

# The Relationship Between Homesickness, Methods of Coping, and Racial Background



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## Introduction

For some individuals pursuing higher education, relocation can result in the development of homesickness. Homesickness is defined as the distress or impairment one experiences before and/or after being physically separated from home.<sup>1</sup> Considering that previous studies have found a link between homesickness and greater school dropout rates, a lack of college satisfaction, and increased symptoms of depression and anxiety, further investigation is important.<sup>2</sup> Current literature lacks statistics on racial disparities in the experience of this phenomenon, the coping methods utilized across races, and previous studies have conflicting results on the correlation between race and homesickness.<sup>3</sup>

## Research Question

The present study aims to investigate the relationship between homesickness, methods of coping, and racial background.

## Methods

### Recruitment and Eligibility

- Recruited through SONA Participant Pool
- At least 18 and currently living away from home

### Participants

- 100 undergraduate UNC-Chapel Hill students
- Demographics
  - White/Caucasian: 56.1%
  - African American/Black: 15.3%
  - Asian/Pacific Islander: 19.4%
  - American Indian/Alaska Native: 4.1%
  - Biracial/Multi-racial: 5.1%

### Measures

- Demographics
- Woulff's Homesickness Self-Report Inventory
- Adult Homesickness Coping Questionnaire (AHCQ)
- Depression Anxiety Stress Scales 21 (DASS-21)

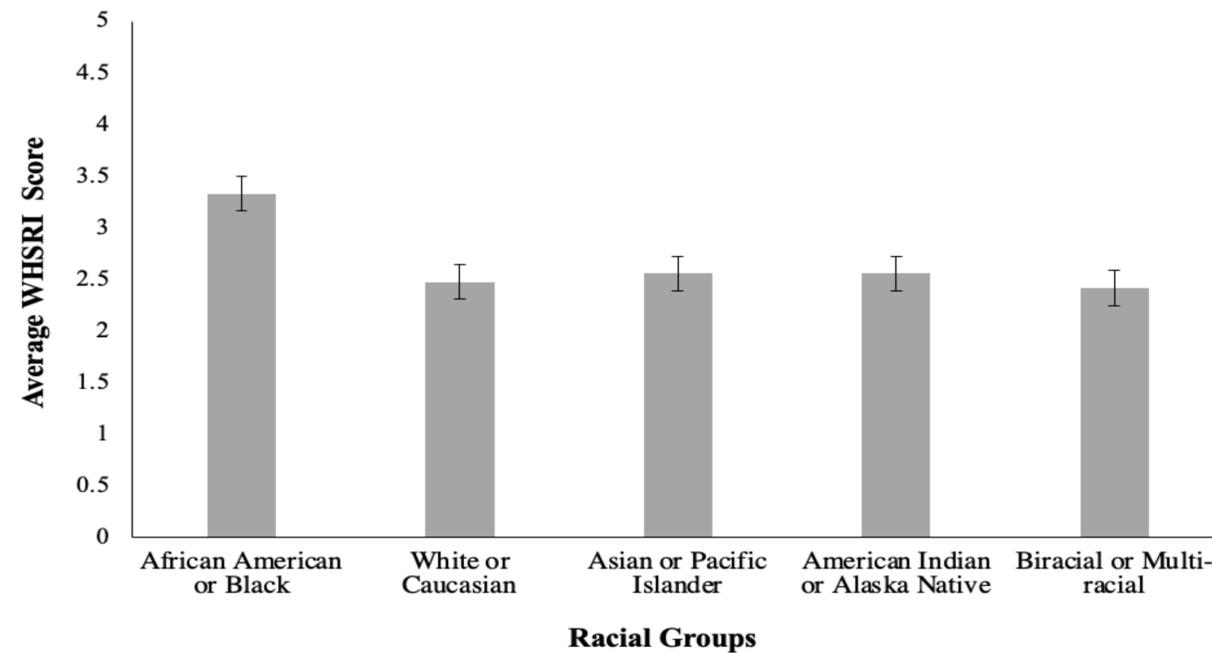
### Statistical Analysis

- Descriptive Statistics
- One-way ANOVAs: test if homesickness, coping methods, and distress symptoms differed across racial groups
- Pearson Correlations: assess relationship between homesickness scores and other study measures across races

## Results

Figure 1

Average Homesickness Scores Across Racial Groups



- African Americans expressed the greatest homesickness symptoms
- Only statistical significance for one-way ANOVAs was between African American participants and White/Caucasian participants

Table 1

Pearson's r Calculated Between WHSRI and Study Measures Across Races

Group	Measures						
	AHCQ				DASS-21		
	SS	PT/D	TR	ME	ANX	DEP	STR
Full Sample	0.19	0.11	0.29**	0.61***	0.37***	0.41***	0.38***
White/Caucasian (n = 55)	0.04	0.07	0.08	0.65***	0.40**	0.52***	0.36**
African American/Black (n = 15)	0.30	0.17	0.52*	0.62	0.39	0.42	0.52*
Asian/Pacific Islander (n = 19)	0.63**	0.29	0.74***	0.52*	0.15	0.11	0.14

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

AHCQ: Adult Homesickness Coping Questionnaire, SS: Social Support, PT/D: Positive Thinking/Distraction, TR: Turning to Religion, ME: Mental Escape, DASS-21: Distress Anxiety Stress 21, ANX: Anxiety, DEP: Depression, STR: Stress

**Full Sample:** utilized religion and mental escape to cope with homesickness, expressed anxiety, depression, and stress symptoms

**White:** utilized mental escape to cope with homesickness, expressed anxiety, depression and stress symptoms

**African American:** utilized religion to cope with homesickness and only expressed stress symptoms

**Asian/Pacific Islander:** utilized social support, religion, and mental escape to cope with homesickness and didn't express distress symptoms

## Conclusions

Our sample expressed moderate levels of homesickness, which aligns with existing research that posit that homesickness is a common experience while in college.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore it is suggested that African American students encounter certain challenges that lead to heightened homesickness levels compared to white students (e.g., perceived discrimination and racism, underrepresentation,) that hinders adjustment, leading to feelings of homesickness.<sup>5</sup> Although a preferred coping strategy for homesickness, mental escape is a maladaptive strategy linked to distress symptoms which explains the distress expressed by White students when homesick.<sup>6</sup> African American students utilize religious coping which is linked to decreased anxiety and depression symptoms.<sup>7</sup> Asian students utilized religion and mental escape which is consistent with previous literature except the use of social support which was found to not be as common due to the fear of the consequences of problem disclosure to others.<sup>8</sup> Certain limitations of the study include the use of cross-sectional data, a relatively small sample size, and lack of access to modern questionnaires.

## Take-Home Message

Homesickness can be a relatively common experience for undergraduate students and must be further investigated considering its impact across various racial groups. Further insight into the variables contributing to heightened levels of homesickness across different racial groups would encourage greater allocation of resources targeting higher-risk populations to help facilitate an easier transition to or adjustment in college.

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