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# African American Students on a Predominantly White Campus: Stressful Experiences and Coping Strategies

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*Eastern Illinois University*

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African American Students on a Predominantly White

Campus: Stressful Experiences and Coping Strategies

(TITLE)

BY

Katherine Townsend

1970-

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
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Running Head: AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

African American Students on a Predominantly White  
Campus: Stressful Experiences and Coping Strategies

Katherine Townsend

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the S.S.P. in School Psychology at  
Eastern Illinois University.

## Abstract

Stressful experiences and coping strategies were examined in African American college students at a predominantly white institution. The Ways of Coping-Revised and the Survey of Recent Life Experiences were mailed to all full-time African American students both on and off campus. The results indicated that African American students are not more likely to experience high stress; that stress level does not predetermine coping strategy and that academic class standing does not influence stress level. However, females are likely to experience more stress due to the pressures of time than males. Furthermore, Wishful Thinking was preferred by students who encounter high stress experiences. Administrators and counselors must consider unique attributes of African American students to help them reach their full potential.

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Stressful experiences encountered by African American college students may sometimes appear overwhelming. A particular stressful encounter of interest is adaptation and accommodation to full-time enrollment at a predominantly white institution of higher learning. Speculations as to why such experiences seem overwhelming are unclear, as this area has not been readily addressed in the literature. This study addressed the level of stress, types of stressors, and the variability of coping strategies employed by African American students associated with their decision to attend a predominantly white university.

To alleviate some of the burdens of stressful experiences, coping strategies must be employed. Specific coping strategies may vary from individual to individual; however, based on a range of potential stressors, it is likely that coping strategies fall into specific categories. Indeed, African American college students experience stressors and employ coping strategies appropriate for perceived stressful situations.

Cooper, Mahler, and Whitt (1984) collected qualitative data from Black students at predominantly white institutions through 87 interviews (47 females and 40 males) and found "that student stressors fell



into and across generally acceptable categorical definitions of psychological, social, and academic problems" (p. 17). Five major stressors discovered were academic (including classes, homework, and tests), finances (including lack of tuition, living, and recreation monies), time management (including procrastination), Black population (including lack of Black students and lack of Black teachers), and racism.

Copper et al. (1984) found that coping strategies commonly used were talking with friends, calling family, listening to music, exercise, and prayer. They concluded that Black students probably experience the same general stressors encountered by their white peers. However, "due to race and minority status, Black students must deal with additional stressors and situations not encountered by their white peers" and "in order to attain successful adaptation to the college or university environment, Black students develop transitional coping responses to daily stressors" (p. 20).

In an effort to identify potential influences of excessive stress, Taylor (1986) examined the relationship between the integration of African Americans on a white campus and their measured levels of stress. Taylor focused not only on perceptions and perspectives of Blacks on a predominantly white

campus, but on a holistic definition of being Black, incorporating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects. According to Taylor, African Americans must learn to adapt to accommodate to their new environment in order to have successful higher learning experiences. That is, they must modify some component of their lifestyle. That includes conforming to undesirable demands and comments such as, forgetting the differences between races and accepting people as people, or "agreeing with Whites that Black people should get off their asses and work" (p.197). These are some perceived suggestions of conformity made to African American college students as they put forth an effort to "get by" or to be a part of a predominantly white peer group. There is a broad spectrum of stressors and their impact on stress levels in African American students. Taylor concluded, "They (Blacks) accept what is given them by White administrators and accept readily what is taken away" (p. 201).

Gray and Rottmann (1988) described college students' perceptions of stress. The College Student Stress Inventory, CSSI, was developed by the authors for descriptive purposes to address high levels of stress among college students. Sample characteristics were not indicated. The CSSI was administered to 347 undergraduate students. The CSSI was comprised of four

demographic items and 73 items regarding respondents' perceptions of stressors, symptoms of stress, and stress management techniques. Gray and Rottmann used Likert Ratings, allowing respondents to indicate their perception of the frequency of occurrence of each item by choosing one of five responses along the continuum of always, often, sometimes, rarely, or never.

They found that respondents did indeed perceive stressors, symptoms of stress, and the need for stress management in their lives. The most often reported perceived stressors included pressure over academic grades, and not enough time to accomplish personal needs. Perceived symptoms of stress included nervousness or anxiety, and muscle tension. Finally, perceived stress management techniques reported included talking with a friend or family member, and setting realistic goals and expectations.

This study suggested that women perceived more stressors and symptoms in their lives than did men, and students with higher academic grade point averages perceived themselves as using stress management techniques more often in their lives than did students with low academic grade point averages (Gray and Rottmann, 1988). Furthermore, they found that students who were younger and in the beginning academic classes perceived more stressors in their lives than did

students who were older and of advanced academic class standings.

University characteristics may also influence stress. Henderson (1988) examined individual perceptions of Black students on a predominantly white campus and focused on the overall perspectives of Black college students and how they dealt with stressful experiences. The author also explored manifestations of a prejudice-discrimination reaction typology among Black students. The perceptions of 13 Black students regarding their need, coping strategies, and experiences in an all-white institution were explored. The ethnographic approach was used to discover whether or not previously unreported concerns of Black students might be complicating a better understanding of the problems they faced in a predominantly white environment. Ethnography uses the perspective of the participants in describing cultural phenomena and relies almost exclusively on qualitative data (Henderson, 1988).

Henderson's study focused only on the small sample of students interviewed. Unstructured interviews were conducted focusing on student activities and organization, the classroom, campus police, residence hall life, university administration student services, personal encounters that might be relevant. Random

sampling was not used which made generalization of the findings to a whole population inappropriate.

Upon completion of interviews and analyses, Henderson (1988) suggested that the racism reaction typology was based on the effects of each student's reaction to perceptions of the racial atmosphere and the student's own history of racial experiences. The author went further to develop a classification system for the typology. Black students who perceived the campus environment as racist and who adopted an assertive position regarding Black students' rights were classified as "Partisans." Those who felt threatened by the environment and who avoided extracurricular involvement were classified as "Stoics." Those who did not perceive racism in the environment and who moved freely within the white mainstream were "Renegades." No follow-up data was available.

Of 13 students interviewed, 6 were classified as Partisans, 4 as Stoics, and 3 as Renegades. Stoics seemed to avoid virtually all social interaction on campus with either Blacks or Whites. Partisans participated in predominantly all-Black activities and tended to avoid social interaction with Whites. Renegades were characterized by much higher levels of participation in White mainstream campus activities

and by their purposeful avoidance of Black student activities or organization (Henderson, 1988). None of the members of these groups associated with members of the other two groups.

It would seem important for African American students to understand that stress is a part of daily living regardless of the college campus; and that they are likely to experience increased levels of stress as a result of their decision to attend a predominantly white institution. Gunnings (1982) emphasized the necessity of counselors helping students to effectively circumvent, recognize, and cope with stress. And suggested that if counselors are to help minority youths cope within the white campus, they must consider physiological and psychosocial influences.

Individual responses to stress may be influenced by various factors, including, but not limited to, cultural sensitivities and developmental needs of Black students (Hughes, 1987). Hughes examined demographic and sociopolitical factors related to African American students by interviewing 50 Black women and 29 Black men by both open-ended survey and telephone. Students were selected from 2 predominantly Black and 11 predominantly white universities from various parts of the United States.

Hughes suggested that Black students on predominantly white campuses defer their social, personal, emotional, and cultural development during the college experience. Hughes further suggested that neither the predominantly White nor the predominantly Black university is providing purposeful student development programming for Blacks. However, greater happiness was reported for students attending predominantly Black universities. It was concluded that regardless of the level of success in college, African Americans must make adjustments, remain focused, and effectively use strategies to minimize stress in their lives.

Previous researchers have used both qualitative and quantitative data to describe the perceptions of stress and coping strategies employed by African American students at predominantly White institutions of higher learning. The current study focused on stress and African American students' ability to accommodate within the predominantly white campus by employing various coping strategies. Prior studies have not directly addressed such issues. However, Gray and Rottmann (1988) explored similar aspects with undergraduate college students in general. Common assessment goals were to obtain perceptions of conditions or situations that might be perceived as

stressful, responses to stress, and what is being done to reduce or prevent stress. The ethnic focused approach, modeled after Henderson (1988), was used to gain perspectives of the African American student body and to better understand their encountered problems in a predominantly white environment.

To evaluate coping strategies it was essential to determine life experiences and whether they were viewed as positive or negative. Nottingham, Rosen, and Parks (1992) focused on the psychological well-being of African American students based on perceptions of life experiences. They found that feelings of alienation on a predominantly white campus were a significant predictor of depression, hopelessness, self-esteem, and preencounter racial identity attitude. As a result, the authors suggested that African American students at a predominantly white university are in need of additional services for them to reach their potential.

There are articles that address the dynamics of the current study. D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) characterized African American students' arrival to a white campus as a dramatic change in their lives and noted that there is a tendency for African American students to have fewer resources to rely on. These include fewer extracurricular activities in high school, racial discrimination, lower socioeconomic



status, poor environmental conditions, and minimal community support. These factors may contribute to an increased level of stress for African American college students.

The current study investigated the relationship between stress and the most frequently used coping strategies reported by African American students on a predominantly white college campus. It addressed the types of strategies most frequently utilized to cope with or reduce stress in relation to experiences encountered at Eastern Illinois University. Coping strategies were based on two broad classes of coping responses: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Ptacek, Smith, and Zanas, 1992, Folkman and Lazarus, 1980, 1985). According to Ptacek et al. (1992), problem-focused coping includes cognitive and behavioral attempts to alter the stressful situation, and emotion-focused coping involves attempts to regulate emotional responses elicited by the situation. Along with the coping strategy, the present study examined the use of a specific coping strategy across grade classification to determine if stress levels are lower as students' academic grade standing increases or changes.

Hughes (1987) reported that Blacks in the United States suffer higher unemployment rates than Whites

(15% compared to 6%), have the highest poverty rate, depend on single mothers to head 37% of all Black families, and are in a severely depressed economic condition. This study helps to justify the present exploration of stressors experienced by African American college students. This study also provides valuable insight and qualitative significance regarding distinct stressors experienced and coping strategies employed by African American students.

Perceptions of stressors may be a key determinant of how situations are managed. An important issue with regard to stress is the mind's ability to cope. Vlisides, Eddy, and Mozie (1994) suggested wellness as a method to reduce stress. It involves mental exercises, physical and breathing exercises, and the freedom to believe and rely on God (one's faith) to better cope with life. Coping strategies can be integrated by the individual in order to relieve stress. However, for the purposes of minimizing ambiguity and maintaining simplicity, specific categories of coping strategies were addressed in this study.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the usage of coping strategies among African American students at a predominantly white university in East Central Illinois. College class was used in order to identify

any variation in stress level possibly due to maturation or experience with a particular strategy. Also a goal was to describe the specific coping strategies employed by African American college students and to assess the generalizability of stressors experienced. The number of, or lack of support systems offered at Eastern Illinois University (EIU) was sufficient reason to investigate such an issue. Support systems include, but are not limited to, the Office of Minority Affairs, the Counseling Center, Student Life Services, the Black Student Union, Black Fraternities and Sororities, and the Black Student Council.

Based on the review of literature, it was hypothesized that:

- 1) African American students attending a predominantly white institution have high stress levels, as determined by instruments used in the study, regardless of coping strategies employed and regardless of grade classification as determined by recent life experiences encountered at EIU.

- 2) Different coping strategies are used by students who are high, compared to those who are low, in stress experiences.

- 3) The higher the academic grade class, the lower the stress level.

Although no hypotheses were advanced concerning the effects of participant's sex, the relationship between sex and stress and coping were also examined.

This study was intended to describe specific coping strategies employed by African American college students, to assess the types of stressors experienced, and to analyze the relationship between coping strategies and stress across college class.

#### Method

##### Participants

Participants were African American students from Eastern Illinois University (EIU), a predominantly white public institution in East Central Illinois. At the time this study was conducted, student enrollment was approximately 10,990 with 471 full-time (12 or more semester hours) African American students. African American students comprised 5.1% of the total student body (including full- and part-time students). Student population included White, African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and others. All full-time African American students were invited to complete self-report questionnaires regarding coping strategies and stressful experiences while at EIU.

Participant names were selected from the EIU 10-day roster out of African American students attending the Spring 1997 Semester. Only full-time students were

included in the study. Nine percent ( $n = 42$ ) of the potential participants returned usable surveys.

Respondents were 85.7% female with an average age of 20.6 years ( $SD = 2.37$ ). Freshmen ( $n=9$ ) and Sophomores ( $n=10$ ) comprised 45.2% of participants, while 54.8% were Juniors ( $n=9$ ), Seniors ( $n=12$ ), and Graduates ( $n=2$ ).

### Materials and Instruments

The stressfulness of adapting to full-time enrollment at EIU was assessed using a single item "Adapting to full-time enrollment at EIU has been stressful for me" (Appendix C). Respondents indicated the stressfulness using a 5-point scale anchored at "not at all characteristic of me" (1) and "very much characteristic of me" (5). Stress levels and most frequently used coping strategy were assessed by using self-report questionnaires.

The Survey of Recent Life Experiences, SRLE (Kohn & Macdonald, 1992) was used to evaluate severity of stressful experiences of participants. There were 51 items rated from "being not at all part of my life" (1) to "very much part of my life" (4). Participants, 106 men and 130 women, were recruited at the Ontario Science Centre, a museum in Toronto, Canada. The alpha coefficient of the SRLE in the item-selection subsample was .92, with a mean of 94.51, and standard deviation

20.44. The alpha coefficient was .91 for a cross-replication subsample with a mean of 96.24, and standard deviation of 20.73.

Kohn & Macdonald reported adequate validity against the criterion of subjectively appraised stress. According to Kohn & Macdonald the items of the SRLE retained an indirect relationship to the stress-appraisal process. This process is a critical determinant of the adverse consequences of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). There are six subscales of the SRLE. They are Social and Cultural Difficulties, Work, Time Pressure, Finances, Social Acceptability, and Social Victimization (Kohn & Macdonald, 1992). For this study three of the subscales were used in the analysis in addition to the overall scale score; they were: Social and Cultural Difficulties, Time Pressure, and Social Victimization.

To determine the coping strategy most frequently employed, the Ways of Coping-Revised (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985) was administered. Sampling consisted of 108 undergraduate students. The Ways of Coping-Revised is a self-report questionnaire containing a wide range of thoughts and acts that people use to deal with the internal and/or external demands of specific stressful encounters. For the purposes of this study, the specific stressful encounter was determined as the

adaptation and accommodation to full-time enrollment at EIU.

There are 66 items measured on a 4-point scale anchored at 0 = does not apply and/or not used, and 3 = used a great deal. The alpha coefficients of the Ways of Coping-Revised in a college student sample were .88 for Problem-focused coping, and .59 to .86 for Emotion-focused coping. There are eight scales to the Ways of Coping-Revised. They are Problem-focused Coping (M=15.2), Wishful Thinking (M=5.2), Detachment (M=3.5), Seeking Social Support (M=7.0), Focusing on the Positive (M=4.2), Self-blame (M=3.3), Tension-reduction (M=2.6), and Keep to Self (M=2.3).

#### Procedure

Surveys were sent, via US Mail and Campus Mail, to the complete population of full-time African American students at EIU during the Spring 1997 Semester. The major predictor in this study was frequency of using a specific coping strategy in adapting and accommodating to full-time enrollment at EIU and the usage of such strategy on stress level. Consent forms, instructions, and questionnaires were mailed to all African American students on and off campus meeting research criterion (see Appendices A, B, & C). The SRLE and Ways of Coping-Revised were presented in counterbalanced order to control for possible order effects. Along with the

questionnaires, demographic information was obtained; grade classification, enrollment status, and gender.

The following guidelines applied to data collection. The higher the coping strategy subscale score, the more frequent use of that strategy. The higher the stress level, the more severe the stress. And the higher the grade classification, the higher academic attainment of the student. By applying such guidelines, ambiguity of results was minimized. For statistical purposes, college class was categorized on a continuum ranging from freshman (1) to graduate student (5).

### Results

The first hypothesis, which anticipated high stress levels in African American students attending a predominantly white university, was not supported (see Table 1). The mean score obtained here on the SRLE (99.74) is below the scale midpoint (127); further, the 95% Confidence Interval of the mean (92.64 to 106.83) includes the means of the two samples that were used in the development of the scale (94.51 and 96.24; see pp. 18-19 above); that is, the participants here were not significantly more stressed than the normative sample. Similarly, the means for the three subscales examined here fall below the midpoint of those scales.



In addition, the responses to the single-item measure of stress at EIU ("Adapting to full-time enrollment at EIU has been stressful for me"; see Table 2) indicated that the average participant viewed adapting to full-time enrollment at EIU as only slightly stressful--if stressful at all ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ). Hence, the participants did not reveal high stress levels on any of the measures of stress used here.

The second hypothesis suggested that students who are high versus low in stress will use different coping strategies. This was not supported by analyses. Students were categorized as high or low on stress using a median split of scores on the SRLE ( $Mdn = 97.50$ ); this was used as the grouping variable on a series of 1-way ANOVAs of the scores on the eight scales of the Ways of Coping-Revised. High- and Low-Stress individuals differed on only one scale, "Wishful Thinking"  $F(1,40) = 9.242$ ,  $p = .0042$ ; the means indicate that those high in stress ( $M = 10.43$ ) used this strategy more than those low in stress ( $M = 7.10$ ). Bonferroni correction for the number of comparisons revealed no significant difference.

In a similar fashion, students were categorized as high or low on stress using a median split of scores on the single-item measure of the stressfulness of

adapting to EIU ( $Mdn = 3.00$ ); this also was used as the grouping variable on a series of 1 way ANOVAs of the scores on the eight scales of the Ways of Coping-Revised. Again, High- and Low-Stress individuals differed on only "Wishful Thinking"  $F(1,40) = 6.409$ ,  $p = .0154$  and again the means indicate that those highly stressed by adapting to EIU ( $M = 10.00$ ) were more prone to use this strategy than those low in stress ( $M = 7.11$ ).

Because the use of Wishful Thinking was influenced by both the overall stress (SRLE) and stress at EIU (single-item measure), a multiple regression was conducted in an attempt to determine how the two stress measures might combine to predict that type of coping. In this regression with Wishful Thinking as the criterion and SRLE and EIU as the independent variables, SRLE score was the only significant predictor,  $R = .79$ ; EIU-stress did not enter the equation. That is, once the overall level of stress was determined (SRLE), EIU-specific stress did not increase the prediction of coping with Wishful Thinking.

The third hypothesis anticipated a negative correlation between year in college and level of stress; that is the higher the academic class, the lower the stress level. This was not supported by

the data. The correlation's between academic year and SRLE,  $r = -.09$ , as well as year with and the EIU measure ( $r = -.11$ ) were not significant ( $p > .05$ ) and, further, trivial.

Although no hypotheses were made concerning the effects of sex on stress and coping, those effects were examined. Possible sex differences on the stress measures were tested using 1-way ANOVAs. Females scored higher on all 6 measures of stress; however, only stress due to Time Pressure was significantly affected by sex. Females ( $M = 19.11$ ) experienced more stress due to Time Pressure than males ( $M = 14.5$ ),  $F(1,40) = 5.152$ ,  $p = .028$ . However, after Bonferroni correction for the number of comparisons, there were no differences between males and females. Sex differences on the coping measures were also tested using 1-way ANOVAs. Although females scored higher on 7 out of the 8 measures, there were no significant sex differences.

#### Discussion

Three issues are raised by this study concerning the relations among stress levels, coping strategies, and academic grade of African American college students. The first hypothesis suggested that African American students attending a predominantly white institution would have high stress levels regardless of coping strategies employed and regardless of grade

classification as determined by recent life experiences at EIU. However, there was no indication of high stress among the African American college students in this sample.

In a study published after the current data were collected, Neville, Heppner, and Wang (1997) examined racial identity attitudes, both general and culture-specific stressors, and problem-focused coping styles. They contended that "the manner in which one copes with stressful events plays an important role in the amount of stress experienced and, ultimately, one's psychological health" (p. 304). If this is so, the results of this study may suggest that African American students at EIU are coping well and should have fairly good psychological health. However, this information is unknown.

Neville et al. (1997) noted that students with a strong connection to African American culture--while holding negative views toward Whites, identified more general stressors in the environment such as roommate or financial concerns. Furthermore, being comfortable with one's racial identity was related to lower identification of culture-specific stressors.

The second issue focused on whether students with high stress levels use different coping strategies than students with low stress levels. Eight coping

strategies (Wishful Thinking, Focusing on the Positive, Problem Focused, Keep to Self, Seeking Social Support, Self Blame, Tension Reduction, and Detachment) were examined. Wishful Thinking was the preferred coping strategy in stress experiences for students with perceived high stress. That suggests that students classified as highly stressed may rely on chance and are more hopeful during stressful experiences. No other preferences for coping strategies proved to be statistically significant.

For both high and low stress students, Wishful Thinking, Focusing on the Positive, Problem Focused, Keep to Self, and Seeking Social Support were endorsed as the first through fifth preferences, though in different orders. However, Self Blame, Tension\Reduction, and Detachment were endorsed sixth, seventh, and eighth, respectively, for both groups.

The final issue examined in this study was whether students in higher academic grade classes would have lower stress. No differences across academic grade classes were found. This contradicts findings of Gray and Rottmann (1988) who found that beginning academic classes perceived more stress in their lives than higher academic classes. Future research may find differences across academic classes.

Time Pressure was perceived as a stressor by females more often than males. However, after correcting for the number of comparisons made, there were no differences indicated. Neither coping strategies or other stressful experiences proved to be significantly related to gender. In regard to gender, it was suggested that females are more likely to feel pressured to accomplish goals, tasks, and assignments in a more timely manner. This suggestion indicated that females may have a more stressful college experience than their male counterparts. However, overall coping strategies and perceived stress levels did not differ between males and females.

Based on the limited number of respondents for this study, it is suggested that African American college students at EIU do not experience high levels of stress regardless of grade class. However, this sampling may not be representative of the African American population at EIU, as this sample may better cope with stress and are probably more likely to organize their lives, enabling them to complete questionnaires. It is also suggested that Wishful Thinking is preferred by students who encounter high stress experiences, and academic class standing has no adverse affect on level of stress.

Implications for Practitioners

As a result of this study, administrators and counselors may better understand the direct perspective of stressors experienced by African American students at EIU. Support systems are essential for the well-being of students and to enable them to more efficiently utilize coping strategies. The African American students enrolled at EIU come from an array of geographic regions. It is important to consider students' background characteristics and campus experiences in order to recognize and relieve some of the unique hardships encountered, and to help improve academic success. Nottingham et al. (1992) suggested that African American students are in need of additional services for them to reach their potential. Such services include, but are not limited to, preparation for their new environment where they will be the minority in the educational setting, being introduced to African American faculty and staff, and being made aware of minority student organizations and support groups.

It should be noted that this study has several limitations and these results should be considered with caution. First and foremost among these is the low (9%) response rate. The low participation rate may have been influenced by various factors. Some

potential influences include, but are not limited to, end of semester deadlines (e.g. research papers, projects, lab work), pending final examinations, students' inability to cope with stress, poor organizational skills, and participants unwillingness to participate in an empirical study. Also, questionnaires were mailed to all participants in March, which coincided with spring vacation and mid-term examinations.

These results are based on a small, non-representative African American sample at one predominantly white institution in central Illinois. Therefore, it is unclear if the results will generalize to samples from other institutions. It is possible that this sample, which had a low stress score, did not allow for a fair assessment of stress level. As noted by Gunnings (1988), the individuality of stress manifests itself through a number of interrelated internal and external factors that make each person's response unique.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

This study addressed stressful experiences and coping strategies from an African American perspective. The findings indicate that African American students utilize various coping strategies to reduce or prevent stress. Perceived stressors and problem solving are



issues to consider in future research in this area. Additional research is needed to more fully understand the stressful experiences encountered by African American students and to better provide services to meet their needs while attending predominantly white institutions.

In order to improve the return rate of questionnaires, researchers may wish to follow-up by post card or telephone to remind participants to return surveys, elicit support from Black student organizations, and avoid distribution of surveys during periods when students may exhibit enhanced distractibility. Future studies should also use comparison groups, such as full-time African American students at Black universities, full-time White students, or other minority students, to strengthen findings.

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Appendix A

The attached questionnaire is designed to evaluate student's method of coping with stress and to evaluate stressful experiences encountered while attending Eastern Illinois University. Your assistance is being solicited in an effort to increase our understanding of the stressful experiences encountered by African American students and their methods of dealing with such experiences.

Your cooperation in this study is very important and participation is greatly appreciated. Please return the completed questionnaire in the enclosed envelope by April 17, 1997.

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Katherine Townsend

Graduate Student, School Psychology

Appendix B

READ AND SIGN THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

I understand that the information I am providing here will be used in research, that my responses will be treated as confidential information, and that my identity will not be disclosed in reports of this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Appendix C

Please indicate the following

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Race: \_\_\_\_\_

What year of college are you currently in?

\_\_\_\_\_ Graduate

\_\_\_\_\_ Senior 90+ semester hours earned

\_\_\_\_\_ Junior 60-89 semester hours earned

\_\_\_\_\_ Sophomore 30-59 semester hours earned

\_\_\_\_\_ Freshman 0-29 semester hours earned

Current enrollment status:

\_\_\_\_\_ Full-time \_\_\_\_\_ Part-time

Instructions: The following question asks you to describe yourself using the scale, marked with the letters A, B, C, D, and E, with (A) indicating "not at all characteristic of me" and (E) "very characteristic of me", and the other letters, points in between.

**Circle** the letter which best describes how characteristic the item is of you.

Adapting to full-time enrollment at EIU has been stressful for me.

<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>
Not at all	Not very	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
Characteristic				characteristic
of me				of me

**Note: There are two sections to this questionnaire. Make sure to read the instructions for each section carefully. Please respond to all items without assistance.**

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for the Survey of Recent Life Experiences<sup>a</sup>

Measure	Mean	SD	Scale midpoint
SRLE	99.74	22.77	127.0
Social & Cultural			
Difficulties	19.21	5.02	27.5
Time Pressure	18.45	4.84	20.0
Social Victimization	7.29	2.64	10.0

<sup>a</sup> Responses are scored 1 to 4 in the direction of more experience; higher scores indicate greater stress



Table 2

Responses to Single-Item Stress Measure<sup>a</sup>

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	6	14.3
Not very	12	28.6
Slightly	9	21.4
Fairly	9	21.4
Very Much	6	14.3

<sup>a</sup> "Adapting to full-time enrollment at EIU has been stressful for me."

Table 3

Coping Strategies Ranked High to Low by order of  
Endorsement

Rank	Strategy	Mean	SD	Item Average <sup>a</sup>
1	Focusing on the Positive	8.05	2.60	2.012
2	Problem Focused	21.36	5.39	1.942
3	Seeking Social Support	12.48	4.62	1.782
4	Wishful Thinking	8.76	3.89	1.752
5	Keep to Self	4.55	2.35	1.516
6	Self-blame	4.83	1.94	1.208
7	Tension-reduction	3.45	1.93	1.151
8	Detachment	6.57	3.64	1.095

<sup>a</sup> scale score divided by number of items in the scale.

Table 4

Coping Strategies Ranked High to Low by Order of  
Endorsement for High and Low Stress Groups

Strategy	Group	
	High Stress	Low Stress
Wishful Thinking <sup>a</sup>	1	4
Focusing on the Positive	2	1
Problem Focused	3	2
Keep to Self	4	5
Seeking Social Support	5	3
Self-blame	6	6
Tension-reduction	7	7
Detachment	8	8

<sup>a</sup> significant difference between groups,  $p < .05$ .