

Living in the Slump: Second Year Undergraduate Students' Coping Mechanisms

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INTRODUCTION:

This study sought to describe and examine the many different experiences African American sophomore students encounter on a predominately White institution (PWI). Moreover, this study looked to understand the stress coping mechanisms they have adapted when balancing academics, social life, and extracurricular activities.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

How do second-year African American undergraduate students describe their coping mechanisms amidst their experience of the second-year slump at the University of Dayton?

METHODOLOGY:

In this study, the researcher used the narrative study (Creswell, 2013) approach to collect supporting data. Nine students who majored in a science-related field or majored in business were interviewed. Participants answered six questions that reflected on their current social, academic, and extracurricular lifestyle.



"I'm going to be the only Black person in here. And all these White people know what they're doing. I'm like, 'is it me?'"

-Victoria

"I just want more of a support system from people you know will listen. I'm in need of something like that."

-Manny

Findings:



Academic Adjustment: Students discussed feeling they are underprepared compared to students of other races.



Anxiety/Loss of Balance: Students depend on the community and resources provided by the Black community on campus. Those students who moved away from campus admitted to feeling lost, unable to cope with some stressful situations, and in need of support.



Emotional Balance: Students lean on their community and friends to help them with their academic and career choices. Some have also adopted the development of harmful coping mechanisms (alcohol and smoking) to cope with stress.



The "Super" Sophomore: Many students admitted to being overly involved in order to stay "present" on campus and to strengthen their community and culture.



Cultural Awareness: Students admitted to the pressure of knowing the true definition of diversity, being a voice for other African Americans on campus, and being a role model for others off-campus.

Recommendations:

- To better understand the stress coping mechanisms of sophomore students, researchers could interview students who major in other academic fields..
- Researchers could also interview students from other colleges/universities to gather more divergent narratives.
- Practitioners could develop a mentor group designed to help students who move off campus, or are from other states/cities.
- Practitioners could collaborate with other organizations or departments who specialize in coping mechanisms, and introduce the information to students.

Select References:

- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: CA, Sage Publications.
- Fries-Britt, S.L., & Turner, B. (2001). Facing stereotypes: A case study of Black students on a White campus. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42(5), 420-429.