asked about the norms and expectations of belonging at MU, Josh (White, senior in 2018) spoke of these demands.

Stereotypically, it's almost like a work-hard-play-hard aspect. Midterms are like a never-ending season. Everyone's super busy, like Monday through Friday. Then, the weekend gets here, and it's just crazy. It's a lot of fun... Yeah, going out and partying or drinking. There's just so much to do, whether it is drinking or isn't drinking and obviously, sometimes it is drinking. But not all the time, so it's almost like a "play hard" in that people are really social. Yes. That "play hard", there is a lot of drinking, but it could be going out and spending the day on the lake or whatever.

Unlike their White counterparts, competence was associated with social categories for Students of Color. They often described the pressure of measuring up academically to break assumptions related to their stereotyped social categories. For example, Donald (African American, junior in 2014) mentioned how being Black and a football player was negatively perceived in the classroom and what he did to break negative assumptions about his academic skills because of his race,

I feel like past that point where people make you feel uncomfortable or where you feel uncomfortable about being the only Black person in the class. A lot of time, when I'm in discussion, I like to talk, just so they can know that, like, "Oh, he actually knows something." Because some people think, "All these Black people on the football team, they don't know anything." But I like to talk a little and let them know that I know a thing.

Similarly, those who identified as low-income and first-generation also articulated pressure and struggles with measuring up to the high socio-economic lifestyle of their peers. Students of Color mentioned a sense of "entitlement" that came with being on campus because the majority population was of high SES. Jorge (Latinx, Senior in 2018) describes the uncomfortable feeling that developed from incompatibility between his SES and his majority peers in the PWI environment.

Most students here do not face this. Sometimes it's really uncomfortable to talk about it with people who haven't been in those positions. Because you almost feel like you're a charity case or that they're going to look down upon you or they don't really see you as their equal. Even if they do feel that way, you would never know. Most people aren't going to say that. The biggest thing for me to get over was, "You know what? These things do not define me. They do not make me any less worthy of being here, and they do not make anyone else, who aren't those factors more worthy than me to be at university." I think that's something that a lot of first-generation and low-income Students of Color feel. It's something we ourselves have to grapple with. But at the end of the day, we are just as worthy as anyone else to be here.

Students also described the resources and opportunities afforded and supplied to meet their needs (See Table 6). White students and a few Students of Color agreed there were enough "options for anyone" to belong at MU. Specifically, they raved about the plethora of opportunities offered. If an opportunity didn't exist, one could create it. Sophia (White, senior in 2014) shares this perspective. She explained social norms did exist at MU, and people were

categorized into various groups. However, individuals were not limited to their group membership.

It's like a big high school [referring to MU]. You have those people who are super popular, and there are people who I've seen in all of my different friends that I've met. Some from classes, some from my apartment, and some just who I've known. There are people who are in all of their pictures on Facebook. So, these handfuls of people know everybody on campus. So, there are, popular people, and there are definitely, sports people. But I don't think that it's a bad thing. I just think that's a way of categorizing all of the people on campus. People cross lines all the time. That's fine. There are social norms, but it's sometimes the social norm to be whoever you want.

Sophia acknowledged that there are standards to fitting in at the MU, but when asked if people must follow these social norms, she, along with some students in the sample, answered not entirely. She explained the ability to cross social boundaries if an individual fits into another group,

I think even if you don't fit into this elite group of popular kids, you're going to fit in somewhere else on this campus. Because there are so many people, there will be someone you can relate to and understand. So, you might not fit into this elite group, but you'll fit in somewhere that will seem normal to you eventually. As I said, I had that problem at first. When I first moved here, I thought I had to be like, this sorority girl with a [bobcat symbol] painted on my face and a bow in my hair every single day. That just wasn't me. So, then I figured out, "Oh, that's okay; not everybody is like that," and there are other people here like me. It's okay that I'm not like that. So normal is different for everybody, but you got to get there first.

While White students often recognized opportunities and affordances for belonging in groups based on personal characteristics, Students of Color did so based on their social categories, most notable their race and ethnicity. For Students of Color, options for finding and fitting into groups based on their social categories were limited simply because there was less of

them on campus. Mai (Asian American, sophomore in 2017) described this sense of incompatibility succinctly as she tried to engage belonging in her residence hall.

I mean, as a Person of Color, I lived in RH-13, which is predominantly White. I would definitely say it was way less diverse than I expected. I also would definitely say you feel more out of place, one, it being your first year, but two, when you are a Student of Color and also low-income, it's a really daunting thing to be surrounded by with a bunch of rich White people.

Many Students of Color such Mai accepted this as part of their experience as they evaluated opportunities offered.

In sum, belonging requirements in students' profiles were both context and person focused. Students' criterion emphasizes that belonging requirements are based on salient identity dimensions. To have their criteria met, students were required to know themselves, be themselves, and engage in social and academic opportunities accordingly.

Processes of Belonging. Belonging processes are the behaviors and interactions students engage to belong. The processes students engaged were guided or initiated by salient identity dimensions and belonging needs. Therefore, when students attribute a salient identity to a requirement, they engage in a process intended to meet that need. If identity dimensions and needs were incompatible with specific spaces, students described challenges with belonging processes. Six main themes emerged from my analysis which described six specific processes of belonging. These were identified as 1) identity-context match process. This process contained four different patterns of belonging that illustrate how students evaluate a match between their identity dimensions and a contextual space, 2) finding or creating a community, 3) effort putting in the work to belong, 4) pre-and post-engagement, and 5) holistic and parochial engagement. Synthesized below is a description of each of these specific processes with examples from student narratives.

Identity-Context Match. Identity-context match defined as a process by which belonging is determined based on a match between one's identity and a contextual space. It is the process of engaging in belonging with identity and context as the central determining factors of belonging.

The identity-context match process was the most utilized process of belonging among students. Students described evaluating whether their identity matched a specific space. Such is the example of Akira (Hmong, senior in 2018), who explained a mismatch between herself and the ingroup characteristics of an identity-based organization. She explained,

I think part of that was because I didn't have a community, and it was really hard trying to find my place on campus because I felt like I needed to fit in. It felt like high school all over again, where you're a freshman and needed to find people to hang out with all the time. I honestly don't talk to anybody that I was friends with freshman or sophomore year at all, anymore. Because I used to be in HASA and I am still on good terms with people in HASA, which is the Hmong American Student Association on campus. But I felt like being in those cultural groups on campus, you had to fit in a certain box to be part of the community. Otherwise, then you're not truly included in everything. So that put a lot of pressure for me to be the certain type of person that I couldn't. That also gave me a little bit of depression, so I decided not to associate myself so much with them trying to fit in because fitting in was so much more stress than I needed.

Akira notes her Asian-American identity as a motivation for joining an organization. However, she recognized that the organization had requirements that clashed with her self-characteristics.

The identity-context match process was exhibited in several ways that involved adapting either the self or environment for fit to occur. This particular process displayed in 4 different patterns, which were 1) measure of fit, 2) blending, 3) identity and familiarity, and 4) "sticking

with people who look like you.” In the next section, I provide a description of pattern of the identity-context match process.

1)The first pattern of the identity-context match was the measuring of fit between identity dimensions and context. Measuring fit was exhibited in three different ways. This pattern involved adapting aspects of one’s identity to match the demand of the environment or vice versa. Students regularly cited authenticity as a critical ingredient of their belonging. But they were also cognizant of the in-group characteristics of the various groups on campus. Most students expressed not changing aspects of themselves to belong. Instead, they modified or took on new identity characteristics to match the demands of the environment. For example, students described picking up new interests to be part of a group. Among Students of Color, this included gaining new awareness of their racial and ethnic identity. Students mainly mentioned adapting to belong while still staying true to their core selves. For example, Lily (White, junior in 2014) describes fitting into her dorm floor. Initially, she excluded herself from the activities on her floor because of her disinterest. She explained how picking up a new interest allowed her to connect more with her floormates,

A bunch of guys were playing it on my floor, and they were, like, “Oh, you should come play with us.” And I was, like, “That looks weird, and I don’t want to do that.” Because everyone was playing Minecraft. A bunch of people on my floor played that. But eventually, I did play those games for a little while because they were, like, “No, it’ll be a lot of fun!” and, I excluded myself at first. I was just, “No, you guys are weird. I don’t want to do this.” Then I went and hid in my room. But eventually, I gave it a chance, and one of my friends wanted to get me to play the magic game with the cards and the monsters. He bought me cards. He was like, “Here. This is a deck. It’s premade. Just play this deck. It’ll be a lot of fun.” That’s how he finally convinced me to play with them, and I was, like, “Yeah. This could be fun. I can play with these people and relate with these people this way.” I’m not the kind of person who plays video games and Yu-Gi-Oh style card games. That’s not me.”

But I never actually gave them a chance. When I did, I was, like, “Okay, cool. This could actually be a lot of fun. This is something I can do with my new friends.”

Lily found that once she accepted the invitation and started playing the games with her peers, she could better connect with them. She did not change herself but instead modified her interests to fit in her dorm floor. White students expressed not having to adjust or modify their identity as much as their peers of color. If White students did adapt, they modified identity dimensions that were adaptable such as their interests or roles identities.

In contrast, Students of Color faced situations when their social categories were not compatible with a space, and they either refused or couldn't adapt to belong. This often resulted in a lack of belonging to spaces they valued or needed. Mai (Asian American, sophomore in 2017), not fitting into two friendship groups because of her mixed-race Vietnamese American identity. She explains how this negatively affected her belonging,

I would definitely say that there's always this sense that you're kind of foreign when you're surrounded by predominantly White people. But at the same time, for me personally, I've straddled this weird place of, the majority of my friends are White, but at the same time, I do have a lot of friends of Color. But at the same time, with my traditionally Vietnamese friends versus my White friends, I kind of straddle this in-between place where I don't really fit in with either side. My Vietnamese friends call me Whitewashed. My White friends, well, they do kind of see me. I mean they kind of see me as White essentially because I've had my friends say comments like, "You're basically White." They also sense that I'm not really fully a part of them. So, it's a weird place to be. But it's something that I've come not necessarily to accept, but not something that really bothers me.

Unable to adapt her racial and ethnic identities Mai described straddling two peer groups that she did not fully fit due to her unchangeable racial and ethnic identity. Students like Mai who were unable to adapt or modify an identity dimension to match a context found themselves at a disadvantage; this often occurred with social categories, most frequently race and ethnicity.

If failed attempts to match occurred in spaces of minimal value to a student, it had little effect on their belonging. However, if it occurred in spaces of critical necessity such as their classes, resource centers, or living space, the effect of a mismatch had a significant impact on their belonging. Take Akira (Hmong, senior in 2018), who had such an experience in her living environment.

I am living in an apartment by myself. I moved in freshman year with two of my friends from high school, who are also both White. It was very difficult because they very much didn't like the food that I liked. When we had to cook and stuff, they always told me it smelled gross and funny. So, it kind of pushed me to go out and find my own place the following year instead of finding an apartment with them. So, I moved into a co-op, a cooperative. Part of the Uniontown community cooperative. Basically, I moved into the POC household for queer People of Color. It was a really great community for me. It was also outside the university, so it made me feel disconnected. I hated being at the university, but I loved being in my cooperative, that sort of dichotomy, I guess.

Akira's experience was a mismatch between her living environment, sexual orientation, and race. She found a space off-campus with people who shared her social group membership as a queer POC in a co-op. With this switch, she felt a belonging in a living environment with individuals who shared her social categories. The inability to adapt one's social categories to fit a space was disadvantageous to belonging for those with underrepresented identities.

The second approach to measuring fit involved both the student and the environment adapting or not adapting to match each other's demands. Students described they modified themselves to meet the demands of that environment resulting in belonging, and similarly, the environment adjusted to meet the needs of the student. The process was also reciprocal, there were times when neither the student nor the environment adjusted to meet needs. Olivia (White, senior in 2014) shares an example of an experience in her dorm. She described wanting to fit in

with her floormates, however she was not willing to take on new interests that would have allowed her to engage with them. She described feeling excluded. As her dorm mates bonded over videogames, she was unwilling to adapt her interest to join in their games. She explained feeling excluded

I did feel very excluded there. I did. I felt excluded. I removed myself. I tried really hard to fit in, but I didn't try to fit in in the form that I was going to change. So, I wasn't going to try and learn to play videogames only because--, not because I don't think it's cool or whatever but because I have no interest in it, like, actual interest.

She explicitly mentions she didn't want to adapt her interest as means to a fit. In turn, she also described the disinterest among her floormates not wanting to engage in activities that interested her. She went on to explain,

I didn't feel left out, but I did feel like, "Let's go do things!" and they didn't want to. So, I was excluded. Or it's not that they didn't want to do things, but that they were already doing their thing. They didn't want to do the sort of things that I want to do. So, I felt excluded in the sense that they all got along because they all did that and they could all talk about it. A lot of times I didn't know what to do. I just kind of either sit there and listen or pretend to care or know what they are talking about, or I would just leave and go do something else.

Because neither she nor her floormates were willing to adapt their interest, she did not connect with them.

The third measure of fit was when neither the person nor the environment felt the need to adapt for a match to occur. In this pattern, typically, a student's identity dimensions matched with the demands of the environment, which resulted in a match and needs being met. Darius (African American, freshman in 2018) shares such an experience when listing all the activities and places that allowed him to feel belonging. He went through several activities based on his interest and

described his connection to the Multicultural Center due to his racial membership. When asked why he feels belonging in the Multicultural Center, he explained,

The Multicultural Center definitely. I feel like everyone there is really open-minded and always willing to talk to you. Everyone always has a smile on their face, and even if they don't—Actually, I will take that back. Not always has a smile on their face, but they are really transparent or people try to be transparent about their emotions. Because they know at the Multicultural Center, people will be there for you, and people will be able to talk to you and match your energy. So, that's definitely what I like a lot about being in the Multicultural Center.

Darius notes that he belongs at the Multicultural Center because people welcome him, and the space matches his energy. He did not have to modify himself because the "transparent" atmosphere of the space allowed him to feel accepted. A measure of fit between one's identity characteristics and the PWI environment was the most utilized process of belonging among all students. Students of Color most evaluated matches based on social categories and context, while White students evaluated fit based on interests, values, and attributes.

2)The second pattern of the identity-context match process involved blending in. Some students described expressing or not expressing certain aspects of themselves in any given environment to belong. Depending on the environment and its demands, students would highlight or discount specific characteristics of their identity to fit. Akira (Hmong, senior in 2018) described how she blended in on campus to get by,

I have quickly learned how to blend in with people, but I choose not to do that very often because it's just not who I am as a person. I like to be honest and be myself and be comfortable. But I know how to connect with people on a basic level. We talk about sports or university type things Those are the only things that I can connect with people who are not like me on campus.

When students described blending, they often described doing so to fit in the mainstream culture of the campus. However, like Akira, they also realized blending in was not an effective way to fit into the university environment mainly because it did not allow them to be fully themselves.

3) The third pattern of the identity-context match process involved one's identity and engagement in familiar opportunities. Specifically, this process involved engaging in opportunities or practices related to identity dimensions that were familiar or had previously been engaged in the past. Students described engaging in opportunities that fit with their salient identities or found to be familiar. Such is the case of Lily (White, junior in 2014), who joined student organizations and engaged in activities based on her interest. She identified as a Christian, so her religion mattered to her belonging. Going to church was a practice she engaged in at home. Therefore, finding a church community was one of her belonging requirements. She described fulfilling her need to engage in her religious practice when she arrived at MU,

The Navigators I chose because I felt that my faith life was missing fellowship. At home, I loved going to church, and I loved my friends at church. I was thinking when I came to MU, like, "Oh, I'm not going to have my home church anymore. I'm not going to have my parents there anymore. I'm not going to have my friends from church there. It's not going to be the same." I was kind of thinking, like, "No, it's okay, I don't need to go to church. As long as I read my bible and pray it'll be fine." But one of my friends, Tom, and one of my really good friends was, like, "You should, you should come with us, and you should go to The Navigators, it's great." And I love it. I have loved getting to know these people. They are really cool, and I feel very close to them.

For Students of Color, this was illustrated when they joined organizations related to their social categories compared to White students, who primarily focused on their interests and values. For a couple of White students like Lily, religion was a salient social category of this process.

4) One pattern identity-context match was unique to Students of Color. They described "sticking to people who look like them" as a means to belong. Specifically, Students of Color spoke about seeking out relationships with peers who shared membership to their social categories, most frequently their race and ethnicity. They engage in activities and organization with peers who shared their background and were attracted to contextual spaces that housed peers who shared their salient identities, such as going to identity base resources centers (e.g., Black Cultural Center, Latinx Student Center, Multicultural Center, etc.), either volunteering, participating in events at identity-based spaces, or joining multicultural organizations. Their motivation for such a connection was the support and acceptance received from having shared experiences. For example, Jada (African American, junior in 2017) described engaging in belonging through communities related to her race, ethnicity, and gender, valuing the shared experience she had with members of the group,

Okay. I came in joining an Afro-Caribbean dance team which is called Rootz, R-O-O-T-Z. It's an Afro Caribbean dance team that was founded by another girl who was POSSE. The club is just situated to share the culture of African Caribbean dance. So, again, we have a lot of rhythms, a lot of upbeat. It's just that club has helped me so much to stay connected to my culture because I feel, being away from home sometimes, there's a disconnect when you go back, and you're not immersed in the culture 24/7 like you were as a child or when you were living under your parents' roof. So just having that has made me always be immersed in my culture and be in fellowship with other girls and other women who also identify as that or who don't but come together to find a common thread in the music. I love music

Jada described being immersed in her culture with peers. She distinctly highlighted how her racial and ethnic identity and gender, personal interests in dance impacted her engagement in a student organization. Jada's experiences is an example of how personal characteristics and social categories are both simultaneously oriented in belonging experiences. was involved in her.

Students of Color valued experiences such as Akira's example, as they often expressed that MU offered limited options for belonging because of their social categories.

Finding or Creating a Community. Another process of belonging that manifested in the data was the notion of finding a community of individuals who provided acceptance, understanding, and supported, much like the college equivalent of finding one's version of a soulmate amongst peers. Isabelle (White, junior in 2014) described she was currently engaging in this process as she was still searching for such a peer group.

There are a million people in the world, but all you need is one. Like, I bet you that there's someone on this campus that could really get me, but I just haven't met them yet, in terms of being a student and being a friend.

Students spoke specifically of finding a community of people who shared their interests or engaged in opportunities together. If such a community didn't exist, students further stressed that one could create it. Some students described having a community, while others mentioned that they were still in the throes of searching. Take Lily (White, junior in 2014), who cited a community of friends she found on her dorm floor,

I mean, all of my friends are really nice, and they're interested in a lot of the same things I am. Like, one of my friends' unicycles, and that's just a thing he does. I can juggle for some reason. I learned how to do that when I was a kid. We're ourselves, and we're together, and we like each other no matter how weird we are. We're very weird together sometimes. But it's a good kind of weird. Like, we watch sci-fi shows and Doctor Who and stuff like that. We don't judge each other for what we like because we may like weird things, but we're having fun when we do it together. So yeah.

She described the typical characteristics of having a community. She engaged in social activities with her peers on her floor and mentioned shared interests that built a connection between them.

Effort "Put in the work!" Students described the temporary but required investment one needed to make in belonging. Specifically, they mentioned "putting in the work to belong." They

articulated that belonging involved time, energy, and effort. Students stressed being open, taking the initiative, and stepping outside of one's comfort zone to engage with people and opportunities. Pointedly, being intentional in one's belonging by taking on these traits and performative actions would increase the likelihood of belonging. Sophia (White, senior in 2014) described her belonging via this process. She mentioned feeling alone at first when she transitioned to MU. She described isolation as a consequence of a lack of effort to belong.

The first week. I wasn't trying then. Yeah. I was just kind of hiding because I didn't have my normal friends. I had a community at home, and I was separated from them and separated from my parents. Separated from everything I knew. It was scary at that time. So, it was, like, "I don't know anyone. I don't fit in yet." Once you try. Once you put yourself out there and try, then I felt like I belonged.

She eventually engaged in belonging by taking action to get involved in various contexts to meet people, which eventually worked,

I could have moved here and sat in my room and read or watched tv or sulked about how I didn't have any friends. But I went to the Union Patio instead, met people there, just sat down and started conversations. Or going out on the weekends to parties, or meeting people in your classes and asking them if they want to study with you. By putting myself out there. Yeah, some people were, like, "Oh, no. That's okay." Fine. That's *okay*. There are 40,000 kids that go to school here, someone will be my friend. So that worked for me, I guess.

She mentions keeping to herself when she first arrived on campus. It wasn't until she put in the effort to engage that she finally experienced belonging. In contrast, Myra (African American/Latinx, freshman in 2014) described her lack of engagement and effort, which caused her to feel like an outsider,

As of right now, I definitely feel like an outsider. Because I feel like I don't participate in enough things to be with everybody else. Because I feel like I don't do enough. I haven't gone to one game

yet at all, not one. I feel like a big part of being here is the football games, the basketball games, and hockey. I haven't done any of that. And frat parties, I don't go to those because I feel like everyone knows each other there and I feel like I don't know enough people. Then there comes a point where I don't really want to know people. So, no. I feel like an outsider at this point still. I don't plan to stay that way, however.

Students also stressed the criticality of comfortably engaging in opportunities of interest or being allowed to be themselves. Engaging in this process meant stepping out of one's comfort zone and taking the initiative to engage in opportunities one would enjoy.

Pre- and Post-College Engagement. Some students described connection to MU before attending or after graduating. Pre-college engagement is having exposure to MU prior to attending. This experience was most common among White students, who often described having family members who attended MU, going to football games as a child, or visiting the campus before attending. The advantage of this process was an attachment to the university before attending. Which then usually led to a stronger connection with the university when admitted. For example, when she arrived on campus, Lily (White, junior in 2014) was familiar with the campus environment because her family regularly visited the university with her family. She described her connection,

I had a couple of friends from high school that were going here. I've been visiting this school since I was a little kid. So, I knew my way around coming in. My family's tradition was to come up here and race up The Lawn. My dad, brother, and I would race up The Lawn. This place seems familiar to me. Yeah. I didn't grow up in the Midwest, but this place just feels very homey to me. I've wanted to come here since I was a little kid. So, finally, being here, I feel like this is where I was meant to be, right now. So, I feel like I belong, yeah.

White students expressed having engaged with the university before attending more so than Students of Color. When Students of Color spoke of pre-college exposure, they mainly described visiting the university when being recruited during high school. In contrast, White students describe pre-college exposure through family connections and engagement in social events as legacies.

Similarly, students also described belonging to MU post-graduation as alumni. While this was not a process in which students were presently engaged, they expressed plans of returning or staying connected to the MU to maintain continued belongingness. Separate from their White counterparts, Students of Color described not feeling comfortable enough to return due to the lack of diversity at MU and the city of Uniontown. Instead, they felt connected enough to visit as a bobcat to show pride in that specific role identity. Sophia and Malik illustrated these differences between White students and Students of Color's post-graduate engagement process. When asked why he would not stay at MU post-grad, Malik (African American, senior in 2018) explained why as a Student of Color, he doesn't plan to return to the university, despite having had a good experience.

I've made a lot of good friendships and met a lot of cool people here, but I think it's not my type of town. The biggest thing is diversity. Racially, it's not very diverse. Really, really not diverse, not trying to sugarcoat anything, but yeah. I think that I met a lot of people who are kind of surprised by me. I don't let racism and that kind of issues bother me that much because if anything, I just try and change your opinion, and if I can't, it's not a big deal. So, I don't let that type of thing get to me. But in terms of building, like, "Oh, I were going to raise my kids here or just be here, and work, is this the type of environment I want to be in?" The answer is no. It's probably because of the diversity thing. I want to interact with a variety of people, and most people here are White, which causes a kind of deference.

While Sophia (White, sophomore in 2014) who echoed some White students, described an opposite feeling of wanting to return and being comfortable enough to settle. She stated,

Yes. Yep. When I graduate, I'm going to move out of Uniontown just because I want to go somewhere new and live somewhere else. But I will be excited to say that I've lived here for three years, and I would feel comfortable moving back at any time because I feel like this is home to me. So, I could come back and feel like I never left.

These examples portray a common dichotomy between White students and Students of Color when engaging in these processes. White students were engaged more in pre-and-post engagement, but Students of Color regularly cited the lack of diversity as a roadblock to engaging in these processes.

Parochial and Holistic Engagement. Processes also involved engaging in belonging through specific spaces, defined as a parochial engagement or engagement in a way that connected a student to the whole university as an institution, defined as holistic engagement. Essentially, students continuously engaged in belonging to build a connection to specific spaces or the institution. Jill (White, freshman in 2014) partook in the holistic engagement process through spectator sports and expression of pride in MU. She explained how activities such as watching games and celebrating victories bonded her to the campus community.

Main street the past couple of weekends. That was *great*. After we got into the Basketball Tournament, the night we lost was kind of scary with the mosh pits and stuff being so small. But after that, we won, after we made it to the Basketball Tournament, and everyone flooded Main Street. If you had bobcat stuff on you were high-fiving random people. My friends' crowd surfed me because I'm so small. That was terrifying yet fun. But everybody was just together, and you just really felt like it was one campus, we were all one and it was great.

Like most White students, engaging in such social activities allowed Jill (White, freshman in 2014) to feel connected to the larger campus community and her peers around her who shared pride as a bobcat. Similarly, Jada (African American, junior in 2017) described her affirmed bond with the Black community on campus through parochial engagement. She explicitly describes the validation and support she received from the group and engaging in activities that matched her interests and racial identity and validated her needs. She explained,

So, they have a lot of events. One will be a place at the table called Ubuntu. It is just a lot of workshops that the Black community has to always open a space for students to come and express their needs and get validation from other students. So, they've done that by communicating, they've done that by protests. They've done that by the comfort and the love always shown there. You know, it's just the motherly thing, that motherly feeling that they always do that has allowed me to feel comfortable and validated.

Among Students of Color, parochial engagement was one of their primary processes of belonging, which allowed them to connect with identity-based micro-communities on campus. Access to such communities without barriers or limitations was critical to their engagement. White students partook more holistic engagement, which led to belonging and feeling connected to the university as an institution. They expressed value in their student roles as bobcats and displayed a strong sense of belonging to the MU community.

Facilitators and Impediments. As exhibited in students belonging processes, identity and context set the foundation for belonging. Still, belonging had to be solidified or facilitated by meaningful interactions. Meaningful interactions are social, academic, cultural, and support experiences that occur during belonging processes that meet or do not meet one's needs and result in either belonging or not belonging. This finding explained the impact of social, academic, cultural, and support experiences on the relationship between identity and context as

they influence belonging. Therefore, part of the link between the person and the environment involved social, academic, cultural, and support experiences that acted as catalysts or inhibitors to belonging processes, either facilitating or impeding belonging. Social, cultural, academic and support experiences that acted as facilitators and impediments appeared in 3 ways, serving only as facilitators, impediments, or both. Essentially, facilitators and impediments are defined as personal or environmental conditions that affected belonging either assisting or impeding belonging.

Myra and Olivia provided examples of facilitators and impediments to their belonging. Olivia (White, senior in 2014) discussed the social connections formed in organizations that facilitated her finding community. She explicitly mentioned it wasn't simply being in a certain space which led her to belonging, but rather it was a combination of the relationships she formed and the people she interacted with that allowed her to fit in.

I think I feel like I fit in because I have friends here. I mean, anytime you have friends, you have people who have the same interests as you. So, that helps. I don't know if it was the things that I did that helped me fit in, but the things I did helped me get friends that made me feel like I fit in. I mean, the fact that I do something religious, that I do something that I like, such as my sorority, and the fact that I have a job, those are all things that help me fit in here. I guess all those things combined helped me fit in.

In contrast, Myra (African American/ Latinx, freshman in 2014) discussed academic competence and her ability to be successful in her chemistry class due to interactions that occurred, which then caused her to question her belonging

Last semester in chemistry, I just felt like people would just understand everything, especially in my discussion section. They're, like, "Yeah, yeah." They just breeze through everything they're doing and I just, have no idea what I'm doing. Then you feel so stupid you don't ask for help. I'm like, "If I

belonged here, I would know what I was doing and I don't." I definitely felt like, "I don't know if I'm even smart enough to go here." I feel like I ask myself that a lot though since I've been here.

Specifically, facilitators and impediments that emerged from students' descriptions consisted of the following nine themes:

1) Social and academic challenges, which were issues that created challenges to one's social and academic experiences, such as struggles making connections or feelings of isolation. Social and Academic challenges were the only two categories that exclusively acted as impediments to processes of belonging. All other emerging themes acted as both facilitators and impediments to belonging. 2) Social effort was the energy students invested in participating in the social environment that positively or negatively encouraged belonging. 3) Adjustment, students described times they were transitioning to MU. Their sense of positive or negative adjustment was influential to belonging processes, most commonly parochial and holistic engagement. 4) Social or academic interactions and connections with peers and campus staff. 5) Social activities, if meaningful to the student, promoted belonging. 6) Support from peers, staff, or resources on campus. 7) School choice and satisfaction with their decision to attend MU. Being satisfied with the state of one's academic and social life influenced belonging. 8) Academic and social competence in measuring up to MU's academic and social demands. Lastly, 9) Cultural experiences were exclusive to Students of Color and consisted of events related to cultural issues or situations that either helped or did not help experience. Students described positive and negative cultural experiences such as microaggression, racial assumptions/stereotyping, shared culture, and traditions.

Social connections and social activities were the most meaningful facilitators and impediments among students. Students valued positive social connections with peers. When students described attempts to belong, they often cited the relationships and friendships that

solidified their belonging. Myra (African American/ Latinx, freshman in 2014) told of three close connections she formed from her involvement and networks in cheerleading, class, and dorm. She explained her list of close friends, expressing she felt belonging when she was with them.

My roommate was found through cheerleading. I just feel completely comfortable with her. We could talk about anything. I feel no judgment passed between us. One girl is also a girl I met through cheer, and she is the one who lives on the same floor as the girl I had class with last semester. Both of them, I can definitely go to. I stay the night over there when we're studying real late. I know a lot of people can go study at somebody's house but are not comfortable enough to stay there and get ready for class the next day together. We can do that. So, that's, I think a pretty strong relationship...When I'm with the three girls I feel I belong.

Social and academic competence mattered depending on one's social membership. When White students described instances of academic competence, they mentioned overcoming academic challenges and poor performance in classes that influenced belonging processes. For example, Isabella (White, junior in 2014) described engaging in holistic engagement through academics. She tells of a time when her poor academic performance led to doubts about her ability to fit in the academic context of MU,

Yeah. I always did really well in high school. So, the grade thing has really shot me right in the heart a couple times. Really, the only time that I had a big doubt moment, the one time that I really did not respond well was when I started to get bad grades like B's and C's, I didn't tell my parents. So, after freshmen year I had my first grades, my dad asked me for a transcript so that we could get our insurance renewed. For the insurance renewal, you get a discount if you have above a 3.0. So, I had to tell him I didn't have a 3.0. So, yeah, that was pretty crappy. There were a lot of fights my sophomore year with my dad just not understanding the difficulty of the classes here So last year mid-second semester after a really emotional, fighting weekend, he sent me a letter in the mail. Literally, the last

paragraph was, like, "I'm not quite sure the MU was right for you." I was, like [sighs]. Because he never doubted me before, ever. I never doubted myself and hearing that he doubted me shook me really bad.

Isabella spoke of how her low grades in class not only led to doubt of herself, but also doubts from family member which caused her to question her ability to keep up with the academic rigor. Similar to Isabella, when competence did occur, it caused students to question their ability to keep up with demands, and subsequently their belonging to MU.

Social competence was more frequent among Students of Color and often acted as an impediment. Both Students of Color and White students describe the pressure to find a social group. However, for Students of Color, measuring up socially meant meeting the demands of the social environment and including how their social categories measured up to that of the dominant social standards at the institution. As previously described, much of MU's student population is White and upper-middle-class. For Students of Color, measuring up to peers from high social-economic backgrounds impeded belonging for individuals who couldn't meet those standards. Students of Color frequently mentioned measuring up socially and its privileges to belonging on campus. Mai (Asian American, sophomore in 2017) provided an example of how her SES created a disconnect in her ability to build social connections with peers in her hall.

I remember the first semester of college, I had this idea that I was going to come in, make all these friends, and it was going to be super easy. It would be just like that [snaps fingers]. It would be like all the college movies. I had a more difficult time than I had anticipated. I mean, part of it felt like, I felt more isolated because I didn't really feel like I fit in my dorm. I mean, I fit in personality-wise but looks and income-wise. People from my floor were from the West Coast. These girls' sisters founded True Religion Jeans and this other guy went to school with Gigi Hadid. These people were rich. Some of the people I met, I was just like, "I am not used to that." I'm from a suburb in Lake City and everyone is extremely middle class. So, for me, talking to them I felt out of touch with my

experiences. It's something that made me feel like I wasn't on the same level as those people in that aspect. Some of the things that they've done or places they've gone to or things that they just take for granted with having money was a really big shock to me.

Being of a different social class than her White peers from the West Coast, Mai felt her SES was a mismatched when interacting with her floormates. This lack of connection resulted in them not fitting in at her residence hall. This was a common experience that only occurred among Students of Color.

Receiving support from peers, campus staff, faculty, or family members was also a vital facilitator of belonging among students. Among White students and Students of Color, sources of support were external (i.e., parents, family members, hometown friends) and internal (i.e., advisors, faculty, resource centers, peers). However, students differed in the kind of support that mattered to their belonging. For Students of Color, support was grounded in shared experiences with peers who shared their social category. Notably, having people who could relate to the struggles of fitting in as a Student of Color provided comfort and acceptance when engaging in processes. Mai (Asian American, sophomore in 2017) explained her experiences, further describing why she valued engaging in identity-based spaces to build community. She notes the importance of connecting with individuals in a society that shared her experience as a Person of Color. She even identifies the identity-based scholarships programs on campus where such a peer group exists

So, I think the first semester was a hard adjustment for me, not only with the political climate but also with the social climate. As I got into the second semester, I started to realize that you don't really try to, but it's easy for other People of Color to seek each other out. So, you suddenly find that your friends are more People of Color, and you relate to them. You also find with people of color too have shared experiences, Chancellor's, PROMISE, or HELP-UP Programs. So, I think that's really important in connecting with a sense of community.

Experience of support like Mai's frequently facilitated belong for Students of Color.

Among White students, support acted only as a facilitator. None of the White students spoke of support as an impediment. White students generally spoke of receiving support whenever they struggled to engage in belonging. For example, as a transfer student navigating the MU environment on her own, Sophia (White, senior in 2014) described feeling a lack of belonging and struggles with figuring out her major when engaging in the identity-context match process, trying to match her interests with her academic studies. She noted the support she received from campus staff during this process allowed her to feel belonging. She explained,

Do I sense that I belong here? I've had some issues with that, too, just because I feel like with figuring out my major and not being able to study what I want to study, makes me feel like I don't belong here sometimes. But, at the same time, I feel like I belong here because I have gone through this weird transition period that not many other students are going to go through here. So, I've kind of been this annoying thing to all of the advisors in the education department and in the career services center and the political science department, who have been running back and forth and trying to figure it out. So, I've opened some lines of communication there. I feel like I definitely belong here.

Sophia described the struggle of trying to figure out her major, and with the help of advisors, she was able to do that, resulting in belonging. While she struggled to belong, it was the relationships she formed exploring her major interests solidified her belonging despite a rock start to her college career.

Cultural experiences acted as facilitators and impediments only among Students of Color. Cultural experiences that commonly served as impediments were instances of microaggressions, stereotyping, and assumptions about identity on campus. Similarly, salient social categories were consistently associated with cultural experiences that facilitated or impeded belonging. When

students engaged in belonging, cultural issues would arise that mainly involved their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and SES. They often found their social categories incompatible with contextual spaces and the PWI environment. They described difficulties fitting in due to feeling misunderstood by assumptions placed on them because of their social categories. Jada (African American, junior in 2017) shared her experiences of being judged as a Black individual and the assumptions and negative opinions about her belonging.

What keeps me from having a sense of belonging? There was this thing freshman year called affirmative action where people were saying some false things on Yik-Yak like, "All Black people who got in here on scholarships are only here because of the scholarship. They are not smart enough, and they're not this, they're not that." When that was happening, I was just very hurt by that. I felt like they didn't know the backstory. They didn't know the number of hours I put in my high school, staying late nights. I lived an hour and a half away from my high school, so staying late nights, getting work done, and volunteering. They don't know any of this, but they make assumptions because I got a scholarship and I'm Black. So, on top of that, if you're Black and have a scholarship, "Oh, Affirmative Action." If you're White and have a scholarship, it is not Affirmative Action. It's because I'm Black that I'm Affirmative Action? So, things like that kind of rubbed me the wrong way and didn't make me feel like I belonged.

Positive cultural experiences were made up of instances when Students of Color connected through shared experiences, or incidents when they received an opportunity to educate others about their social identities or raise awareness on their experience. If cultural experiences were positive, they became highly impactful facilitators, especially in non-identity-based settings where Students of Color engaged with their White peers. Jada (African American, junior in 2017) continued to describe the positives and adverse effects of cultural incidents in belonging. She explained how she felt an obligation as a member of her racial group to represent her racial community and appreciated the opportunities to raise awareness by sharing her experience. In

spaces where students could do this positively, it facilitated their belonging. She described an instance in class,

Let's be honest, the Midwest is very Whitewashed. It is very one type of way. So, I feel like with the lack of diversity in the state, when outsiders come who represent different cultures or represent different races, there's a lot of pressure to kind of expose them. So, I felt that obligation and to represent being an African American woman on this campus. To have the ability to do certain things that progress my community as a whole and represent them in the best light possible because there's just so much slack, and there's so much bad baggage and assumption with who I identify as. Usually, when I am the only Person of Color in the room in a discussion, and we are discussing something I guess on the topic of People of Color. A lot of people look to me to try to have me answer first. So okay, I guess I'm the only person that might know something about this in the room. I remember the topic of hair came up. A question was proposed that said, "in Uniontown, I feel like I can go anywhere to get my hair done." You had one people on this side. You had a spectrum, so absolutely agree and absolutely do not agree. I was the only person on the absolutely do not agree side. When we had discussion after, everybody looked to me to answer. So, just in that moment, I felt, "Okay, this is my chance." I have to explain why I don't agree with that statement and explain why the Midwest or Uniontown doesn't provide those resources for Students of Color on the campus. So, in that moment, I felt like I had to uphold a lot of being a Black woman in that space.

Jada looked forward to the opportunity to share her experience with her White peers in class. As While Students of Color appreciated such opportunities, they also headed caution that such interactions could be adverse. Elijah (African American, senior in 2018) spoke of an experience of being the only Person of Color in a classroom and the mixed positive and negative impact that came with being tokenized in a setting. When asked if he feels accepted and respected by peers and instructors, he explained,

I think they do, especially when it comes to classes with topics of racial equality or anything of social justice. I've had a few classes involving that, whether it's African American studies. I'm in a

geography course right now called Introduction to the City. So, sometimes, especially in my discussion about 12 to 15 people at most, being the only African American or minority, in general, is interesting. Because you have a different perspective than the majority of the students there, whether it's from your geography or upbringing. So, I think they do. But I've also been in situations where you're hesitant because you're the only person giving that type of outlook. So, it kind of seems like you're doing too much; doing too much to wake people or something like that.

Much like Jada, Elijah described how he felt accepted mainly by peers. However, he mentioned that cultural incidents in the classroom could be an impediment that sometimes made him hesitant to engage. These findings are evidence that cultural experiences play a significant part in the belonging processes of Students of Color.

Student descriptions in belonging profiles showed again that social categories and personal characteristics were specifically salient to their belonging processes, facilitators, and impediments. Therefore, identity dimensions are meaningful to the exchange process. For Students of Color, their marginalized social categories (i.e., SES, sexual orientation, gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) were most meaningful to their exchange process. In contrast, exchanges centered on their personal characteristics, most frequently their interest, values, and attributes among White students.

Belonging Spaces. Engagement in belonging processes resulted in identifying spaces of belonging for students. These are contextual spaces where students either felt or did not feel belonging. Akira (Hmong, senior in 2018) provides an example of this. She listed her places of belonging.

Places where I feel safe, like around the media center in the communication art building. My professors and friends, there I can be myself. But everywhere off campus, I have to be this different person to make sure that I keep myself safe and that I'm not offending anybody else.

Four different types of spaces emerged from students' engagement in processes of belonging. First, the most common belonging spaces were affinity and parochial spaces. These were specific environments or micro-communities within the institution in which students felt a sense of affiliation. These could consist of a peer group, student organizations, major area of study, the campus community, social environment, and one's job. The second most common type of space students identified was physical spaces of belonging, such as buildings, offices, and campus staff who occupy those spaces. Such contextual spaces included living facilities (e.g., residence hall, apartment), classrooms, and buildings containing non-academic support services (e.g., identity-based centers and resources). Caleb (White, sophomore in 2014) depicted an example of a physical belonging space when he described the affiliation, he felt to the peer group he found in his residence hall. He illustrated engaging in social activities such as cooking and playing games that built social connections and resulted in his residence hall becoming a physical space of belonging space.

I feel like I belong when we're doing our cooking on Saturday nights. The first time we did it, my friend had just come back from hunting, and he had a bunch of venison steaks. He was like, "I don't know what to do with two dozen venison steaks." And we were like, "Let's cook them together, let's cook them together. Eat them together and have a party." So, we invited, our entire floor and we made the steaks, twice-baked potatoes, asparagus, and cobbler. We had a big party together and hung out and played games afterward. That was the specific time when I felt like I belonged. Like, that was the first time in MU where I was, like, "Yes, I get these people and these people get me." I feel like I belong here. This, this is my home.

The third type of space that emerged was alienated spaces. Alienated spaces were contexts where students felt a definite lack of belonging or were still searching for belonging and therefore did not have any established spaces of belonging. Some students were presently still

engaging in the search for spaces of belonging. Alienated spaces were more common among Students of Color than White students. White students who described alienated spaces specifically mentioned not partaking in the school's party culture. Therefore, the typical social environment was an alienated space for them. For example, Caleb (White, sophomore in 2014) describes disinterest in party culture. Making that social environment an alienated space for him

I don't know if *most* people on campus get me, but enough do. Like, the whole not drinking thing. A lot of people when I tell them "Oh no. I'm sub-free. I don't drink. I don't party." They're, like, "What? Why not?" and it seems kind of weird for them.

Some still students described still searching for a space to belong. For example, Isabella (White, junior in 2014) shared her frustrations about several failed attempts to find a group to affiliate with.

I haven't found the org on campus for me. I know a lot of people find an org that they really love, and they're really involved, and they really connect to. I never had that on campus. It bothers me that I never found an organization that I could really connect with. I think part of the problem was that I was my freshmen year, I didn't really try to find anything. I think I went to the student org fair, but nothing really stuck with me. I think I went my sophomore year, too. But, yeah, there was nothing that I really bonded with that was really like my thing. And it does bother me because I know, I'm assuming there are people out there that feel the same way as me.

Students who shared Isabella's experience often described content or regret about the having alienated spaces.

4) Lastly, all students expressed some sense of belonging to the holistic university as an institution. This meant belonging to the campus community. But most Students of Color expressed more belonging to specific contexts in the social and academic realm of the PWI than to the Institution. Such is the example of Sophia (White, senior in 2014), who recounted the list

of social activities when engaging in the university environment that resulted in feeling belonging to the MU community. She listed everything tallying up experiences,

I have so many memories. The people that I've met here, the football games, the basketball games. My experience living in Uniontown. I lived in the dorms. I saw President Obama speak on The Lawn. There're so many things like Adams Dining Hall opening up, the referendum they just had for the new gymnasium. So many things that I can look back on someday. I really value those things. I get really proud when I think of things like going to the sports games or watching President Obama speak because those are experiences that my fellow peers have given to me. The football team winning and being able to go that's an experience that. They worked really hard for it. Now I get to have that memory.

In contrast, when describing his overall belonging, Malik (African American, senior in 2018) focused on the various student organization and communities he nurtured and built as his belonging spaces. He perceived them as his legacy and impact on campus. He explained

I think I've kind of built a foundation for myself here. Like the new neurobiology major started here, and I'll be one of the first people to graduate with that major so that's kind of cool. The Science Ed Center program that I'm involved in also kind of started right around when I entered as a freshman, so I've also been able to see how the programs really expanded and take part in helping to build it as well. So, I think I made my impact on campus here. So, I think that's a big part of why I like it, and why I think that it was a good decision to come here.

Maliks belonging to specific spaces on campus was a more common experience among Students of Color who felt more belonging to specific micro-communities (i.e., parochial spaces) rather than the holistic university space.

Products of Belonging. Another result of engaging in belonging processes was the emergence of negative and positive outcomes of belonging, which I defined as products of belonging.

Belonging products were either negative or positive outcome from engagement in belonging processes. While students exhibited belonging to spaces, they also revealed outcomes that either met or didn't meet their belonging requirements. Outcomes were also a result of compatibility or incompatibility between salient identity dimensions and contextual spaces. Outcomes were made up of belonging characteristics. Common positive belonging products included comfortability, membership, and affirmation of belonging. For example, Sophia (White, senior in 2014) describes how building a community facilitated by a relationship with her roommate resulted in the positive product of feeling comfortable at MU.

It makes me feel comfortable so that I'm willing to do silly and crazy things like that. Being around my roommate, she knows me a lot and makes me feel good about myself. So, she helps make me feel comfortable and like I belong. At first, when I moved here, it was hard for me to feel that way. But now that I've lived here for so long, I have attached memories to this place. I feel like I belong here. Similarly, Kim (White, junior in 2014) described feeling affirmed in her belonging from putting in the work to belong. She received positive feedback from participation in social and academic activities that facilitated belonging to MU.

What ways do I sense I fit in? One way was when I got accepted. My work and my schedule's kind of crazier, for some reason. Like, having something to do and being, like I was saying earlier, the more you have to do, you're way cooler. So, I feel cool because I have a lot to do and stuff. People are interested in what I am doing. Like when people ask what I do and I tell them, they're, generally interested. Which is kind of cool so. It's stressful, but it's also yeah, I go to this school.? It goes both ways. But I think I belong in a sense too because, I study at the Union, I go to football games, I go to shows. Kind of all over the place.

Generally, positive products of belonging resulted mostly from belonging processes that contained facilitators which met students belonging needs.

In contrast, negative belonging products consisted of belonging characteristics such as competence, declination of belonging, lack of authenticity, lack of membership, lack of comfortability, and misalignment in person-environment fit. Isabella (White, junior in 2014) describes a lack of fit between her personal characteristics and a student organization she attempted to join; she did not feel any connections with group members, resulting in misalignment with her organization.

It was a case where I didn't connect with any of the people in the group at all. I got into it because there are two girls that I knew from freshmen year that were in it. I was asking them, like, "Hey, what orgs are you in? I want to get involved with something." There were two that they were involved in, and I picked one. Basically, I asked someone which one I should pick, and I picked this one. I don't think it would have gone better if I had picked the other one because most of the girls in the group, I don't think I could categorize them all in one group, but I just didn't *connect* with really any of them. It was kind of an immaturity thing, not really on my level. The students in the organization didn't have my humor, didn't have my wit, almost.

Students of Color generally expressed challenges to belonging and misalignment between their salient social categories and contextual spaces.

Salient Identities and the Dynamics of Belonging. Identity dimensions salient to students' sense of belonging appeared throughout their belonging profiles. Salient identity dimensions set the foundation for students' needs, guided engagement in belonging, and were associated with belonging spaces and products. There were differences between White students and Students of Color as to which identity dimensions were most salient to their belonging. Among White students, their most salient identity dimensions were their personal characteristics, specifically their interests, values, and attributes. Few White students in the sample identified social categories in their belonging. Those who did referenced religion and gender.

Among White students one's membership in social groups on campus was based on their interests and was at the core of interactions between their identity and contextual spaces White students described attributes and values of their personal characteristics related to belonging. For example, Olivia (White, senior in 2014) listed her belonging in various social groups based on her professional and personal interests and religious beliefs. She explained, "So, I fit in here because I fit into this niche of people that I found. I fit into the Greek life, work, somewhat religious, somewhat care about school crowd." Similarly, Sophia (White, senior in 2014) mentioned personality characteristics. She explained feeling belonging in her everyday life,

I'm a pretty low-maintenance person. So, my roommate and I really like to go get pizza at Pizza Palace. The people there, we go there so much that they know who we are. So I really like feeling like they look forward to seeing *me* and that makes me feel like I belong, definitely. We had been drinking, but then we decided to go jump in Big Lake in the middle of the night. That makes me feel like I belong here. Because I'm a student and I'm having a lot of fun. Those are the memories that I will tie to Uniontown. So that's what makes Uniontown important to me.

White students' engagement in belonging processes mostly incorporated activities and interactions related to their interests. Both examples showed that their personal characteristics were the center of their belonging for White students.

In contrast, social categories were the most salient identity dimension for Students of Color. Most commonly, their race and ethnicity. Gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and religion were all social categories in which Students claimed membership when belonging. For example, when asked how she considers herself to be a part of campus, Estefania (Latinx, freshmen in 2014), reflected on her minority status as a Person of Color belonging on campus,

Especially because you're part of the minority, you just really want to be like, "look at me, I'm a bobcat too." But I feel more accepted in certain parts of the university. Like, I said my floor.

Especially Greek life. I'm not Greek. I'm not in a sorority. But Multicultural Greek life, they're so accepting of everyone who's a person of color. With them, you feel excited to celebrate being on this campus. Here, it can feel like you're really in it, especially living on campus. You're in the social aspect even when you don't want to be. So, you just have to find your places.

Shared experience is what mainly drew Estefania to the multicultural Greek organizations. She described a strong affiliation to multicultural Greek community, simply as a member of her racial category, and the acceptance she feels from the community while not formally in a fraternity or sorority.

For some Students of Color, their social categories influenced their belonging. Findings showed that Students of Color perceived disadvantages to belonging at MU because of incompatibility between their unchangeable social categories and the PWI context. Mai (Asian American, sophomore in 2017) shares this perspective saying,

When you are a Person of Color, there are a lot of barriers that majority of students here do not face and its uncomfortable to talk about with people who haven't experienced it. It causes doubts that you are not as worthy.

Students of Color underscored in their narratives that they had the added task of overcoming everyday challenges related to their social categories when belonging because of the lack of diversity. This caused Students of Color to feel like they were automatically outsiders.

Elijah (African American, senior in 2018) explains this perspective as a Black cis-male on campus,

I mean being Black on campus you're automatically an outsider. Just from, you know the percentagewise. I usually keep my headphones in. I just kind of go from point A to point B on campus, compared to maybe past years. But yeah. I feel like an outsider that's in a circle, that's in the

middle because I still live on campus and stuff. I think given the identities that I carry with me I think I'll just be a natural outsider. Just because until we see students from mixed-status families, students that are undocumented, students that deal with any sort of discrimination, actually attain educational outcomes that they ought to or that they can, I think people like me are going to be outsiders.

Elijah felt like an outsider because of his racial identity. For most Students of Color, their social categories were characteristics of the self they could not change to fit the PWI environment, which made feeling included challenging. Elijah continued to describe how being a member of a marginalized social category was outside the norm of the PWI environment and, therefore, automatically made students who held those identities feel like outsiders.

Well, anyone that's not White, first-gen, basically a lot of people like me. If you have a physical disability, I know a lot of the residential halls are very non-handicap friendly. I think there's a lot of underlying power dynamics where if you're not White, not a male, and if you're not straight it's kind of hard to fit in. That's why we have the LGBTQ center. It's why we have the Student Resource Center. It's why we have scholarship programs to kind of alleviate that. But that's not a permanent solution. I think just going back to that comment about just I'll be an outsider no matter what. I think it's very much how it really is for me. So, I think just embracing that and trying to be as unapologetically Mexican as I can be, because that's a struggle too that will come back to backfire on me. But just embracing that, embracing my identity as being a racial, ethnic minority. That's probably keeping me because that's not the norm. The dominant culture is this euro-Caucasian culture.

Elijah mentioned while his racial and ethnic identity clashed with the holistic MU environment, he continued to express himself. This reaction was common among Students of Color.

Therefore, Students of Color described the value of having a shared experience with peers who identified with their identity struggles because they felt understood.

Within each student's profile, salient identity dimensions guided the processes they engaged and the facilitators and impediments they experienced when belonging. For Students of

Color, intersectionality was a vital component of how salient identities interacted with context to impact belonging in some instances. When students engaged in belonging, multiple identity dimensions were engaged, which added barriers to their belonging.

Descriptive Portraits: Belonging Profiles

To illustrate how each facet of a belonging profile is connected, I present two student experiences, with one student from each sample group, Brittany (a White student) and Darius (a Student of Color). Each case provided a picture of the links between elements of the SOB-PEFit framework (i.e., identity dimensions, contextual spaces, exchange processes) in students belonging experiences. (See Figures 5 & 6 for an outline of the two belonging profiles)

Brittany's Belonging Profile. Brittany (White, Freshmen in 2014), had always known she was going to attend Monument University. Since she was young, members of her family told her, "You're going to be a bobcat because your father was a bobcat, your uncle was a bobcat, and your sister is a bobcat." Being a legacy and having multiple family members attend, MU was a natural part of her life. So, the decision to go to attend MU was easy. However, Brittany still had specific criteria she valued in her connection to the university.

My whole family's come to MU. So, I kind of grew up with bobcats pushed on me. Then it was really a decision between here and the University of Kentucky. I went with my dad to tour Kentucky. I loved it. But the only thing that I didn't love was the long drive there and back. I'm close to my family. So, it was a really big deciding factor if I wanted to go that far away from them or just wanted to be an hour and a half away. So, that kind of pushed me to come here over anything else... I don't think I'd be as happy as I am here, honestly. Because of the time difference. It's so many hours away from my family. I go home at least twice a month, just to see my family and just to hang out with them. If I went to Kentucky, I feel like I wouldn't be able to do that. So, it's just a lot different. The openness of here, and the openness of people, it's just a lot better fit here than Kentucky.

In her decision to attend MU, Brittany identified having her family close as a crucial requirement. So, for her, having family on campus was important to her. When asked if she was happy with her decision to attend MU, she replied,

I love it. I love the campus. I love the atmosphere here. But sometimes I feel like it's obviously a really hard school, and sometimes I feel like it's overwhelming for me, especially having it be so big. All of my classes are 100+ people. It sometimes just feels overwhelming. Like Kentucky, the other schools that I looked at are a lot smaller, and more personal. I feel like that's what pushes it down.

While Brittany enjoyed her experience, she also hinted at several factors that mattered to her belonging. Specifically, she highlighted academic competence when she mentioned school could sometimes feel overwhelming trying to keep up in large classes. She continued to describe her abilities in managing her academic work. She reflected on times when a time she doubted herself for failing to do so.

Yeah. I mean, there still are, at some points when my schoolwork gets heavy, I'm feel like I shouldn't be here. I can't handle this." But obviously, I got in here, I can handle the workload. It's just a matter of wanting to do the schoolwork. I feel like I'll mess around.

So, academic competence was a requirement of her belonging. It mattered to her that she kept up with academic demands.

As she walked to classes every day, Brittany mentioned she paid attention to peers as they pass her by. She loved seeing all the different kinds of people at MU. She acknowledged that the student population was assembled into various cliques and interest groups through which students express themselves. She focused on personal characteristics, noticing that peers grouped themselves based on personal interests. To her, it was just like high school but with more options. She described MU as diverse for this reason,

I just like the diversity. That's what I like. I've always liked different people. I've always had different friends in different groups and cliques and stuff. In high school we had the stoners, we had the popular

girls, the athletes, and then the nerds, the gamers. But then here you just have so many more. So, coming here and seeing that there are even more than what we had in high school, makes me feel good. That kind of, I guess, makes me feel like I belong here.

Brittany mentioned that diversity makes her feel belonging. Being able to express herself in a group and being accepted was a requirement of her belonging. She continued to describe the importance of not being afraid to be oneself to fit in the right group.

It's just like you don't have to be scared to voice your opinion. You don't have to be scared to actually be yourself. Because, like, "Oh, I'm not going to fit in. I'm not going to have any friends." Because no matter what you're going to find somewhere that you fit in. Here in college, if you don't want to see someone, you don't have to see them. If they don't like what you think, or you don't like what they think, you don't have to make time for them. So that's kind of cool. You can just voice how you feel and still have friends.

Brittany's belonging requirements consisted of family, feeling accepted for being oneself, and academic competence. According to the SOB PEFit framework, Brittany should feel belonging if these requirements are met from engaging in belonging processes. Brittany also hinted at her salient identity dimensions. She highlighted self-expression of one's identity was salient to her belonging. She continued,

What makes me feel like you can really be yourself is if you just walk up and down Main Street on a Saturday afternoon and look at how different one person is from the next person or just watch people walk by you, how different everyone is dressed. How different everyone's acting. It just makes me think I'm not going to be an outcast here no matter what I do. Because there isn't anyone typical MU student. No matter how you dress or talk, or act, you're never going to be the one weird kid. You can just be whoever you want to be, and you'll find people to fit in with. That's what reassures me that, like, "Oh, it's fine." Everyone here, I feel, has a group of friends to fall back on. That's nice about this university.

When Brittany described the environmental requirements of the university, she mentioned there isn't just one typical MU student. She explicitly said you could be whoever you want to be and find people. She noted that MU afforded opportunities for anyone to belong, no matter their interests, behavior, or identity. It's a stark difference from Students of Color who regularly cited fewer affordances to their belonging and feeling like outsiders because of their social categories. She also mentioned her appreciation of the diversity on campus (i.e., different groups and cliques). She said the university was filled with all different types of people who dressed and behaved differently. Her perception of diversity focused on personal characteristics rather than social categories. This view of the type of diversity on campus is starkly different from Students of Color, who focus on diversity in terms of representation of social categories. This perspective shows a dichotomy in how salient identities can impact perceptions of belonging between White students and Students of Color. White students like Brittany tended to orient belonging with interests and personality traits, compared to Students of Color who oriented belonging with social categories.

Brittany's belonging processes consisted of engaging in pre-college engagement, community building, identity-context match, and parochial engagement. She experienced several impediments and facilitators when engaging in these processes. As previously mentioned, Brittany already had a connection to MU before attending. However, upon her arrival, she made varying failed and successful attempts to integrate and ultimately belong, the first being finding a community.

Brittany felt quite satisfied with her residence hall room assignment. She found that her dorm was in the perfect location on campus, in an area surrounding most of the social opportunities offered on and around campus. She explained,

I would say it's nice to be surrounded by people and surrounded by nightlife or just always have something to do. We can just walk to Main Street, and it takes two minutes. We can go hang out at Dining One or something. So, it's really nice. I like that. I don't think I would like West Dorms at all. It's just too quiet.

This excitement trickled into finding community in her residence hall which felt like a family and fulfilled a belonging requirement. She explains how she came to be close with her floormates,

It kind of just feels like we've all been close for a long time. Kind of how you grow accustomed to your family, and how they say, "Oh, you can tell who it is by how they walk down the stairs." Like, you can tell who it is by how they walk down the hall. That's kind of how it feels. Back in East Dorms, I can be sitting on my futon with my door open, but I can't see anything. I'll hear someone walking down the hall, and you'll hear how their keys jangle. You can tell who it is. So, it's kind of just like that. Growing accustomed to people makes them feel like you've known them a lot longer. That's how our whole floor feels with each other.

Specifically, engaging with her floor community led to a closeness that felt like having a family. Brittany highlighted growing "accustomed" to each other occurred from knowing each other. Social activities and social connections were facilitators. She grew accustomed to her peers by partaking social activities with the people on her floor, such as having lunch and studying and formed social connections. She added,

A bunch of us study together or we'll just go and get coffee together. Sometimes, we go to the mall, walk up and down Main Street, window shop, go in, and just have fun, like in stores. Just run errands together, just everyday things.

Describing a time when she truly felt her floormates were like a family, she detailed one particular social event that solidified belonging in her floor community,

It was three or four weeks into school, and we went out as a floor for one of the girls' birthdays. We went to Campus Burgers. It was kind of just like those really surreal moments where you're like there but then you, kind of, feel like you're pulled away, and you're just looking at it all? It was kind of like one of those. Where it was a bunch of us, twenty of us at this big, long table at Campus Burgers. She had her mug in her hand, and the balloons were everywhere, and you just looked around, like, "This is my family." Like, that's the first time that I was like, "This is it; this is my family. This is how it's going to be all year." So that was kind of one of those times where it just clicked, like, "You made the right choice, coming here instead of Kentucky. Like, you made the right choice." It just clicked.

Going out with her floor to popular places on campus helped affirm her belonging, showing that social activities and relationships facilitated her community building.

Engaging in community building resulted in membership to her floor. Her residence hall became a physical and parochial space that met belonging requirements. A positive product of her belonging was feeling comfortable with her floormates. She explained her floormates were comfortable around each other, similar to her family back home.

I feel like college would be a lot harder without the crew from my dorm, especially with how close I am to my actual family. I feel like coming here and getting such a close feeling with those people so quickly really helped MU become more of a home. Because at home, back in Maple Stream, you have your family there, and it's just comfortable, and you feel in place there. That's how it feels in East Dorms. Like, you just feel in place because all these people are there and you're so close to them, and it's just a comfortable feeling. So, I feel like college would be a lot harder without that, for sure.

Brittany also engaged in the identity-context match process. She describes the importance of fitting in, identifying that belonging depends on one's attitude and the environment. She again oriented belonging with personal characteristics. She continues emphasizing finding the right environment that fits one's attitude was key to belonging. She said,

I feel a sense of belonging anywhere. It's a mix of your attitude and the environment you're in. If you're not a big city person, you're probably going to feel kind of pushed away from here. Maybe that's only living in East Dorms that I feel that way. Maybe living in West Dorms, I would feel entirely differently. But if your attitude and personality don't mix with the environment, you're in, you're not going to feel a sense of belonging.

Finding the right environment to express herself was something she found in her living environment that positively cascaded into her everyday experiences in the general campus community. The match between her identity and the MU community was facilitated by her social satisfaction with the social environment on campus. This resulted in generally positive belonging products, which included authenticity and affirmation from feeling like she could be herself walking around on campus. She ultimately felt holistic belonging to the whole MU space. She elaborated,

Well, the Campus Burgers thing is kind of a combination of happiness tied to school. I would say it was happiness because you're there with your friends and everything. Then it kind of ties into the school part because it's such a Uniontown thing. Like, Campus Burgers is Uniontown. So, it's like, school tied in with friendship and being happy. It just molds together. Because when you think of MU, you think of the Lawn, and you think of Main Street. So, you walk down Main Street, and it just makes you happy. It's like, "This is my school." and you just feel really good about it.

These positive products of belonging also fulfilled Brittany's belonging requirements of being able to express herself on campus and be accepted for it. Given her experiences, she felt an overall sense of belonging to Monument University as an institution.

Also, Brittany did not experience any impediments aside from the identity-context match process she second-guessed her academic abilities to keep with the academic demands. Even then, she found support in her floormates who studied with her and also her family who would support her through managing the workload. When asked about doubting herself, she went on to

describe how she pushed through hard times, emphasizing the support she received. It was a facilitator that allowed her to feel worthy of belonging and met her competence requirement.

A lot of phone calls with my parents. A lot of phone calls with my friends from back home. Just a lot of that. A lot of support pushed me. I don't think most of it was me pushing myself. I think a lot of them pushed me to get through it. Just hearing them keep telling me that, like, "You got this far; you can do it. It's nothing different than you did in high school. You've done all of this homework before. You've read this many pages before. You can do it again." It was kind of just that. They kept reiterating that. Then it kind of sunk in that "I have done this before. Like, I can do it, no matter how overwhelming it seems.

The support she received was a facilitator that allowed her to feel worthy of belonging and met her competence requirement.

Overall, Brittany found all her belonging needs met. She also experienced facilitators with very few impediments, which solidified her belonging. Her residence hall became her main belonging space, as it was the one place, she found community. Her salient identity dimensions were her personal characteristics specifically her interests, values, and attributes. She oriented her belonging within this identity dimension. See Figure 5 for a full summary of Brittany's belonging profile.

Overall, Brittany found all her belonging needs met. She also experienced facilitators with very few impediments, which solidified her belonging. Her residence hall became her main belonging space, as it was the one place, she found community. Her salient identity dimensions were her personal characteristics specifically her interests, values, and attributes. She oriented her belonging within this identity dimension. See Figure 5 for a full summary of Brittany's belonging profile.

Darius's Belonging profile. Darius (African American, freshman in 2018), had very little exposure to MU before attending, unlike his counterpart Brittany. Having grown up in what he felt was a diverse environment, the predominantly White atmosphere of the institution felt different to him as he transitioned. Having no previous attachment to MU, his primary motivation for attending was money. He earned the POSSE scholarship, a nationally recognized Trio program. Coming to MU, he had very few requirements for his campus belonging. He valued diversity. He acknowledged that while his relationships back home mainly were with White peers, when he transitioned to MU, he found it easier to stick with peers who shared his social categories. Diversity and comfortability were requirements of his belonging. Therefore, he was drawn to spaces on campus that he felt were diverse and comfortable. Explaining the differences between his relationships on campus and his relationships at home, he says elaborated on these requirements,

It's mainly the diversity that's different. Like, the people I interact with on a day today. Back home, which was interesting, I had more White friends. I've never really thought of why that is. I think it's because here, it's a lot easier to stick to what you know and stick to people that you look like. Just for that just sense of comfort and being here, that's definitely happened a lot more. Because of the spaces, I feel more comfortable hanging out in are the Student Resource Center, the Multicultural Center, or the Black Cultural Center, the POSSE office, which is where a lot of the diversity here is. Another thing about back home is all of my White friends; they're either first- or second-generation immigrants. They're all very connected to that history. They're very into being German, or being Spanish, or being French, which I thought was interesting. I appreciated that because it gave me a much more worldly view. Then here, the people I interact with, I would say it's not as easy.

He highlights that at MU, he finds comfort and ease around people who look like him. Darius's statement also cited forming relationships with diverse peers similar to his relationships back home. Therefore, his requirements also composed of connecting with people, particularly peers

who shared his social categories or came from diverse backgrounds. This understanding of diversity is different from Brittany's perspective. Darius and his peers of color oriented their belonging on social categories and membership in groups according to social categories.

Darius engaged in several belonging processes, specifically pre-college engagement, parochial belonging, identity context match, and building community. Darius was able to engage in pre-college engagement through his POSSE scholarship, which allowed him to visit MU before attending. During his visit, he stayed in the learning community for individuals who shared an interest in sustainability. Having enjoyed his visit, he decided to live in the sustainability learning community. When he arrived on campus, he attempted to engage in building finding community in his residence hall, given shared interests. However, that is not what happened. He explained,

I had a great time when I visited last December. One of my good friends from my high school came here the year. He was a year ahead of me. He went here already, and I stayed with him when I visited. He lived in the Garden Learning Community in West Dorms, which is where I'm living now. That was another pretty big reason. Well, it didn't end up exactly how I expected it, but the people that I met when I visited were awesome, and I really enjoyed all the people. Just the sense of community was really cool. I think my year is slacking a little bit. It is not exactly what I expected. Just because, I guess it's just a group thing. Sometimes you get a group that's really into the environment and actually cares and wants to do those things, and likes to cook, and stuff like that. This year feels like more of I have a group that kind of cares, and it's cool to say they care. That sense of community just isn't the same as what I expected, or at least from what I saw when I visited.

While pre-college engagement gave him an initial connection to the MU, it wasn't enough to solidify belonging when he arrived. When he arrived on campus, he attempted to engage in building community but faced several impediments that disrupted this process. Specifically, he put in the social effort and tried to make social connections but was ignored.

Yeah. From what I saw when I visited, it was a lot more diverse, and second, everyone just liked hanging out. When I hang out in my den, there are people that will just not talk to you. I don't like having to go so far out of my way to have a conversation with someone or just trying so hard. Then saying something with no response. I don't know, just weird stuff like that. It's not what I expected at all.

He also described negative cultural experiences as a Black individual in his residence hall, which impeded his belonging. This included getting stares and assumptions being placed on him by peers. His race was a salient part of his process. He had cultural experiences in which he was judged for his race, which impeded his belonging. He continued to explain this experience

That's another thing that's different from back home, is no one will look at you differently. But here, when I walk into my den, it's like, "Oh, he is here. Oh." It's just a lot of weird looks. Then I got into an altercation with this kid on my floor the other day just because he assumed I was another kid, another Black friend of mine, and I tried to just be like, "I don't know about that."

Despite his social efforts and attempts to build community with his floormates, he was declined.

He continued,

So, I'm really good friends with my roommate. Then I'm cool with a couple of other people on my floor. But first semester, I just really didn't go into the den that often just because I knew everyone was already in there. It just gave me so much anxiety, which I didn't even have before. But I'd just get so anxious to walk in. Then, every time I would, it would be a weird situation. So, that would lessen my confidence for the next time. This semester, I tried to start it off on a new foot, just hang out in there as much as possible. Then it's just kind of the same thing. Honestly, I felt more comfortable in my room or going to the Student Resource Center, hanging out with my friends, or having my friends over.

These processes along with impediments resulted in his residence hall becoming an alienated space because he failed to build social connections there aside from his roommate. He explained

I feel like I'm at the point where I don't need to deal with that. I found enough people that I don't need to seek that out from the people on my floor anymore. I don't want to group them all together. So, I still say hi to people in the hallway and try to make conversation. But I think at a certain point, I have to delineate between my friends and just acquaintances and people that I live with.

The negative product that resulted from his failed engagement in his residence hall was feeling a lack of membership to that particular community.

Instead, he sought out belonging outside of his dorm by engaging in the identity-context match and community-building processes in other areas on campus. He started by focusing on finding people who shared his racial identity. So, he engaged in identity-based spaces where people who share his social categories gathered. He also engaged in activities that were familiar and matched his interest. As he described spaces he engaged in belonging, he mentioned spaces that resonate with his racial identity and interests. This included spaces such as the Multicultural Center and his POSSE scholarship. He elaborates,

The Multicultural Center is definitely. Just hanging out in that lounge or the POSSE office is definitely where I feel I belong. I'm trying to think of another place. I really enjoy going to the camera store just because I loved going to the camera store back home. It's kind of the same thing. It's not really a place but riding my bike around. That's just something I've always loved to do. That really brings me peace, and that feels like something I should be doing. Then just in my room because I've made my room to be exactly what I want it to be. That just brings me joy, and people like to hang out in my room, which brings me joy too.

While engaging in these contexts, several facilitators assisted the match between his race, interests, and the spaces. Support and social connection were two facilitators that helped him belong to his POSSE scholarship organization and the Multicultural Center. He described feeling satisfied with the support and relationships he received from POSSE. It felt like a family, which gave him community.

There are just cultural things that come out of the DMV that I'd love to relate to and I do relate to with my POSSE because we're all from DC and the east coast. That's just amazing always to have that support system. Like, always have someone you can talk to, always have someone that will understand an issue back home. For example, one of the lines on the metro is shutting down for a week, and I didn't know who to talk to about that. But then I realized my friend, and I realized that he would understand. We can talk about that and joke about stuff, which is really nice. Then it's just also, we've become a family. We're always there for each other. We're always down to hang out. We're always helping each other with homework and stuff. There are events and stuff that we have to do for POSSE that isn't the most fun, but just having those people and that support system has been great.

In his description, he mentioned that his POSSE peers understood him and connections with peers who shared his background. Therefore, his POSSE scholarship became a parochial and affinity space for him. The positive product which results was finding comfort and membership to POSSE.

Darius previously noted that it mattered for him to go where there was diversity, which he found in his POSSE scholarship program and the cultural centers on campus. Specifically, the Multicultural Center was a context that matched his social categories, resulting in that office becoming a physical space of belonging for him. However, there was an impediment that disrupted his belonging to that environment.

I wouldn't say an outsider, but I wouldn't say fully immersed. I wouldn't attribute that to anything other than living in West Dorms, because you are kind of separated from everything that's going on. But West Dorms is its own community and its own and stuff. The experience is just a little different. It's not a matter of feeling included by people. It's just a matter of being there all the time. I'm not going to be at the Multicultural Center all the time because it takes me so long to get there and get back. I'm not going to go to all these events because it is a bigger hassle, and I try not to let that be a barrier.

In his statement, while Darius found spaces of belonging, the location of his dorm was an impediment to his belonging to the Multicultural Center. The positive belonging products which resulted from his engagement in identity context match and building community were feeling comfortable and feeling authentically himself. Darius felt the most belonging to identity-based affinity spaces where he could feel comfortable and found community with a diverse group of peers who shared his social categories.

One additional negative product of Darius's belonging was that he did not express belonging to the university institution. The reasoning was due to negative cultural interactions on campus. In particular, he felt judged and not accepted as a Person of Color, which impeded his overall belonging. He further explained,

I don't like to make these assumptions about people, but you can't help but feel judged when walking down the street and everyone's looking at you a certain way. There are so many little remarks, and I feel like a lot of people here, the issue is they're so afraid of being seen as racist that they ignore things and that just makes it worse. There are too many just little comments that just are annoying. I feel like it's not their fault. I feel like the issue comes from people just growing up and not having an outside view of anything else besides where they grew up. And growing up where I grew up, I learned to accept everyone, understand everyone's views, and understand everyone's lifestyle. Even if I don't understand it, at least try to accept it. I feel like that's a lot of people. That's something that people don't try to do as much here.

Overall, Darius felt belonging to parochial spaces on campus related to his race that met his belonging needs. See Figure 6 for a full summary of Darius's belonging profile.

SOB- PEFit Theoretical Framework Applied: Group Trends

How an individual belonged was unique to each student because of their specific identity dimensions and the variety of contexts they engage. When applied to the SOB- PEFit model, belonging profiles revealed a map of how identity and context interact to influence student

belonging at PWI. See Figure 7 for the complete SOB-PEFit framework with facets of belonging profiles applied. When belonging profiles were applied to the model, they displayed a blueprint of students' belonging experiences, revealing the codex of connections between the PWI environment and the individual that produces belonging. The framework shows qualities of belonging that are unique to individuals because of their identity and general connections that all students experience during the belonging.

The model shows the connections between identity and environment that produce belonging. Most importantly, when applied to the SOB-PEFit model, belonging profiles revealed identity and context do interact to impact belonging. If exchange process met students' needs according to their salient identities, belonging would occur. Group examination of profiles displayed group trends in belonging between Students of Color and White students. See Figure 7 for the full SOB-PEFit framework with categories of the belonging profiles applied.

Person and Environmental Needs & Demands. Students' belonging profiles revealed that both students and the PWI environment have needs and demands for belonging, but the PWI environment also supplies affordances for belonging (See Figure 7). Descriptions of belonging requirements consisted of person-environment-centered criteria. As previously mentioned, person requirements describe what the individual needs or supplies for belonging to occur. Environmental requirements explained what the environment demanded or supplied the students to belong.

For most students, their belonging requirements incorporated their salient identity dimensions. Within the SOB PEFit model, given the complex dynamics of students' identities, students' belonging criteria was unique to each student. Table 7 displays the differences of salient identities to belonging requirements between White students and Students of Color.

For Students of Color, their belonging requirements were most often associated with social categories; most salient were race and ethnicity, followed by gender and religion. Race and ethnicity were the most prominently mentioned social category because students emphasized diversity and representation as their primary needs. For Students of Color, their interests also mattered a close second.

In contrast, among White students, belonging requirements were associated with personal characteristics, most often their interest values, and attributes. They rarely identified social categories in their belonging requirements. White students highlighted social connections and close relationships as the most pertinent need of their belonging. They stressed building and fostering relationships based on interests.

While students belonging requirements varied, all students described attending the PWI with some understanding of their own needs and criteria for belonging.

Environmental Supplies and Affordances. The MU environment itself had its own set of environmental requirements. Environmental requirements were criteria demanded by the university to fit in. When describing the standards of fitting and how to be a bobcat, all students echoed several environmental demands and affordances for belonging. These demands and affordances were based on what students described as MU's social and academic contexts. These included opportunities, characteristics, and resources offered MU to for belonging.

Students identified contextual factors that demanded that came with expectation. Both groups stressed the need to make an effort to engage in campus opportunities to belong. However, this was more common among White students than among Students of Color. Taking on the role identity of being a bobcat was also a demand of the environment. For White students and some Students of Color, being a proud and accomplished bobcat was expected.

Students also described the multitude of options afforded and offered by the PWI environment to engage belonging. However, there was one clear distinction between the two groups in this sample. Students of Color repeatedly highlighted the PWI environment afforded individuals with dominant social identities more opportunities and access to experiencing belonging. They also stressed that the institutional structure and resources were set up to meet the needs of students who held majority identities. Students of Color frequently mentioned the lack of representation led to feeling like outsiders.

Overall, person and environmental requirements revealed a critical connection between identity characteristics and contextual factors in students belonging and how they set the stage for processes of belonging to occur and meet students' needs.

Exchange Process. The exchange process comprised belonging processes and facilitators and impediments that either solidify or inhibit the connection between identity and context to result in belonging. Students engaged belonging process, which involved connecting their salient identity dimensions to the university contextual spaces to meet needs. While engaging in belonging processes, student's belonging profile contained descriptions of social, academic, cultural, and support experiences that facilitated or impeded their belonging. (See Figure 7).

How individuals belonged was unique because of their specific salient identities and the variety of contexts in which they engaged in the PWI. Therefore, every student in the dataset had a unique set of facilitators and impediments that determined either positive or negative outcomes of belonging and addressed needs. The exchange process resulted in positive belonging products if belonging needs were adequately addressed. This finding confirmed an interaction between identity and context during belonging, but also showed those two factors alone don't directly lead to belonging. Facilitators and impediments are evidence that meaningful interactions and

experiences must occur for students to experience belonging. Table 8 contains the differences in belonging processes.

Identity and context were generally linked whenever they influenced belonging. Among both Students of Color and White students, the identity-context match process, community building, and parochial and holistic engagement were the most commonly utilized processes of belonging (See Table 8). Both groups engaged the most in the identity-context match processes. White students evaluated fit based on their interests and values, while Students of Color considered fit based on their social categories, most commonly their race and ethnicity. Students of Color also described adjusting themselves to fit-in more so than their White counterparts. Finding and building community was the second most utilized process of belonging among both racial groups. Community building was more prevalent among Students of Color, as they described engaging numerous identity- micro-based communities on campus to belong. White students most frequently sought out communities in their living facilities. Students of Color also displayed more parochial engagement as they sought out belonging through specific communities. In contrast, White students showed more holistic engagement in opportunities connected to the larger campus community.

In the SOB-PEFit framework (See Figure 7) there were social, academic, cultural, and support experiences that either facilitated or impeded belonging processes. Individuals had a set of facilitators and impediments that was unique to them but there were also group trends among Students of Color and White students that emerged from the application of the model. Student's descriptions showed social, academic, cultural, and support experiences (e.g. social connections, academic interactions, microaggressions) positively or negatively influenced belonging either facilitating or impeding processes. Mainly, Students displayed differences in the facilitators and

impediments that affected their belonging process. Table 9 displays the difference in facilitators and impediments between Students of Color and White students. Social experiences and cultural experiences far exceeded academic experiences in their influence on belonging processes

Students of Color experienced more impediments than White students. Social connections and social activities were the most frequent facilitators among White students. For Students of Color, social connections, especially those with peers of color, were the most frequent facilitators. However, the significance of cultural experiences for Students of Color was distinct from White students. Cultural experiences acted as both an impediment and a facilitator. Cultural experiences often engaged students' social categories in a specific context and therefore was a critical facilitator and impediment exclusive to only Students of Color. Due to the students' salient identities, facilitators and impediments were unique to each student's belonging process when associated with a salient identity characteristic.

White students experienced fewer facilitators and less impediments than Students of Color. Among White students, social activities and social connections were the most frequent facilitators of their belonging. Specifically, White students most frequently described making friendships and partaking in activities related to their interests and area of study that helped their belonging. The most frequent impediments among White students were failed social interactions and academic challenges among White students.

Among Students of Color, social connections and cultural experiences were the most frequent facilitators and impediments of their belonging. Interestingly, cultural backgrounds acted more as impediments than facilitators, followed by academic and social competence. Social effort, if failed, was more of an impediment for Students of Color than their White counterparts.

Support appeared frequently and mattered to both racial groups as impediments and facilitators. Students of Color, more so than White students, described instances of support that facilitated their belonging. Interestingly, not a single White student described the support as an impediment, suggesting that while Whites students did face social and academic challenges, they also expressed receiving the support needed to address them.

Academic interactions and challenges were the most frequent facilitators and impediments of the academic realm. Academic interactions only acted as impediments for Students of Color and not for White students. Meaning that White students experience more positive interactions with peers and faculty when engaging in the academic realm. Academic challenges for White students included exploring majors, transitioning, and keeping up with demanding coursework. While among Students of Color, academic challenges included the inability to connect with instructors and peers, the tokenism of being the only person of color in an academic setting, underachievement, and lack of assistance from faculty and staff with academic demands.

Fit. A result of going through belonging processes was fit. Engaging in belonging processes with the impact of facilitators and impediments led to various belonging products and, therefore, determined belonging in the PWI (See Figure 7). Subsequently, students' engagement produced positive or negative outcomes of belonging and contextual spaces where they either did or did not belong. Examination of students' belonging products in their profiles also identified students overall belonging to the PWI institution.

Table 10 contains differences in belonging products. Students of Color expressed more negative belonging products than White students. Interestingly, Students of Color experienced the same number of positive experiences as they did negative experiences. Results indicated that

Students of Color experienced fewer positive outcomes of belonging than their White peers and were more likely to experience adverse outcomes when they engaged in belonging processes. Negative products resulted from encountering impediments that did not meet belonging requirements.

Among Students of Color and White students, affinity spaces were the most common type of belonging space. However, they differed in all other aspects. See Table 10 for frequencies in belonging spaces.

Students of Color reported more alienated spaces than their White counterparts. This was often a result of unmet needs due to the lack of diversity in the PWI environment. They identified having fewer options, opportunities, and social groups. Students of Color also consistently identified the incompatibility between their social categories and contextual spaces because of the lack of diversity and representation.

Students of Color expressed belonging to micro-communities in the PWI that were more accommodating to their social categories rather than MU as an institution. These communities included physical spaces on campus such as identity-based centers, parochial spaces, and affinity spaces such as student organizations. It's important to note that some Students of Color, like Darius, attempted to build community or adapt to fit in their residence halls. Results among Students of Color varied in making their living environment a belonging place. Some did so successfully, and others did not. However, residence halls and classrooms were popular spaces where some Students of Color engaged in positive belonging with their White peers.

In contrast, White students displayed more belonging to the holistic university space expressing membership in the larger campus community. They found their personal characteristics matched with the PWI environment. Residence halls and living facilities were the

most common physical spaces of belonging for White students. They also expressed belonging to affinity spaces of peer groups based on personal characteristics. White students mentioned having more opportunities to engage in norms and traditions, such as sporting events and party culture, that gave them membership or affirmed belonging. This also resulted in less alienated spaces. For White students, social categories were not salient to their spaces of belonging. Instead belonging spaces were most associated with their interests, values, and attributes and resulted in belonging to holistic institutional space. They expressed membership and affirmations of belonging to the campus community and social environment.

Discussion

This study had the goal of answering the following 3 main research questions: 1) What dimensions of their identity do Students of Color and White students describe as salient to their sense of belonging in the PWI environment? 2) How do students describe the interaction between the campus context and identity as they impact belonging? 3) How does the process of belonging in the PWI context occur and differ among White students and Students of Color? In the paragraphs to come I explain how the SOB-PEFit model answers these questions and then summarize the implications of this work on existent research on belonging.

Salient Identity Dimensions of Belonging

The first research question focused on identifying the identity dimensions most salient to belonging. Findings from this study show that students orient belonging based on membership to their salient identity dimensions. Role identity, personal characteristics (i.e. interest, values & attributes), health, and career interests were all identity dimensions associated with belonging within student experiences. Findings showed that both White students and Students of Color recognize that different social groups and peer networks exist in the PWI environment. They

attempted to belong to various social groups that matched their salient identity dimensions. The identities salient to students' belonging differed between the two groups.

Students of Color oriented their belonging with their social categories, most commonly their race and ethnicity. White students oriented their personal characteristics in their belonging. Therefore, there were notable differences and similarities in how students engaged in belonging. These differences in salient identity dimensions and contextual spaces students engaged belonging, explained why White students and Students of Color displayed differing outcomes of belonging.

For White students, their general interests, values and attributes were most meaningful to their belonging. They described more positive experiences than Students of Color when engaging in belonging in the PWI setting. Among Students of Color, their social categories, specifically race and ethnicity, were most salient in their belonging experiences. For Students of Color their race and ethnicity negatively impacted their belonging through negative cultural interactions that acted as impediments of belonging. Compared to White students, whose general interests were more prevalent in their belonging experiences and were often a match with groups that existed on campus. Overall, identity dimensions were positively and negatively associated with students belonging. Positive and negative associations depended on compatibility and how identity dimensions interacted with a particular setting. As student engaged belonging in the different spaces they entered, their belonging was rooted in characteristics of the self-connecting with one's context. Findings add to the existing research noting that Students of Color and White students display differing experiences of belonging as they transition and engage in the collegiate atmosphere to belong (Freeman et al., 2007; Hausmann et al., 2007; Haussan, et al., 2009; Hoffman et al., 2003; Strayhorn, 2019).

SOB-PE-Fit Framework

The second research question of the study called for examining how students describe the interaction between identity and context on belonging. This research question was answered through the application of the SOB-PEFit framework, which detailed the connection between identity and context. This study identified the elements that made up the SOB-PEFit framework: the person, who claimed membership in various identity dimensions, contextual spaces, the various social and academic contexts that make up the PWI environment, students' conceptualizations of the components and behaviors that make up belonging (i.e., "fit"), and the exchange process, during which identity and context interacted to influence belonging. When students engaged in belonging in various contexts, they did so by evaluating fit between their salient identity dimensions and the context, which resulted in different products (i.e. outcomes) of belonging for students.

The SOB-PEFit framework showed students' needs are based on identity dimensions. Belonging is determined by how well the PWI environment addresses these needs with its affordances and supplies. To meet their needs, students engaged in a process of belonging, which was facilitated or impeded by social, academic, cultural, and support experiences. Depending on a student's salient identity dimensions and the contexts they inhabited, engagement in belonging resulted in positive or negative products of belonging, along with belonging to various spaces in the institution or the institution holistically (See Figure 7).

Application of the model to this sample showed that the resources and opportunities offered in the PWI contextual spaces met the needs of White students more so than Students of Color. Therefore, more positive exchanges occurred between their salient identity dimensions and contextual spaces during the exchange process. This framework provided an in-depth script

for examining the relationship between a person and their environment that result in either belonging or not belonging. The SOB-PEFit framework also allowed for examining group trends in belonging needs, processes, and outcomes when applied to the belonging profiles of a specific population. This is a new way of examining belonging that is not currently present in existing research. This contributes to the body of work, supporting identity and context as significant predictors of belonging in the educational setting (Gummandam et al., 2016; Means & Pyne, 2017; Hussain & Jones, 2021)

A Tale of Two Belonging Experiences

The third research question called for detailing how belonging occurs and the differences between White students and Students of Color. White students and Students of Color described similar characteristics of belonging. However, they displayed between-group differences in their trends and patterns of belonging. While Students of Color and White students engage in belonging in similar ways, they experienced it differently depending on the context. In this section, I discuss the differences in belonging between Students of Color and White students.

White Students Belonging

I begin here with White students' experiences because their experiences were often the norm. I say this because every experience White student displayed in this study was also expressed by Students of Color. I highlight numerous similarities between the two groups in this section. As I previously mentioned, White students tended to orient their belonging with their personal characteristics. Given that they were the majority population at the institution, they expressed more opportunities to belonging in the PWI environment. The most important need for belonging among White students was social connection. They valued having social relationships with groups and spaces that shared their interests and values. They expressed that

enough options existed in the PWI environment for them to belong. This suggests that White students felt the PWI environment supplied enough affordances for their belonging. White students also expressed a desire to be accepted for their authentic selves as they attempted to belong. These findings align with empirical literature that shows self-perception, self-worth, and acceptance are promoters of belonging (Gummadam et al., 2015; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Schmader & Sedikides, 2017; Silver 2020b). They extend previous work by showing that students value the self when belonging; acceptance of their authentic self from social connections is an important criterion of their belonging.

White students and Students of Color also displayed opposite experiences of belonging even though they engaged in the same belonging processes. How students engaged in belonging depended on the context. White students most frequently engaged in the identity context match process, followed by finding community and holistic engagement. When belonging, White students and Students of Color most often sought to find a match or compatibility between salient identity dimensions to which they claimed membership and the spaces in the PWI environment. For example, when White students engaged in finding community, they sought out communities that shared their personal characteristics, most commonly their interests. The belonging processes of White students displayed more positive exchanges between their personal characteristics and the PWI, suggesting them to be more compatible.

For White students, personal characteristics were what mattered to their belonging. During belonging processes, their personal characteristics adapted more easily to the PWI environment. They experienced more facilitators that met their needs of having social connections with peers who accepted their authentic selves. Their most frequent facilitators included positive social interactions and participation in social activities. Most interestingly,

White students partook heavily in holistic engagement by participating in social activities that built a connection between them and larger campus community. This means they sought out belonging to the PWI institutional space, more so than Students of Color. Therefore, White students valued belonging to the institution. Consequently, they ultimately reported feeling belonging to the holistic university environment as an institution. They also expressed belonging not only to the holistic university space but also to affinity spaces on campus. In sum, findings suggest that when White students engage in belonging, they are more likely to connect it to their personal characteristics. They are also more likely to have their needs met and are more likely to feel belonging to both the institution.

Students of Color Belonging

As previously mentioned, social categories—especially, race and ethnicity—were the most salient identity dimensions among Students of Color. Belonging held different meaning for Students of Color; they sought to belong with peer groups and spaces that housed individuals who shared their social categories and experiences. They centered belonging on connecting with each other in various spaces. Students of Color valued social connections with peers who shared their experiences. However, unlike their White peers, Students of Color expressed that the PWI environment did not provide enough affordances to meet their needs due to the lack of diversity. Mainly because there were fewer of them, finding peers and spaces to connect was more challenging. These findings suggest that for Students of Color, belonging with each other at the institution was at times more vital than belonging to the institution. However, the PWI was not supporting them in meeting this need.

Similar to White students, Students of Color most frequently engaged in the identity-context match process; however, they sought to match their social categories with the PWI

environment. For them, membership in their social categories created barriers that made belonging more challenging. Some Students of Color expressed feeling automatically like outsiders because they couldn't adapt salient social categories to fit the PWI space. Ultimately Students of Color expressed adapting to fit in more so than White students. They expressed more impediments to their belonging processes, with cultural experiences related to their race and ethnicity being the most common impediment. Like White peers, Students of Color valued social connection with peers, but emphasized those who shared their salient identity dimensions, background, and experiences. They expressed belonging to more affinity and parochial spaces that were more willing to adapt to meet their needs. Students of Color also identified more alienating spaces. They reported more negative products of belonging and less positive products than White students. Students of Color are more likely to experience negative exchange processes. Findings contribute to past research on the relationship between identity, context, and belonging. Most scholars have noted that Students of Color and White students display differing experiences of belonging as they engage the collegiate environment (Freeman et al., 2007; Hausmann et al., 2007; Haussan, et al., 2009; Hoffman et al., 2003; Strayhorn, 2017). The current study helps to detail the locus of differing experiences between the two groups. Although social categories dominated the narratives of Students of Color and personal characteristics were dominated in narratives of White students, both groups did articulate both categories in relation to belonging.

In addition, a noteworthy finding is dependency on context for belonging processes to occur. As students engaged in belonging, White students took the approach of orienting belonging in personal characteristics, while Students of Color oriented their belonging toward their salient social categories. As students entered a space in the PWI environment, belonging

was dependent on properties of the self-co-mingling with features of the environment, which resulted in differences in belonging when engaging with different contexts of the PWI.

Overall differences between how White students and Students of Color navigated belonging mainly showed belonging is dependent on one's identity dimension and context. Therefore, as students engaged in various spaces, their belonging processes changed as they shifted with their environment. This is a key implication of the study findings, suggesting that belonging as a construct can be different for White students and Students of Color as they engage in various environments and express different salient identities, showing that belonging was not a universal construct among individuals as they changed contexts. Therefore, how one engages in belonging in one setting could change when they enter another.

At the start of this study, to correspond with empirical literature, I approached belonging as a personal trait, understanding that it is a universal construct among individuals (Strayhorn, 2019; Menkor et al., 2021; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). However, this study showed that while all students have a need to belong, differences in how White students and Students of Color oriented their belonging offer another viewpoint to conceptualizing belonging. Findings showed students understood belonging as a characteristic of the self within a context, and the nature of one's belonging shifted as individuals moved from one space to another. Exchanges processes between identity dimensions and the environment essentially showed belonging arises out of features of the context as well as properties of the individual. Meaning that belonging is equally dependent on context as it is on identity. This finding offers a new perspective on how students understand belonging that warrants further investigation as a follow-up to this study. Therefore, while I emphasized institutional belonging

at the start of this study, results showed differences between students in the value placed on belonging at the institution rather than to the institution.

Implications

The results of this study suggest White students feel belonging to the institution, while Students of Color express more belonging to people and spaces within the institution. These findings mainly revealed how White students thrived from feeling belonging to the PWI, while Students of Color expressed thriving from connecting with peers who shared their identity but felt like “outsiders” when belonging to the institution. The application of the model highlighted several critical connections between identity and context that hold important implications for theorizing and improving practices of belonging at PWIs.

First, for PWIs to promote belonging among Students of Color, it is essential to consider ways of fostering connections with each other and peers on campus. Lack of diversity and representation is a critical belonging criterion that can be addressed and is likely to increase belonging between students significantly. For example, an increase in representation among the student body and staff offers Students of Color more options regarding group membership or connecting with peers who share their identity dimensions and experiences. If addressed, this can significantly impact belonging as more representation would afford more opportunities to engage in the connections desired for their belonging in the PWI context. These finding raises the question of whether belonging to the institution or at the institution is better for the student experience. Therefore, my continuation of this research seeks to address this question as expansion of this study.

Secondly, findings highlight that both students and the PWI have demands and needs for belonging. Therefore, identifying and understanding student needs for belonging is incredibly

helpful in providing resources and opportunities that will appropriately meet those needs and ensure belonging. Findings also showed that needs are identity-based, suggesting that creating inclusive spaces that meet students' identity-based needs is another approach to establishing belonging. In this study, students described adapting to belong, however results also showed spaces can adapt to accommodate students' needs. A primary goal of education is to encourage self-growth and transformation. Therefore, as PWIs embark on the work to meet student's belonging needs, they also need to determine how to create appropriate spaces in which identity transformation can occur without abandoning or subjugating the self to belong. Therefore, creating spaces that won't require students to negatively alter themselves to have needs met will promote inclusion and belonging. These findings align with past research emphasizing that creating caring, supportive, and welcoming environments is critical for building a sense of belonging (O'Keefe, 2013). Since student needs are identity-based, focusing such efforts on institutional initiatives and practices that resonate, recognize and value student identities while addressing their needs will be most beneficial for promoting and fostering belonging.

Thirdly, if the goal of a university is to promote student belonging to the institution, then it is also relevant to consider that promoting belonging through micro-communities could reinforce the segregation between racial groups on PWI campuses. One solution is to encourage interactions across racial groups to decrease alienated spaces and increase affinity spaces across social and academic contexts in the PWI environment for Students of Color. It would better serve institutions to focus on fostering belonging by encouraging interactions across racial groups through shared experiences. While there were differences in belonging between White students and Students of Color, there were also similarities. Both racial groups expressed feeling accepted for their authentic self; having social connections that offered acceptance was a critical criterion

of belonging. As group valued social connection. This finding aligns with past research, which indicates belonging to a community involves an open environment that allows for self-expression and acceptance (Cheng, 2004).

Also, among the two racial groups, one's interest was salient to their belonging. The social environment, specifically social connections, was an influential facilitator of belonging processes for both groups. The residence halls and classrooms were belonging spaces where students connected with peers outside their social categories. There were instances in classrooms when Students of Color described positive conversations with White peers and staff related to their racial experiences and strong relationships with White peers in residence halls and living environments. Therefore, promoting such interactions in those spaces would allow students to express themselves and bond based on these commonalities and shared experiences. Such a strategy would foster belonging between the two groups allowing students to feel belonging to both each other and the institution. This strategy aligns with empirical work showing that social contact must be meaningful and collaborative for both groups for intergroup relations to occur. Schofield (1989) examined the development of social relationships among Black and White adolescents in a desegregated middle school. Her findings showed that while students tended to socialize in their social groups, collaborative experiences with peers led to interracial mixing. Similarly, research on college students also showed collaborative interactions, such as having supportive relationships with peers and staff, were meaningful for belonging and essential to persistence (Hausmann et al., 2009).

In addition, the exchange process within the SOB-PEFit framework, emphasized that meaningful interactions that occurred during belonging processes solidified or inhibited belonging. This shows belonging does not merely happen by creating more spaces or

encouraging contact between Students of Color and White students, but rather meaningful interactions need to occur to foster belonging. Meaningful interactions constitute acceptance of one's identity and met needs during belonging process. This suggests belonging doesn't simply occur from creation of more spaces, but rather interactions that address identity-based needs significantly promote belonging. As institutions are developing more inclusive spaces on campus, it's essential to implement practices in those spaces that create positive interactions to solidify belonging.

These findings also confirm the proposed model and validate belonging as a measure of P-E Fit. In the literature on P-E fit and student development, scholars have referenced belonging as an extension of the P-E fit when applying the theory to measure transition and attrition educational outcomes (Hurtz et al., 2007). This work is an addition to the few studies that explicitly use P-E Fit to measure belonging in the PWI environment (Soppe et al., 2019; Suhlmann et al., 2018; Menkor et al., 2021; Walton & Cohen, 2006; Wurster et al., 2021). The SOB-PEFit framework allowed for a macro-level investigation into how belonging occurs at a PWI. Belonging profiles permitted micro-level examination of the specific links and connections between context and identity that result in belonging for each student. Every student had a belonging profile of unique interactions between their identity and contextual spaces that brought about their belonging. Generalizations of belonging among the two groups can be made by applying profiles to the model. As a practical tool, the SOB-PE Fit framework and complementing belonging profiles can be used by spaces in the PWI environment to identify and fulfill the belonging needs of the students they serve. As PWIs begin to assess belonging, applying the SOB-PEFit model and belonging profiles is an additional tool to evaluate students' individual belonging compared to institutional practices that impact belonging outcomes.

Limitations

This study was a pilot study to test and validate the SOB-PEFit Framework. I plan to apply it to more cases of the original dataset for further in-depth analysis. Therefore, the work established in this study will continue following this analysis. Also, more in-depth analysis can be conducted on several aspects of this research. For example, this study's findings and research questions focused primarily on the between-group differences among Students of Color and Whites students. However, the model also allows for the examination of within-group differences and also examining gender differences. Therefore, subsequent steps of this work are to expand the data sample and conduct further in-depth analysis of experiences which include within group differences and gender differences.

Also, this study is a case study of one university, and the findings are subjective. While the results could be generalized to other PWIs, it will be beneficial for the model be applied at other institutions or specific spaces of a PWI for additional validation. In sum, additional aspects of the model warrant further investigation, such as to delineating the difference in belonging experiences that exists within racial groups. Further investigation would yield rich information on belonging for specific populations.

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Table 1
Participant Demographics

Interview Year	Pseudonym	Gender	Year in School	Major /Field of Study	Race /Ethnicity
2014	Kim	F	Junior	Rehabilitation Psychology	White
2014	Caroline	F	Senior	Rehabilitation Psychology/ Occupational Therapy	White
2014	Jill	F	Freshman	Human Development & Family Studies	White
2014	Lily	F	Junior	Biology/Nursing	White
2014	Brittany	F	Freshman	Psychology/Law	White
2014	Sophia	F	Senior	Political Science	White
2014	Oliva	F	Senior	Textile & Fashion Design	White
2014	Myra	F	Freshman	Biology/ Pre-Nursing	Multi-racial-Black/Latinx/White
2014	Isabella	F	Junior	Biology/ Pre-Veterinarian	White
2014	Estefania	F	Freshman	Communication Arts/ Film Production	Latinx/Peruvian
2014	Donald	M	Junior	Life Science Communications/	African American
2014	Christopher	M	Freshman	Kinesiology/ Occupational Therapy	White
2014	Caleb	M	Sophomore	History/ Secondary Education	White
2017	Jada	F	Junior	Pre-Nursing	African American/Nigerian
2017	Mai	F	Sophomore	Pre-Nursing	Asian American/Vietnamese
2018	Josh	M	Senior	Mechanical Engineering	White
2018	Darius	M	Freshman	Retailing and Consumer Behavior	African American/Ivorian
2018	Elijah	M	Senior	Economics/ Unsure	African American /Tanzanian

2018	Jorge	M	Senior	Kinesiology/ School Counseling	Latinx/Mexican American
2018	Akira	F	Senior	Communication Arts & Digital Studies/ Digital Media Production	Hmong
2018	Tanisha	F	Sophomore	Biology/ Pre- Pharmacy	African American
2018	Malik	M	Senior	Neurobiology/ Pre- Med	African American

Table 2

Code Matrix of Identity Dimensions Salient in Belonging among Students of Color & White Students

Category	White Students		Students of Color	
	Number of Mentions	Number of Students	Number of Mentions	Number of Students
Health	2	2	2	2
Career Interests	62	11	44	11
Values, Interests, & Attributes	72	11	83	11
Social Categories	8	5	99	11
Role Identity	16	7	7	3
Total	93		179	

Note. Columns report the number of times a category was mentioned across transcripts and the number of students mentioning the category at least once.

Table 3*Code Matrix of Contextual Spaces of Belonging for Students of Color and White Students*

Category	White Students		Students of Color	
	Number of Mentions	Number of Students	Number of Mentions	Number of Students of Color
Job	16	8	18	11
Social Environment	38	9	38	11
State/Region	6	1	1	1
Campus Community	43	11	21	11
City Community	11	7	7	5
Classroom/Major Academics	17	11	30	11
Living Facilities	39	11	26	11
Non-Academic Support Services	1	2	31	9
Campus Sports	7	7	22	7
Student Organizations	34	11	48	11
Home	16	9	30	10
Academic Resources	4	6	13	6
Total	101		285	

Note. Columns report the number of times a category was mentioned across transcripts and the number of students mentioning the category at least once.

Table 4

Code Relations Matrix of Identity, Context, Social, Academic, & Cultural Experience, and Belonging.

Category	Belonging Experiences	White Students		Students Of Color	
	Number of Mentions	Number of Mentions	Number of Students	Number of Mentions	Number of Students
Social Experience	279	138	11	141	11
Academic Experiences	98	16	11	82	11
Cultural Experiences	106	5	4	101	11
Support	67	16	11	51	11

Note. Columns report the number of times a category was mentioned across transcripts and the number of students mentioning the category at least once.

Table 5

Code Matrix of Belonging Characteristics between Students of Color and White students.

Category	White Students		Students of Color	
	Number of Mentions	Number of White Students	Number of Mentions	Number of Students of Color
Membership	29	10	31	9
Challenge	15	9	19	9
Motivation	2	2	2	2
Condition	9	5	18	8
Engagement & Involvement	13	7	9	5
Comfortable	20	7	21	9
Affirmation/Confirmation/Declination	31	9	25	11
Person-Context Fit	37	9	26	11
Norms & Expectations	40	11	27	11
Competence	11	6	19	8
Value	10	6	20	8
Authenticity	40	11	38	11
Belonging Prior to or External of PWI	7	3	13	5
Total	264		268	

Note. Columns report the number of times a category was mentioned across transcripts and the number of students mentioning the category at least once.

Table 6
Code Matrix of Belonging Requirements between White students and Students of Color

Category		White Students		Students of Color	
		Number of Mentions	Number of Students	Number of Mentions	Number of Students
Individual's Belonging Requirements	Deal Breaker	4	4	2	1
	Feeling Accepted for Who I Am	8	4	12	4
	Feeling Valued	1	1	1	1
	Competence	3	3	8	6
	Family Feel	2	2	0	0
	Social Connections/Relationships	23	10	10	9
	Diversity "More people like me"	0	0	22	10
University Belonging Requirements	Social Connection/Group Engage-"Make an Effort"	1	1	1	1
	Engage in Norms	10	8	4	2
	Engage in Norms	1	1	2	2
	Personal Characteristics	16		6	3
	Competence "play hard, work hard"	5	4	9	4
	Express who you really are	3	2	4	2
University Belonging Affordances	Options for Anyone	8	7	3	2
	Support	1	1	0	0

Note. Columns report the number of times a category was mentioned across transcripts and the number of students mentioning the category at least once.

Table 7

Code Matrix of Salient Identities in Belonging Requirement for Students of Color and White students

Category	White Students		Students of Color	
	Number of Mentions	Number of Students	Number of Mentions	Number of Students
Social Categories				
Sexual Orientation	0	0	3	2
Gender	4	2	6	4
Religion	4	3	1	1
Race & Ethnicity	0	0	36	11
Socioeconomic Status	0	0	4	2
Values, Interests, & Attributes	19	11	20	9
Career Interests	2	1	8	5
Role Identity	15	7	4	2
Health	0	0	1	1
Total	44		83	

Note. Columns report the number of times a category was mentioned across transcripts and the number of students mentioning the category at least once.

Table 8*Code Matrix of Belonging Processes between White Students and Students of Color*

Category	White Students		Students of Color	
	Number of Mentions	Number of Students	Number of Mentions	Number of Students
Holistic Engagement	8	6	3	2
Parochial Engagement	5	2	11	9
Pre & Post College Engagement	5	3	2	1
“Put in the Work”	5	4	6	4
Identity Context Match	21	11	31	11
Finding or Creating Community	13	10	22	11
Total	57		75	

Note. Columns report the number of times a category was mentioned across transcripts and the number of students mentioning the category at least once.

Table 9*Code Matrix of Facilitators and Impediments between White students and Students of Color.*

Category	White Students		Students of Color	
	Number of Mentions	Number of Students	Number of Mentions	Number of Students
Facilitators				
Adjustment (Social & Academic)	15	7	11	3
Social Effort	11	6	12	3
Social & Academic Competence	0	0	14	4
Social Connections & Interactions	23	11	30	11
Social Activities	25	11	12	7
Cultural Experience	0	0	28	11
Satisfaction (Social, Academic, School Choice)	6	3	4	2
Support	10	4	21	10
Academic Connections & Interactions	11	6	14	5
Total	101		146	
Impediments				
Adjustment (Social & Academic)	12	4	17	7
Social Effort	11	3	19	9
Social & Academic Competence	12	3	19	10
Social Connections & Interactions	14	8	24	11
Social Activities	12	5	12	6
Social Challenges	12	3	16	5
Cultural Experience	0	0	37	11
Satisfaction (Social, Academic, School Choice)	1	1	6	3
Lack of Support	0	0	13	4
Academic Connections & Interactions	0	0	18	9
Academic Challenges	15	6	15	6
Total	89		196	

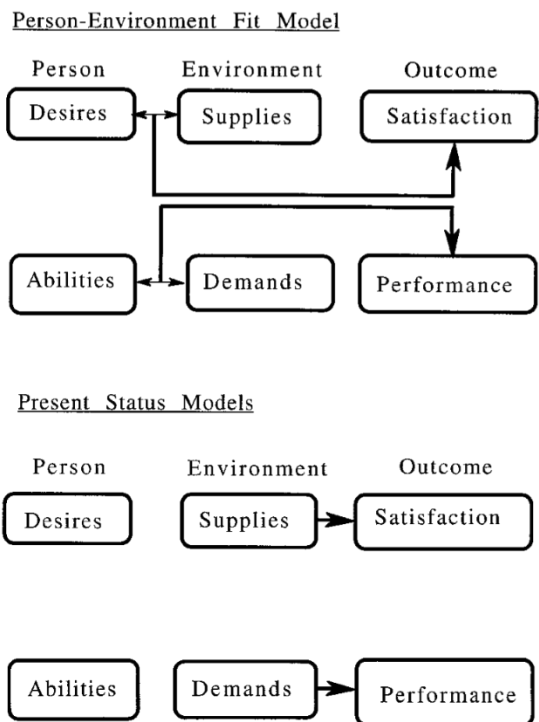
Note. Columns report the number of times a category was mentioned across transcripts and the number of students mentioning the category at least once.

Table 10
Code Matrix of Belonging Products and Spaces for Students of Color and White Students

Category		White Students		Students of Color	
		Number of Mentions	Number of Students	Number of Mentions	Number of Students
Belonging Products	Negative Product	15	10	39	11
	Positive Product	55	11	39	11
Belonging Spaces	Holistic University Institution	18	9	6	4
	Physical Spaces	17	11	13	8
	Affinity & Parochial Spaces	33	11	31	11
	Alienated Spaces	8	5	28	11
	Total	146		156	

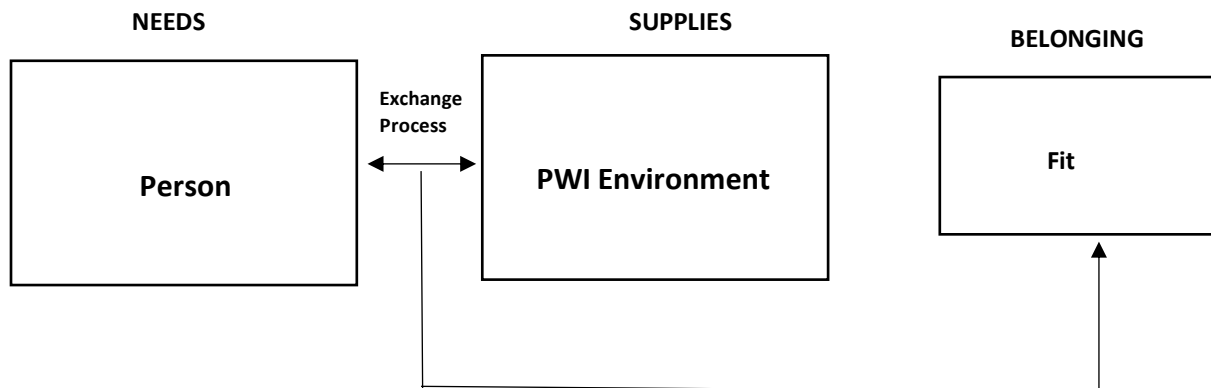
Note. Columns report the number of times a category was mentioned across transcripts and the number of students mentioning the category at least once.

Figure 1
Model of Person-Environment Fit as originally utilized vs. Present Models



Note. Model of person-environment fit as originally utilized vs. Present models displaying two individual perspectives of P-E fit applied in current empirical research across academic disciplines.

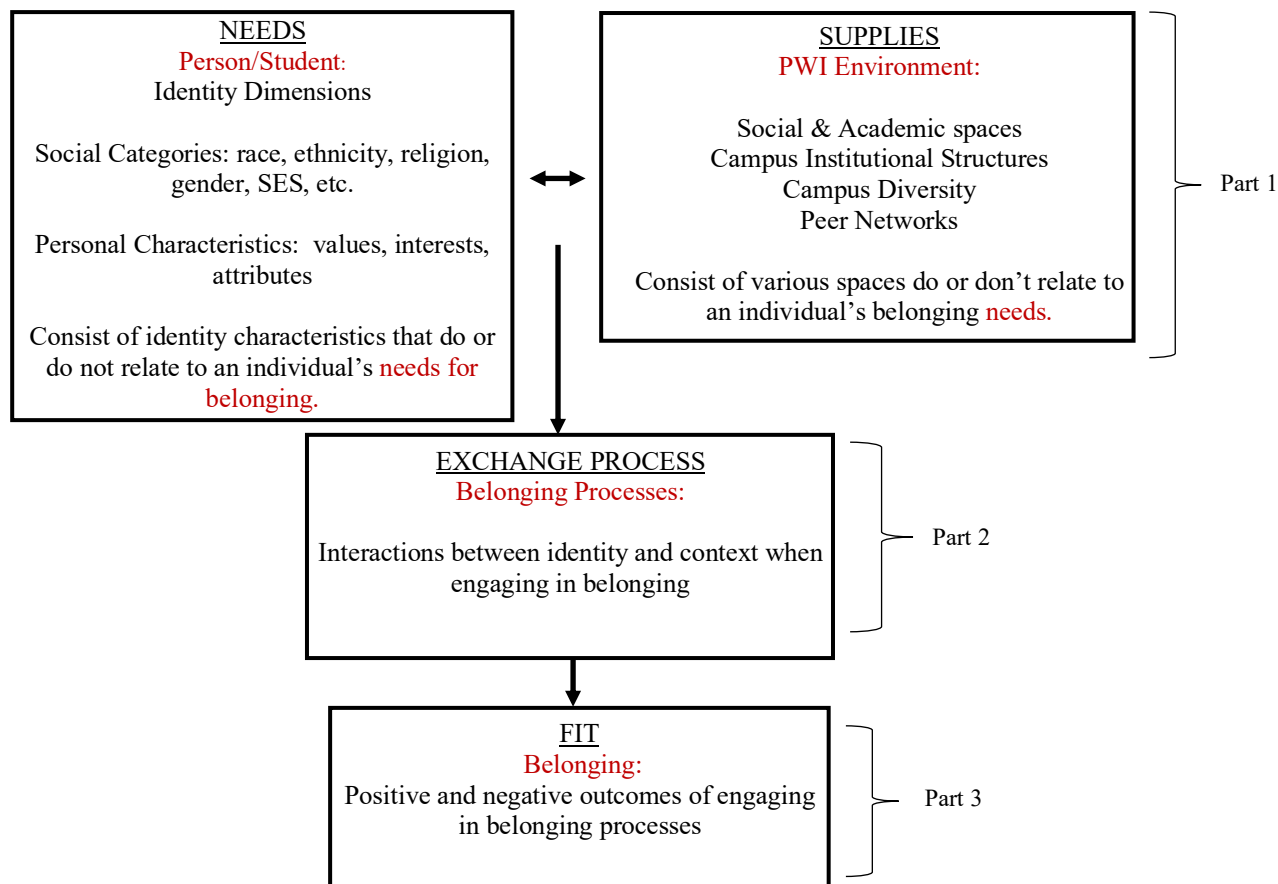
Figure 2
Basic Model of Sense of Belonging through P-E Fit Framework



Note. Displays model of the person-environment framework applied to belonging.

Figure 3

Proposed Model of Sense of Belonging through Person-Environment Fit Framework



Note. Displays the 3-part components of the proposed SOB PE-Fit model explaining the component and flow of connections in the model.

Figure 4

The Defined Basic Elements of Sense of Belonging through Person-Environment Fit Framework

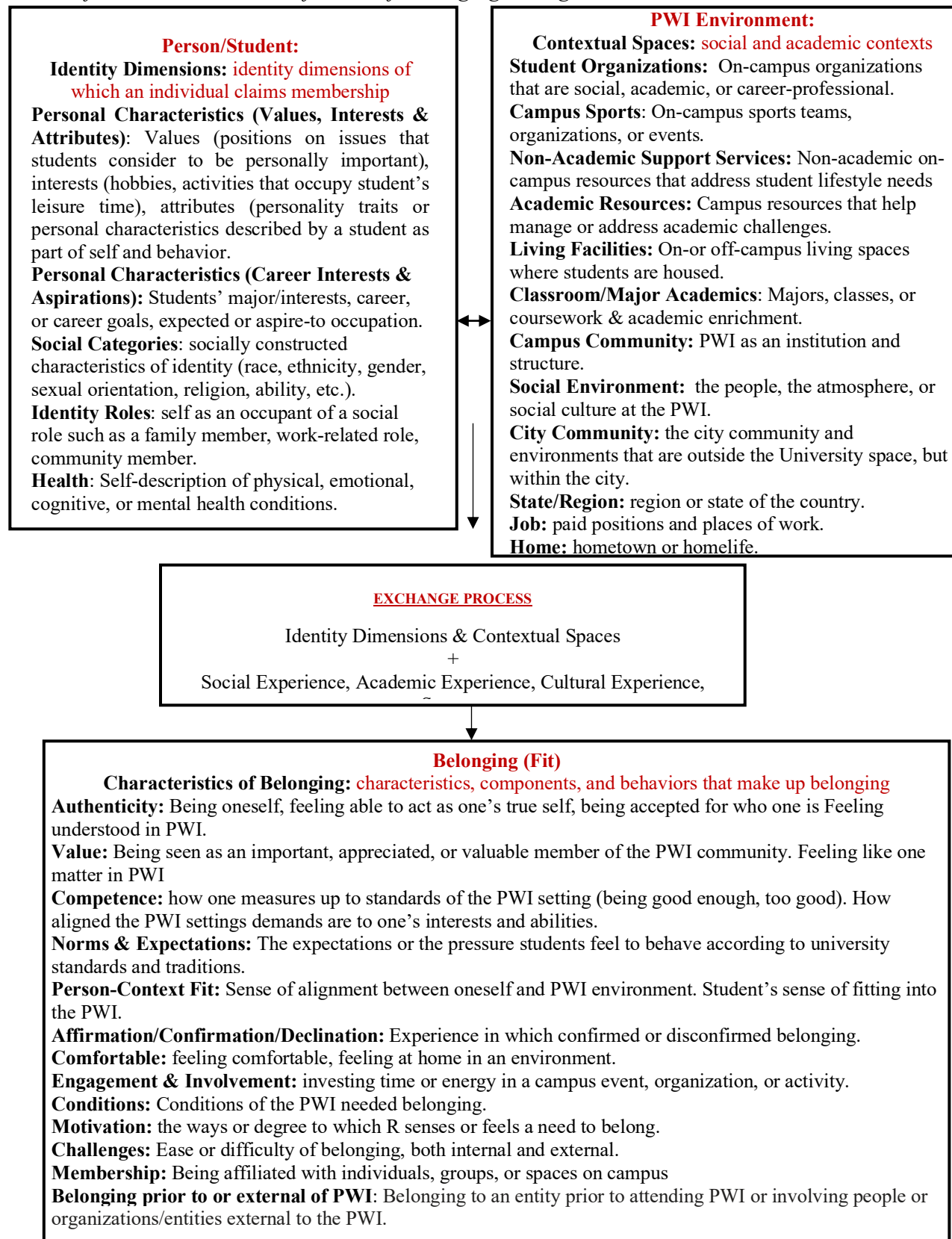


Figure 5
Brittany's Belonging Profile

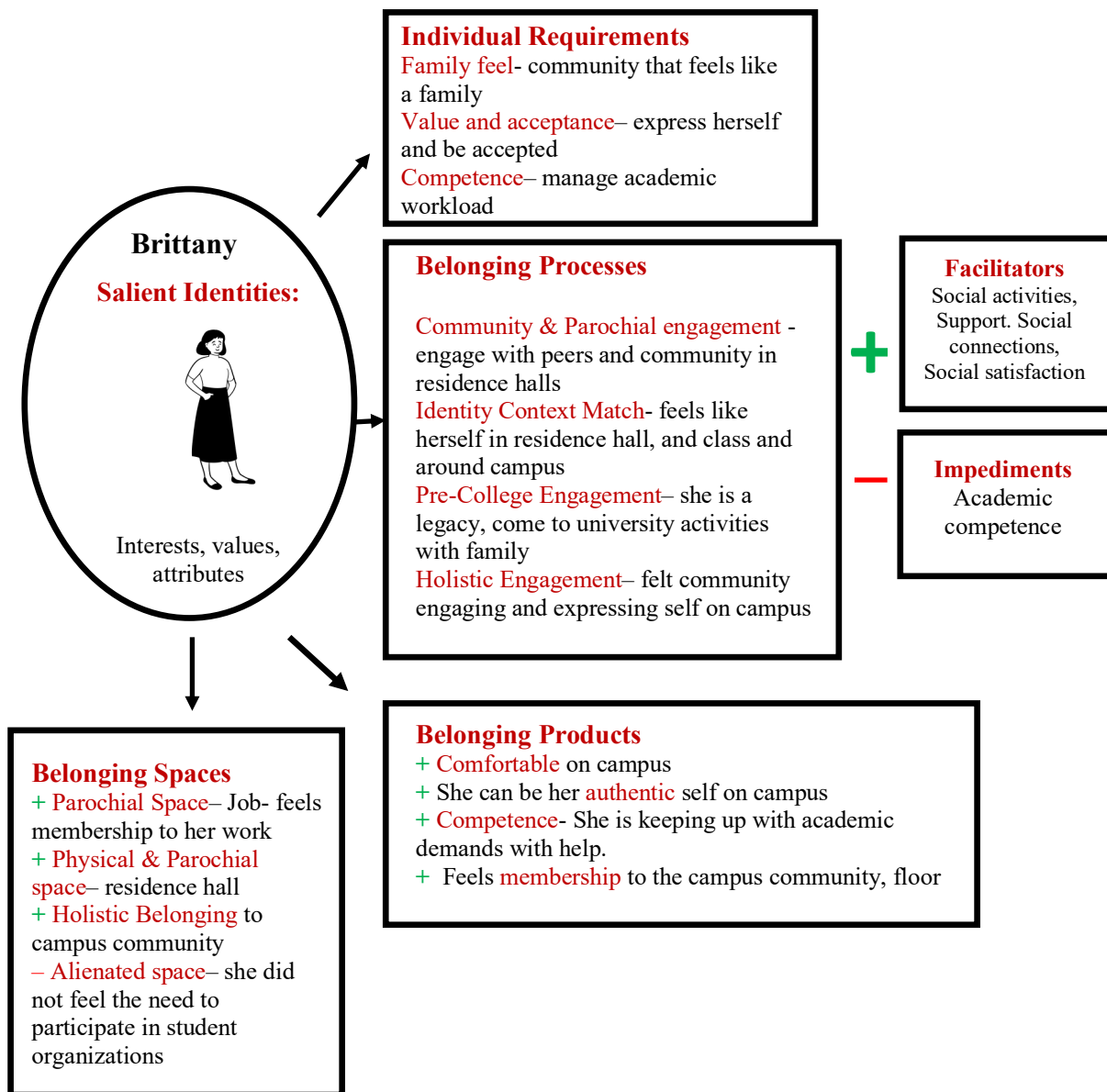


Figure 6
Darius's Individual Belonging Profile

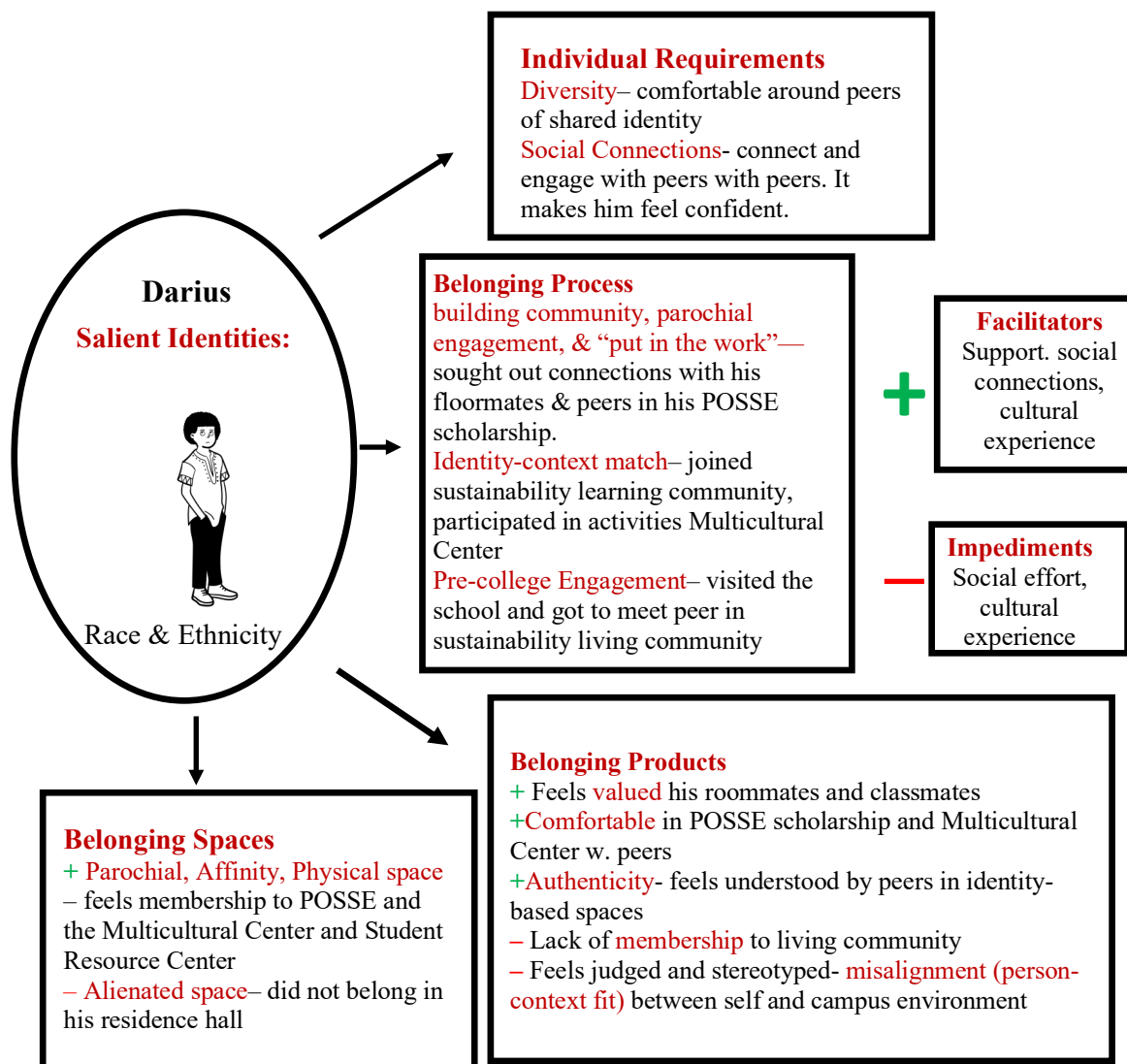
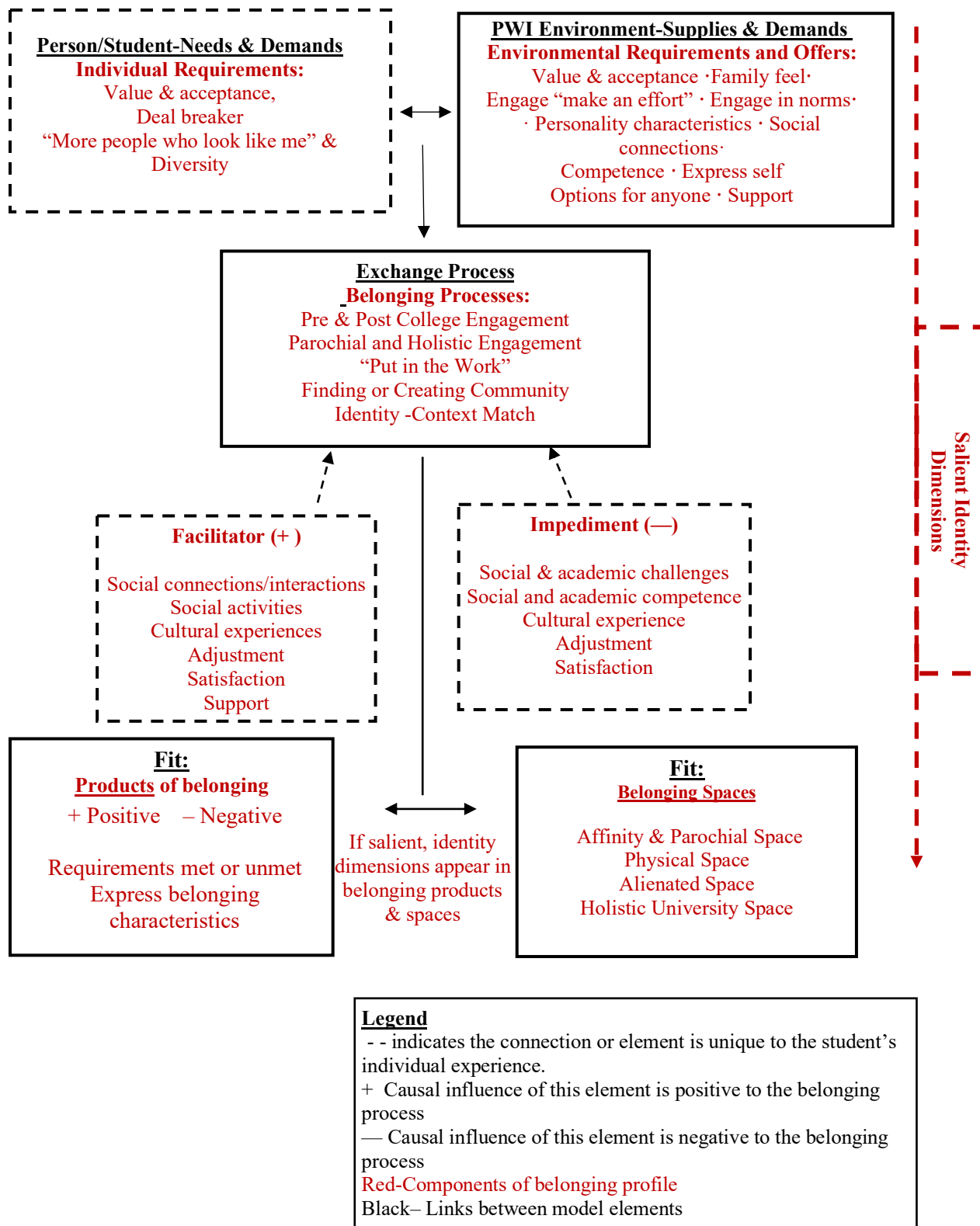


Figure 7
Applied Sense of Belonging – Person-Environment Fit Model



Appendix A INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Age _____ Year _____ Major _____
Background _____

Thank you for agreeing to be part of our study. Just a couple of reminders:

- What you tell us is strictly confidential. No one besides the research study team will hear what you have to say.
- To help keep things confidential, please don't use anyone's real name during our conversation. You can refer to people by their relationship to you ("my roommate," "my best friend," "my boyfriend," "my professor")
- Is it okay for me to audio-tape the interview?
- do you have any questions before we begin?

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Tell me a little about yourself

- How would you describe yourself to someone who doesn't know you?
- [Make sure to get the participant's age, year in school, anticipated major, and ethnic background]

What made you decide to attend UW-Madison; why did you think this would be a good place for you to attend college?

- Looking back on it now, how would you rate your decision (on a scale of 1 to 10)? 10 is high and 1 is low. Why?

2. AUTONOMY ISSUES

Some people say that part of being at college is taking more responsibility for yourself.

- Has that been true for you? Explain.

3. ACADEMIC ISSUES

How have things gone academically this year?

- [Probe for achievement level, satisfaction with grades]

Do you think you were adequately prepared for the academic demands that you have faced?

Have you had any doubts about your ability to succeed academically here?

- How have you dealt with those doubts? Who or what has helped you?

Have your classes been interesting and informative?

- Does the information you're learning seem relevant to your own life experiences?

How well have you been able to get to know professors / course instructors / TAs?

- Have instructors been supportive, encouraging?

How much do you feel like instructors / classmates accept and respect you for who you are?

- Do you ever feel like you're playing a role, or being asked to represent a whole group of people?

4. SOCIAL INTEGRATION: PEOPLE & ACTIVITIES

How has it gone trying to get to know people and getting to be known by people here?

Have you found the kind of people that you feel you can form close friendships with?

- How did that happen? OR
- Why do you think that hasn't happened?

How successful do you think you've been in making close friends here?

What are some typical things that you do with your friends?

- What would life be like for you here if these people were NOT here?

Have you joined any organizations or activities?

- What made you choose this activity / these activities?
- How has being part of this organization / activity made a difference in your life here?
 - [Probe for sense of integration / belongingness, affirmation of identity, social support]

6. IDENTITY ISSUES

The lyrics to one of the University's songs go [interview cite university song]. What do you think it takes to really "be a Bobcat?"

- What does it take to fit in or be accepted by people here?
- What type of person would have a hard time fitting in here?

Is there a place / activity / event on campus that gives you the sense that "I can be myself here"?

- Tell me about that.
- Why does that give you a sense of belonging?
- How did you discover this [place / activity]?

In what ways do you sense that you belong here?

- How much do others value having you as their roommate, friend, classmate, student?
- Do you feel as if most people on campus "get" you? Explain.
- Do you feel that you can be yourself among people on campus, or do you feel that you have to act like someone you are not? Explain.
- Do you see yourself as part of the campus community or do you see yourself as more of an outsider? Explain.
- [If needed: "Tell me a story about a time when you felt like you belonged here."]

In what ways do you feel that you DON'T belong here or are not accepted?

- Tell me a story about a time when you were unsure if you belonged here, or a time when you definitely felt you did NOT belong here.
- What keeps you from having a sense of belonging?
- What would need to happen for you to develop a sense of belonging?

[If not yet clear: "What has happened to make you feel included on campus?" "What has happened to make you feel excluded?"]

7. ENDING THE INTERVIEW

What are your plans for [semester break / the summer]? Are you looking forward to that?

Any final questions for me about the interview or the study?