

ABSTRACT

Dissertation: College, Academic Major, and Classroom Belonging in College Undergraduates

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Belonging is an innate drive, impacting how humans think, act, and feel, having positive effects in all but adverse conditions, such as when belonging is missing or uncertain (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This susceptibility to belonging uncertainty may be particularly problematic in college, being linked to lower academic achievement, persistence, social adjustment, and intention to persist (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990; Hausmann et al., 2007; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Wilson et al., 2015). Prior research on belonging in college students has focused on marginalized populations including African Americans (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Walton & Cohen, 2011) and women (Braindard & Carlin, 1998; Chervan, Plaut, Davies, & Steele, 2009; Good, Rattan, & Dweck, 2012; Marra, Rogers, Shen, & Bogue, 2012). Non-traditional students (NTS) can be considered a marginalized population and may be susceptible to lower or uncertain college belonging. They exhibit lower rates of entrance, retention, and graduation than their more traditional classroom counterparts (Strage, 2008) and report feelings of fear, anxiety, and isolation at navigating an increasingly difficult social divide within the classroom (Samuels, Beach, & Palmer, 2011). Prior research on belonging in college students has been focused on belonging at the university level, despite occurring at three levels—university, academic major, and classroom (Wilson et al., 2015). This study examined whether

NTS report lower levels of belonging compared to traditional students, and if students overall report differing levels of belonging across the three levels. Results of a mixed ANOVA indicated that when compared, traditional and NTS reported similar levels of belonging. However students overall reported lower levels of university belonging than either classroom or major belonging. Implications, limitations, and future directions are discussed.