Social Psychology of Education (2006) 9:381–403
DOI: 10.1007/s11218-006-9001-z

Racial identity beliefs and academic achievement: does being black hold students back?

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(Received: 19 November 2005; revised version: 10 June 2006)

Abstract. The examination of a student's racial identity beliefs along with the extent to which being Black is a central part of his or her self-concept provides a novel, insightful approach to understanding the relationship between racial identity and academic achievement (Chavous et al., 2003,). Using Sellers et al. (1998a) Multi-dimensional Model of Black Identity (MMBI) as a framework, this study investigated racial centrality, public regard and private regard beliefs in relation to the grade point average of African–American high-school students. A total of 289 African–American students from a large urban district participated in this study. Cluster analyses conducted on the three subscales of the MMBI on separate samples of 9th and 12th grade students replicated three of four racial identity profile groups previously identified by Chavous et al. (2003). Additionally, among both 9th and 12th grade students, *Alienated* students achieved significantly higher grade point averages than did *Idealized* students.

Key words: academic achievement; adolescents; black racial identity; high school

1. Introduction

Early Black racial identity research, in particular, that conducted by Eugene and Ruth Horwitz and Kenneth and Mamie Clark, suggested the existence of Black self-hatred manifested in a preference for White over Black among African–American children (Clark & Clark, 1939; Horwitz & Horwitz, 1939). Until the early 1970s, researchers corroborated these findings, producing data that seemingly indicated a swell of empirical support for the Black self-hatred hypothesis (Porter, 1971). However, with the onset of the Black Consciousness movement, the self-hatred thesis quickly fell out of favor as the identity and consciousness of African Americans was effectively transformed through the "redefinition of the constituent groups'

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identities and political consciousness" (Cole & Stewart, 1996, p. 99). The end result was such that the new emphasis on racial dignity and self-reliance caused many Blacks to see themselves in a new, drastically more positive manner than that reflected in the early racial identity literature.

The re-examination of racial identity research, coupled with the changing social climate, prompted a reconceptualization of racial identity. Black racial identity is in fact a complicated cognitive map which guides one's interactions with both others and the physical environment (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998). Any consideration of its development and manifestation must attend to a number of cognitive and situational components. While early racial identity research assumed only one overarching identity construct among African Americans that unilaterally reflected an individual's perceptions of his or her race, personal construct theory argues for the existence of multiple constructs that are more or less relevant in a particular situation (Phinney & Alpuria, 1990). This theory further asserts that less-relevant constructs are subordinate to more relevant constructs; thus it is not assumed that all African Americans normatively define themselves with respect to race; for some gender, religious affiliation, occupation, or some other criteria may be a more defining characteristic. Subsequently, one should not assume race as the super-ordinate cognitive construct of the self-concept for a psychologically "healthy" African American individual (Penn, Gaines, & Phillips, 1993).

Further, early considerations of Black racial identity confound what early researchers termed self-hatred with racial self-concept and the affective and evaluative judgments of one's race (Cross, 1991). More comprehensive models of Black racial identity should not assume a preference for Black or White to necessarily reflect either self-concept or self-esteem, though there is thought to be a relationship among these variables (Sellers et al., 1998b). The explicit separation of racial preference from one's positive or negative feelings about being Black and the extent to which one considers race as the most central component of one's self-concept allows for subtle differences among African Americans in the manner in which racial identity is manifested.

1.1. A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MODEL OF RACIAL IDENTITY

In an effort to provide an integrated view of African American racial identity that reflects these components, Sellers (1993) introduced the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI). The MMRI is based upon four assumptions. First, *Black racial identity is assumed to consist of both situationally determined and stable properties*. While some situations may encourage African Americans to define themselves with respect to racial group membership, in others, race may be substantially less salient, thus

activating other aspects of one's identity. At the same time, however, in situations perceived to be ambiguous, the extent to which race is a superordinate construct in one's self-concept will determine the manner in which one interprets seemingly neutral events with respect to racial connotations (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). Additionally, among African Americans, the regard with which one holds Blacks is thought to remain relatively stable over time (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke 1998a).

Second, this model assumes that *all individuals have a number of different hierarchically ordered identities*. Previous research suggests an array of identity constructs within the individual (Penn et al., 1993). While many popular models of racial identity development assume the superordinate status of race among African Americans, the Multidimensional Model of Black Identify (MMBI) conceptualizes racial identity as only one of many constructs within the individual (Sellers et al., 1998a). The extent to which an individual views racial identity as the most central component of his or her self-concept will hold important implications for the meaning one ascribes to being an African American (Sellers et al., 1998b).

Third, the model assumes that *an individuals' perception of his or her racial identity is the most valid indicator of his or her racial identity*. This stands in stark contrast to early models of racial identity, which focus on behavioral indicators as a means to understand the self (i.e. Horwitz & Horwitz, 1939). Although the model does assume a correlation between race-related behaviors and racial self-concept, it asserts that overt behavior is often constrained by contextual factors, while subjective self-perceptions differentiate affective and evaluative race judgments from other constructs and allow for the role of the individual in the construction of one's racial self-concept (Sellers et al., 1998a).

Lastly, the model assumes *individual differences in perceptions of what it means to be an African American*. While many "stage" models of Black racial identity propose an evolution from a "bad", underdeveloped racial identity to one that is "good", the MMRI does not issue judgment as to what constitutes a healthy or unhealthy racial identity (Sellers et al., 1998a). Instead, the model asserts that the efficacy of one's racial identity is dependent upon the demands of a particular environment.

Based upon these assumptions, the MMRI posits that Black racial identity is composed of four distinct dimensions. The first, *racial salience*, refers to the extent to which race is a relevant aspect of one's self-concept at a particular moment in time. It is considered to be the most context-dependent component of racial identity, serving as a mediator between the more stable components of racial identity and one's interpretation of and behavior in a particular situation. The second dimension, *racial centrality*, refers to the extent to which one defines him or herself in terms of race. Racial centrality is assumed to be a stable component of racial identity. Its inclusion in the model is based upon research that suggests

individual differences as to the relevance of race among African Americans (Cross, 1991). The third dimension, *racial regard*, refers to both the effective and evaluative judgments that one forms regarding his or her race (*private regard*) and one's perception of others' view of African Americans (*public regard*). Its inclusion in the model is based upon research regarding collective self-esteem that argues for both a public and private component (Crocker, Lubtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994). While early racial identity research argued that an awareness of discriminatory practices (public regard) would inspire self-hatred based upon one's race (private regard), recent studies have suggested that this is not the case (O'Conner, 1999; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). The final dimension, *racial ideology*, reflects the manner in which one feels members of the race should behave. It is likely that African Americans embrace a number of different ideologies relative to the demands of particular situations and environments (Sellers et al., 1998a).

1.2. RACIAL IDENTITY PROFILES AND CLUSTERS

An innovative and beneficial application of the MMBI involves the identification of racial identity profiles. It is likely that three of the outlined components of racial identity: racial centrality, private regard, and public regard, do not function independently (Chavous et al., 2003; Cross, Strauss, & Fhagen-Smith, 1999). Rather, it would seem to be the case that these variables interact with one another to influence attitudes and behaviors (Chavous et al., 2003). Racial identity profiles are the composite representation of racial centrality, public regard, and private regard relative to group norms for the purposes of a qualitative classification of one's racial beliefs. This methodological practice has introduced important revelations with regard to the relationship among racial identity attitudes, demographic, psychological, and performance factors (Chavous et al., 2003; Cross et al., 1999; Sellers et al., 1998b). Racial identity profiles describe types of individuals within the African American community, drawing attention to characteristics that may facilitate or impede certain behaviors and attitudes in a particular context (Cross et al., 1999). The profile approach to examining racial identity promotes a diverse view of African Americans, paying homage to the complexity and heterogeneity that exists within the group (Neville & Lilly, 2000).

The profile approach to studying racial identity has only recently been developed and utilized (e.g. Carter, 1996; Neville & Lilly, 2000; Chavous et al., 2003). It is based upon Helms' (1995) argument for diversity among the different Nigrescence model identity statuses. Carter (1996) examined this assertion and identified three distinct within-status racial identity clusters: a Pro-White cluster, characterized by negative private and public regard for African Americans and low-racial centrality; a Racial-Confusion

cluster, characterized by opposing endorsements of public regard, private regard, and centrality; and a Racial Pride cluster, characterized by high levels of racial centrality, public regard, and private regard. Neville and Lilly (2000) expanded this conception to consider racial identity profiles and their relation to psychological distress among African American college students. Although the authors failed to duplicate all three of Carter's (1996) racial identity profiles – college students in this sample expressed racial identity beliefs that were consistent with only the Racial Pride and Racial Confusion Clusters – the data did suggest that individuals in the racial pride cluster experience significantly less psychological distress in academic settings than did individuals in the racial confusion cluster.

Chavous et al. (2003) further extended the applicability of racial identity profiles, addressing their relation to academic beliefs, performance, and later attainment. Based upon the utilization of three of the subscales of the *Multi-dimensional Inventory of Black Identity* (MIBI; Sellers et al., 1998a): racial centrality, private regard, and public regard, the authors identified four Black racial identity clusters. The first is an *Idealized* racial identity cluster, which is characterized by high levels of racial centrality, private regard, and public regard. A second racial identity profile identified in this study is an *Alienated* racial identity cluster, which is characterized by low levels of racial centrality, low levels of private regard, and low levels of public regard. A third racial identity profile identified in this study is the *Buffering/Defensive* racial identity cluster, which is characterized by a high level of racial centrality and private regard and a low level of public regard. The fourth racial identity profile identified in this study is the *Low connectedness/High affinity* racial identity cluster, which is characterized by a low level of racial centrality, a high level of private regard and a low level of public regard.

1.3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF RACIAL IDENTITY

While the work of Chavous et al. (2003) provided valuable insight with regard to the examination of Black racial identity and its relation to academic beliefs and outcomes, some considerations were ignored in this examination that have been deemed important in the racial identity literature. For example, Chavous and her colleagues restricted their sample to the 12th grade students of blue collar families who obtained grade point averages below 3.0. While this did result in the recruitment of a fairly large sample size, these restrictions prohibited the examination of racial identity profiles across ages and levels of academic achievement for a truly diverse sample such as would be found in many urban school districts.

Previous researchers have suggested that individuals construct qualitatively different racial identity beliefs based upon the challenges that are inherent to a particular point in one's life (Cross et al., 1999). Mainstream

identity theorists suggest that individuals enter adolescence with an unclear self-concept; the developmental process through which one "takes ownership" of the self-concept occurs as a result of self-exploration and self-reflection (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). Phinney (1989) reconceptualized the Erikson/Marcia model of identity development to consider the unique manifestation of this process for different racial and racial minority groups. According to Phinney, individuals enter adolescence with poorly developed racial identities, enter an identity crisis period, during which time the challenges associated with racial or racial group membership are confronted and, assuming one is able to successfully resolve these challenges, formulate a "positive" racial identity. This vision of racial identity development, much like the Nigrescence models of Black identity development, is strikingly linear and unidirectional (Cross, 1998).

In response to this rather limited view of Black racial identity development over the lifespan, Parham (1989) introduced the term *nigrescence recycling*, which refers to the manner in which an individual reconsiders his or her racial self-concept based upon the specific "encounter episodes" one experiences at different periods in life. Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) assert that African Americans pass through six periods in which an individual will face unique challenges that precipitate the reconceptualization of one's racial identity: infancy and childhood, preadolescence, adolescence, late adolescence and early adulthood, adulthood, and adult identity refinement. The nigrescence recycling inspired by the period-specific trials that one faces encourages the development of an racial identity that is enhanced by the periodic, context-specific re-examination of what it means to be Black.

These findings suggest that students at different points in their high-school career may construct qualitatively different views of Black racial identity. The racial identity of ninth grade adolescents reflects a range of influences that differ significantly from those of the 12th grade student who is preparing to enter adulthood (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001). While early adolescents' black racial identity may reflect low-racial centrality, as significance is placed on other aspects of the self-concept, by late adolescence/early adulthood, a period of examination and exploration may inspire the adoption of a Black racial identity in which race is the central construct (Scott Jr., 2003). Further, while the young adolescents' relative inexperience in life prevents him or her from anticipating the multiple issues that relate to being classified as an African American, as one progresses through the lifespan, he or she is likely to acquire a wisdom that contributes to the development of one's racial self-concept and racial self-esteem (Parham, 1989). As such, the first purpose of this study is to test for the replication of the four previously discovered racial identity profiles across grade levels.

1.4. RACIAL IDENTITY AND ACHIEVEMENT

Chavous et al. (2003) reported that *Alienated* students expressed the lowest levels of academic efficacy, school importance, school relevance, and school attachment among the four racial identity profile groups, while *Idealized* students expressed the highest levels of each variable. This finding suggests that African American students' composite racial centrality, private regard, and public regard beliefs relate to educational attitudes and outcomes.

However, Chavous and her colleagues further restrict the sample to students with grade point averages below 3.0. This constraint not only limits the generalizability of the study's results but also confines analysis of the relationship between Black racial identity and academic achievement. As a result, the reported grade point averages for the four racial identity profile groups – *Idealized, Buffering/Defensive, Low Connectedness/High affinity, and Alienated* – all fall within a fairly narrow range. Additionally, the highest reported grade point average, 2.21, is attributed to both the idealized and alienated racial identity profiles, constructs that are at seemingly opposite poles. Subsequently, a second purpose of this study is to further investigate the relationship between Black racial identity beliefs and academic achievement for students who exhibit a wide range of academic performance.

With respect to the relationship between racial identity and academic outcomes, researchers generally fall into one of two perspectives when attempting to understand achievement and achievement related behaviors among African American students: one which contends that Black racial identity impedes academic success and one which asserts that Black racial identity facilitates achievement (Chavous et al., 2003). Those models of the former perspective argue that African American youth come to recognize existing systemic barriers to their success and subsequently distance themselves from behaviors that would ensure educational success because of a belief that these behaviors are unlikely to lead to success and prosperity (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1988).

Further, researchers who operate out of this paradigm assert that African American students tend to devalue domains in which Blacks have traditionally been unsuccessful, thus protecting one's self-esteem against failure (Graham, Taylor, & Hudley 1998; Hughes & Demo, 1989). Because of (inaccurate) perceptions of a lack of academic ability among people of color, some African American students come to reject achievement related attitudes and behaviors; as a result, the correlation between self-esteem and academic outcomes decreases steadily among African American students (especially males) over time (Osborne, 1997). Some African American students deliberately reject academic achievement as "acting white," instead choosing to play the role of class clown or adopting other modes of

creative expression embraced more readily by one's African American peers (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1990).

Additionally, *stereotype threat*, or the situational threat that stems from the prevailing image of African Americans as intellectually inferior, places an emotional and cognitive burden on the individual's self-concept, as the threat of conforming to the damaging anti-intellectual stereotype produces high levels of anxiety which negatively influence agency beliefs and performance in academic settings (Aronson, Quinn, & Spencer, 1998; Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Steele, 1992; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Individuals who identify with African Americans – those for whom being Black is a core element of their self-concept, based on the MMRI—are more susceptible to stereotype threat than those who do not (Steele, 1992; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Subsequently, self-efficacy for academic achievement is lower among African American students than it is among white students, even though the concept seemingly has no relation to the self-esteem of Blacks (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995).

Conversely, a second perspective asserts that a deliberate, self-chosen affiliation with African American culture is a positive decision toward academic success. There is a noteworthy historic basis for the link between African American culture and academic valuation and achievement (Anderson, 1988; Cross, 1998). Additionally, students of African American parents who socialize their children to be aware of racially motivated barriers to their future success attained higher grades than those students who did not receive Black socialization messages from their parents (Murray, Stokes, & Peacock, 1999). Further, an awareness of the evils of racism and discrimination may prompt African American students to develop alternate modes of expression, as compared with those of the mainstream, embracing events, symbols, and meanings that allow them to experience a positive, "healthy" self-concept (Tatum, 1997).

In a manner consistent with the assumption of multiple, hierarchically ordered self-concept constructs, Perry et al. (2003) argue that African American students must successfully negotiate three often-contradictory identity constructs: that which defines the self as an African American, that which defines the self as a member of mainstream society and that which defines the self as a disparaged and stigmatized minority group member. Subsequently, the resolution of what it means to be Black in a school setting is often rife with problems. African American students are presented with the challenge of balancing identity constructs that reflect an awareness of the existence of discriminative forces, embracing the contingency between effort and achievement and recognizing the contradictory and erroneous nature of mainstream perceptions of the intelligence and competence of African Americans. High-achieving African Americans are then those who are able to reflect a measure of cultural pride while successfully navigating a contradictory structure that simultaneously advocates

academic success while restricting access to the opportunities and accolades that correspond to high levels of achievement. As a result, high levels of academic achievement are usually found among those African American students who exhibited an awareness of discriminatory structural barriers while simultaneously embracing a commitment to the principles of academic achievement (O'Connor, 1999).

In an effort to address the issues of racial identity development and its relation to achievement, the following research questions were investigated:

1. Do both 9th grade students and 12th grade students display the same racial identity profiles as identified by Chavous et al. (2003)?
2. Do students of different racial identity profiles differ with respect to academic achievement across grade levels, and if so, how?

2. Methodology

2.1. SUBJECTS

A total of 289 African American high school students from three public high schools in a large, Midwestern school district participated in this study. Approximately 56% of the study body in the district is African American. Among the African American student population in the district, the graduation rate is 62.7%. Further, only 48.7% and 33.1% of African American students were assessed as proficient in reading and mathematics, respectively.

Schools were selected to maximize variance in socioeconomic status and graduation rate while roughly holding racial composition equal. The selection of these three participating high schools is based upon the assumption that they represent a degree of socioeconomic and academic diversity within the African American population that adequately represents the larger urban African American student population. School A is currently in a state of *academic emergency*, meeting only 3 out of 12 state mandated performance indicators. Its student body is over 95% African American; additionally, 95% of the student body is classified as economically disadvantaged. Approximately 56% of its students graduate from high school; these students surpass the state proficiency level in both Reading and Writing, but fail to meet the state requirements in Citizenship, Math or Science. Based upon the adequate yearly progress goals for the 2002–2003 school year, however, only 65% of African American students exhibited acceptable progress in Reading while only 43% of students met this standard in Mathematics.

In contrast, school B is rated an *effective* school by the state of Ohio; its students meet nine out of 12 state mandated performance indicators. Its' student body is almost 100% African American, though only 65% of the student body is classified as economically disadvantaged. Almost 98% of its

students graduate from high school and these students meet state required proficiency levels in four of five subjects: Citizenship, Reading, Writing, and Science, falling just 0.9 of a point short of the state requirement for Mathematics. Based upon the adequate yearly progress goals for the 2002–2003 school year, almost 90% of African American students exhibited acceptable progress in Reading, while almost 70% of students met this standard in Mathematics.

School C is currently in a state of *academic emergency*, meeting only 3 out of 12 state mandated performance indicators. Its student body is 94% African American and almost 98% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged. Approximately 57% of its students graduate from high school; these students surpass the state proficiency level in both Reading and Writing, but fail to meet the state requirements in Citizenship, Math, or Science. However, based upon the adequate yearly progress goals for the 2002–2003 school year, 98.3% of African American students exhibited acceptable progress in Reading while 98.7% of students met this standard in Mathematics.

Student-participants in this study self-identified as African American based upon information provided as to the race of each students' mother and father. The racial categorization from which students would report each parent's race was that which was used by the district: *African American, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, White*, or *Other*. Ultimately, only students who self-identified two African American parents were included in this analysis.

Descriptive statistics are displayed in Table I. Students in the three high-school samples differed significantly in both student age ($F(2, 286) = 805.29$, $p < 0.05$) and grade point average ($F(2, 286) = 6.32$, $p < 0.05$); post hoc analyses suggest that students in the high school A sample were significantly younger and achieved significantly lower grade point averages than did students in both high school B and high school C samples, which did not differ significantly from each other with respect to either age or grade point average. High School A students who participated in this study were

Table I. Age, gender, and GPAs for the three high-schools and the two grade levels

	N	Males	Females	Age (SD)	GPA(SD)
High school A	153	72	81	14.80 (.62)	2.12 (.98)
High school B	71	31	40	17.58 (.53)	2.43 (.65)
High school C	65	28	37	17.66 (.61)	2.51 (.64)
Freshmen students	153	81	72	14.80 (.62)	2.12 (.98)
Senior students	136	59	77	17.63 (.57)	2.47 (.64)
Total	289	131	158	16.13 (1.53)	2.28 (.85)

ninth grade students, while students from both High Schools B and C were 12th grade students. Given these differences, separate analyses were conducted on the data for each research question, treating this sample as two distinct data sets, one composed solely of freshmen students from school A ($N = 153$) and a combined sample of senior students from schools B and C ($N = 136$).

2.2. INSTRUMENT

Racial identity was measured utilizing the MIBI (Sellers et al., 1998a), based on the MMRI, which considers African American racial identity with respect to four components, *salience*, or the extent to which one's race is a relevant part of one's self-concept at a particular point in time; *centrality*, or the extent to which one defines him or herself in terms of race; *regard*, or a person's affective and evaluative judgment of his or her race; and *ideology*, or a person's beliefs, opinions, and attitudes with respect to how African Americans should behave (Sellers et al., 1998b).

The instrument consists of three subscales: a racial centrality subscale, a racial regard subscale and a racial ideology subscale. Following the methodology of Chavous et al. (2003), which sought to construct meaningful racial identity profiles based solely upon the centrality and regard beliefs of adolescents, this study used a shortened version of the instrument containing only the Racial Centrality, Private Regard, and Public Regard subscales, yielding 20 items.

The racial regard subscale is composed of a public regard and a private regard subscale. *Public regard* refers to one's assessment of the perceptions of others towards African Americans. This subscale is based upon early racial identity research, which asserted that identity development is based heavily upon beliefs concerning the manner in which one is viewed (Horwitz & Horwitz, 1939). More recent study concerning the devaluation of African Americans strongly suggests that awareness (i.e. high levels of public regard) prevents African Americans from internalizing the negative effects of racism (White & Burke, 1987).

Private regard refers to one's racial self-esteem, or the individual's perception, be it positive or negative, about African Americans (Sellers et al., 1998b). While early research on African American racial identity purported to assess both public and private regard using the Doll Test (Clark & Clark, 1939; i.e. Horwitz 1939), this model considers the affective and evaluative judgments one makes about themselves separately from the influence of others.

Evidence of the convergent validity of the MIBI was established in correlations with the *Racial Identity Attitude Scale* (RIAS), an instrument to assess the developmental progression of Black racial identity (Helms & Parham, 1990). Both the centrality and private regard subscales of the

MIBI were negatively related to the *pre-encounter*, or most primitive stage of Black racial identity development. Additionally, significant intercorrelations were found between the MIBI and the *Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure* (MEIM) (Phinney, 1989). Both the centrality and private regard subscales were positively correlated with the affirmation belonging and identity achievement subscales; additionally, the private regard subscale correlated with the racial behaviors subscale (Sellers et al., 1998a).

The centrality and private regard subscales of the MIBI also correlated with the frequency of race-related behaviors. A significant negative correlation was found between scores on the centrality subscale and contact with Whites. Individuals with an African American best friend also reported significantly higher Centrality and Private regard scores than did those without an African American best friend.

Finally, with respect to the reliability of the instrument, the subscales of the MIBI exhibited acceptable alpha coefficients ranging from 0.71 to 0.81 (Sellers et al., 1998b).

2.3. PROCEDURE

In March of 2004, the students at each high school site were apprised of the objectives of the research study. Parental consent forms were distributed to each African American and biracial (students with at least one African American parent) student. Students were informed that participation in this study was contingent upon the prompt return of the parental consent form to his or her site's appointed classroom teacher.

Student who elected to participate in this study were provided with the study's instrument; the name of each student was preprinted on the top sheet of this instrument, which corresponded to an identity number assigned by the study's senior author and printed on the first sheet of the actual instrument. Student-participants confirmed their identity as reflected on the top sheet of the instrument and then detached and discarded the top sheet, leaving only an identification number on the study's instruments. This information was completed by the students and submitted to the senior author of the study (who is himself an African American) at the conclusion of the appointed time period. After the completion of the racial identity instrument, the senior author of the study submitted the student-participant list to each building site's high school guidance counselors, who provided cumulative grade point average information for each student-participant in the study.

3. Results

To compare the similarity of Black racial identity profiles obtained among student participants in both the freshmen and senior data set to those of

Chavous et al. (2003), the suggested number of distinct racial identity profiles for this data set were identified utilizing Ward's method of linkage and the squared Euclidean distance. Student scores in on the three variables (centrality, public regard, and private regard) were first standardized. This standardization represented each students' score on the three variables relative to his or her same-grade peers. Next, the agglomeration schedule, which determines the number of clusters that best fit the data set, was examined for large decreases in the coefficient, which indicates the number of distinct clusters that can be derived from the data set. In each instance, the agglomeration schedule suggested the existence of three distinct clusters. *K*-means iterative cluster analysis was then conducted based upon a three-cluster solution utilizing the three standardized subscale scores of the MIBI. This step both characterizes students of each cluster based upon scores on the three subscales of the instrument relative to group means and identifies and reports the number of students who fall within each classification. This statistical analysis has been previously supported in the literature (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984; Chavous et al., 2003).

Figure 1 presents the profiles that emerged for the freshmen student sample. The first cluster ($n = 44, 29\%$) is characterized by high levels of racial centrality, public regard and private regard relative to the mean scores for these variables. Chavous and her colleagues identified and labeled this profile group *Idealized*. A second cluster ($n = 75$, 49%) is characterized by low levels of public regard, and high levels of both racial centrality and private regard relative to the mean scores for these variables. Chavous and her colleagues identified and labeled this profile group *Buffering/Defensive*. A third cluster, ($n = 34$, 22%) is characterized by low levels of racial

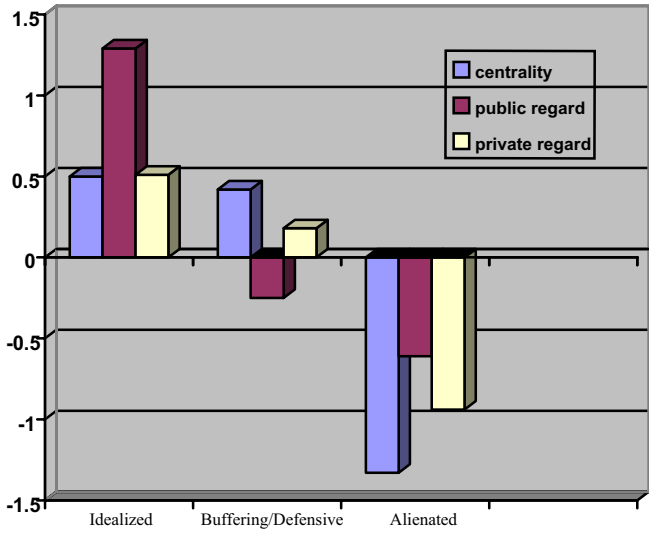

Figure 1. Summary of racial identity cluster groups for the Freshmen sample

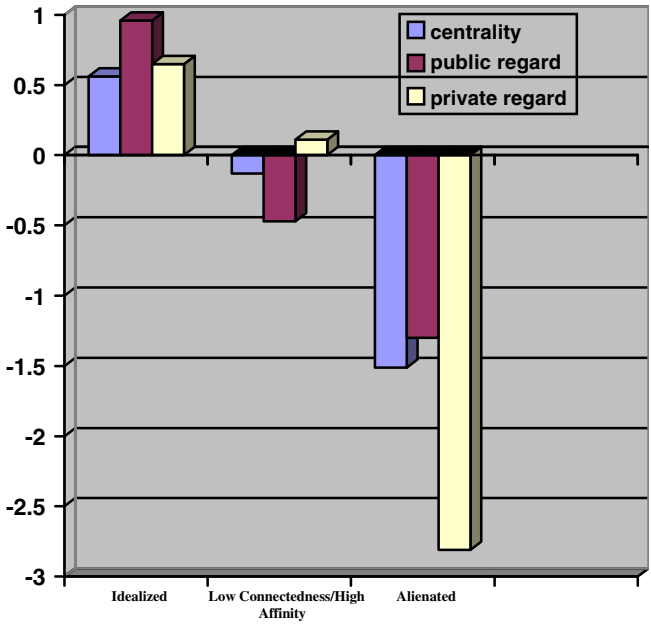

Figure 2. Summary of racial identity cluster groups for the senior sample

centrality, public regard, and private regard relative to the mean scores for these variables. Chavous and her colleagues identified and labeled this profile group *Alienated*.

Figure 2 presents the profiles that emerged for the senior student sample. The first cluster ($n = 41$, 30%) is characterized by high levels of racial centrality, public regard and private regard relative to the mean scores for these variables. Chavous and her colleagues identified and labeled this group *Idealized*. A second cluster group ($n = 81$, 60%) is characterized by high levels of private regard and low levels of both racial centrality and public regard relative to the mean scores for these variables. Chavous and her colleagues identified and labeled this group *Low Connectedness/High Affinity*. Finally, a third cluster ($n = 14$, 10%) is characterized by low levels of racial centrality, public regard, and private regard relative to the mean scores for these variables. Chavous and her colleagues identified and labeled this group *Alienated*. Post hoc Chi-square analysis of the freshmen and senior racial identity profile groups reveal no significant differences for distribution of racial identity profile membership by gender ($\chi^2(2) = 5.050$, $p > 0.05$) or school setting ($\chi^2(4) = 3.425$, $p > 0.05$). The results suggest that while all four of the different clusters proposed by Chavous et al. (2003) appeared, only three appeared at a time and one of the three varied across grade levels.

Additionally, a 2×2 analysis of variance was used to determine if the relationship between racial identity profile group and grade point average

differed between freshmen and senior high-school students. For this analysis, only the Idealized and Alienated racial identity profile groups were considered because only these two groups were replicated for both 9th and 12th grade students. Results of the 2×2 analysis of variance are displayed in Table II. Means and standard deviations for both freshmen and senior high-school students are displayed in Table III. These means are depicted in Figure 3. The data indicated that among both freshmen and seniors, *Alienated* students achieve significantly higher grade point averages than do *Idealized* students ($F(1, 129) = 7.219$, $p < 0.01$, $\acute{\omega} = 0.053$). The reported effect size for this examination indicates that a "moderate" amount of the total variance in grade point average is accounted for by racial identity profile group membership (Keppel, 1991).

4. Discussion

The data suggest the existence of three distinct patterns of racial identity beliefs among 9th grade students: *Idealized, Buffering/Defensive, and Alienated*, and three among 12th grade students: *Idealized, Low Connectedness/High Affinity, and Alienated*. Additionally, for the two racial identity profile groups that appear across both grade levels, the data reveal a significant difference in grade point average, namely that students of the *Alienated* racial identity profile group achieved significantly higher grade

Table II. 2×2 Analysis of variance for freshmen and senior idealized and alienated racial identity profile groups

	Df	SS	MS	*F*
Cluster	1	4.445	4.445	7.219*
Grade Level	1	2.283	2.283	3.707
Cluster×Grade level	1	0.373	0.373	0.605
Error	129	79.429	0.616	
Total	132	87.704		

* $p < 0.01$

Table III. Means and standard deviations for grade point average by student classification and racial identity profile group.

	Idealized M(SD)	Alienated M(SD)
Freshmen	2.12 (0.93)	2.54 (0.86)
Seniors	2.43 (0.53)	2.71 (0.68)

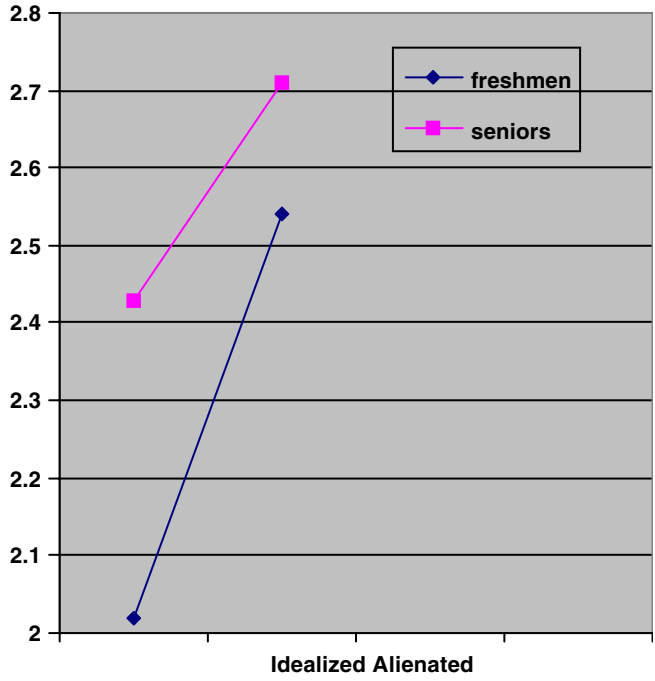

Figure 3. Mean grade point average by racial identity profile group for both the Freshmen and Senior students

point averages than did students of the *Idealized* racial identity profile group.

Among the 9th and 12th grade samples, students expressed attitudes that were consistent with Chavous et al.'s (2003) four racial identity profile groups: *Idealized, Low Connectedness/High Affinity, Buffering/Defensive*, and *Alienated*. Both samples contained students at the two extremes in relation to the components of racial identity; *Idealized* students, who expressed high levels of racial centrality, public regard and private regard, and *Alienated* students, who expressed low levels of racial centrality, public regard and private regard. These two cluster profiles have consistently been found among African American samples (Carter, 1996; Neville & Lilly, 2000). The discovery of these two homogeneous, conceptually meaningful racial identity profiles suggests drastic differences in the way that different adolescents internalize and interpret the African American experience. It would seem that some young people readily use raciality to define themselves and that this deliberate association with African Americanism is based upon a positive evaluative judgment of their race and their positive perception of others' assessment of African Americans. Conversely, other adolescents who choose not to define themselves with respect to race perceive African Americans negatively and believe that society devalues

African Americans. Seemingly, both these groups are immune to the pressures of being Black in a racially oppressive society; *Idealized* students are insulated by the positive regard they have and believe others have for African Americans, and *Alienated* students are protected by their attitudinal disassociation from African Americanism.

The 9th grade sample produced a third profile group, *Buffering/Defensive*, students who expressed higher than average levels of racial centrality and private regard, but low levels of public regard. This group is similar to Neville and Lilly's (2000) *Engaged Internalization* cluster, which was composed of individuals who frequently think about race and participate in a number of Black related activities, but are keenly aware of the impact of racism on everyday life. Researchers have suggested high-achievement among students who adopt this perspective, within a culturally sensitive context that promotes high expectations for student success (Perry et al., 2003). Unfortunately, there is an extensive literature that suggests a "brutal pessimism" with respect to the achievement prospects of African American students (Guthrie, 1998; Hilliard, 2001; Perry et. al., 2003). Indeed, the quality of educational resources and services provided for many African American students in urban high schools is neither sufficiently "culturally sensitive" nor pedagogically adequate to engender a culture of achievement among students of the *Buffering/Defensive* profile group.

The 12th grade sample also produced a third, qualitatively different racial identity profile group, *Low Connectedness/High Affinity*. These students expressed low levels of centrality and public regard and higher than average levels of private regard, indicating that they held positive feelings about African Americans, but were reluctant to self-identify as Black due to their perceptions of discrimination and racism. It would stand to reason that this group is most similar to *Alienated* students; their awareness of unfair practices based upon bigotry may lead them to suppress race in their self-concept, although they differ from *Alienated* students in that they do not personally hold any negative feelings about African Americans.

Although this study's design was not longitudinal, it is still useful to note differences in the racial identity beliefs expressed by the 9^{th} and 12^{th} grade samples. The *Buffering/Defensive* group was only found among younger students, while the *Low Connectedness/High Affinity* was identified only in the 12th grade sample. This is consistent with previous research that suggests African Americans revisit and revise their racial self-concept at different points in the lifespan based upon the unique challenges of that particular period in their lives (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Parham, 1989). The attrition process resulting in only a fraction of the freshmen remaining in school for their senior year may contribute to a shift among some students from an ethnocentric perspective to one that expresses significantly lower levels of racial centrality. More specifically, while younger students may still struggle to reconcile what it means to be Black with the manner in which

African Americans are perceived by others, older students, after years of being inundated with negative images of African Americans in the media and seeing a number of their peers perform at a level below expectations and ultimately drop out of school, may be resigned to abandon defensiveness regarding their race and choose instead to define themselves by qualities other than their race.

Based on the findings of Chavous et al. (2003), it was expected that there would be significant differences between racial identity profile groups with respect to grade point average, namely that *Idealized* students would outperform students of other racial identity groups. Instead, quite the reverse was found. Among a sample that included students reporting a wide range of academic achievement, *Alienated* students achieved significantly higher grade point averages than did *Idealized* students. This relationship was consistent across grade levels; i.e., in both freshmen and senior samples, *Alienated* students manifested significantly higher levels of academic achievement than did *Idealized* students.

According to early examinations of the relationship between Black racial identity and academic achievement conducted by Ogbu and others, Black students' low levels of achievement were said to be due in part to their failure to adopt the American perspective that suggests a contingency between effort, academic achievement, and lifelong success. Assumedly, African Americans instead focused on the ways in which the opportunity structure fails to reward their efforts to the same extent as those of Whites. Qualitative research conducted by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) described this phenomenon as "racelessness," suggesting that students who minimize the connection to other African Americans and assimilate into school culture improve their chances of school success. Similarly, *Alienated* students expressed lower than average levels of racial centrality, public regard, and private regard, which may suggest that they are in fact disassociating themselves from a group that they perceive negatively. As *Alienated* students represent the "high achievers" within this sample, it would seem that these students may have embraced the notion that the American social system is "fundamentally egalitarian and meritocratic" if only they can place distance between themselves and the onus of their race (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995).

More recently, in stark contrast to the assertions of Fordham and Ogbu, O'Connor (1999) asserts that there is a great deal of variability among academically successful Black students, some adopting discourses that maximize race while others minimize race but afford dominance to other self-constructs. The one criterion shared by all successful African American students was an awareness of the discriminatory forces that attempt to impede the economic success of African Americans. While Fordham and Ogbu hypothesized that this awareness would lead to the development of an oppositional identity, O'Connor (1999) suggests that dissonance inspired

by the unique struggle of African Americans for upward mobility can be tempered by the adoption of a pro-achievement academic orientation. Subsequently, low levels of public and private regard among *Alienated* students may be offset by an academic orientation that embraces pro-achievement attitudes and behaviors.

A second plausible explanation for differences in the academic performance between *Alienated* and *Idealized* students involves the peer group and the manner in which it plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes about achievement. Perry et al. (2003) argue that the academic success of African American students is based in part upon their successful management of three oft-competing identity constructs: "... as members of a castelike group, ... as members of mainstream society and ... as members of a cultural group in opposition to which whiteness historically and contemporarily continues to be defined" (p. 104). Environments that are devoid of individualistic, competitive, stratification and promote a strong culture of achievement among all students are most likely to contribute to high levels of achievement among Black students. In its absence, academically successful African American students may perceive the need to advance only one of the three competing identity constructs over the other two. *Alienated* students may be those who identify with the White majority foremost in their self-concept, as reflected in their expression of significantly lower levels of racial identity.

Why might it matter that the high-achieving African American students in this sample do not seem to readily self-identify as Black? The construction of a self-concept dominated by a mainstream orientation may inspire the adoption of a value orientation that discourage the acquisition of cultural capital and impede the formulation of interpersonal relationships with other African American students. Steinberg et al. (1992) examined beliefs about the rewards of success among African American high-school students and concluded that it was extremely difficult for Black students to join a peer group that encouraged academic excellence. Additionally, Witherspoon, Speight, and Thomas (1997) concluded that for African Americans, there is a clear link between racial identity and the struggle for peer acceptance. The attitudes and behaviors that translate to peer acceptance in an academic setting may not necessarily be similar to those that lead to academic success.

Students who exhibit engagement behaviors such as those identified by Finn and Rock (1997) that lead to school success: coming to class and school on time, being prepared for and participating in classwork, avoiding disruptive behavior and expending effort towards completing assignments, are at times made to feel isolated by their less-motivated peers. Accordingly, *Alienated* students may be those high achievers who, by nature of their attitudes about school, are cut off from the social networks that exist within the high school. They may then respond by expressing attitudes

about their race that reflect a rejection of a group that they perceive as embracing attitudes and behaviors that are in opposition to the belief system of high-achieving students. The remaining racial identity profile groups would then be considered more similar to each other than to *Alienated* students in that they are composed of students who express high levels of private regard, which indicates a mutually high level of peer acceptance. This too is problematic in that it advances a vision of Black racial identity as deficit cultural model, one which promotes a paradigm of African American inferiority. Conversely, previous researchers have reported high levels of self-esteem and the adoption of achievement-related goals among students immersed in Afrocentric attitudes and behaviors (Spencer et al., 2001).

A particular strength of this research effort is that it is one of a small number of studies intended to pinpoint empirically derived racial identity profiles among African American high-school students. Group attitudes and beliefs are especially important in the psychological and social development of African Americans and the replication of Chavous et al.'s four racial identity profile groups among a more inclusive sample not only builds upon their work, but helps refute a monolithic, overly-simplistic view of Black racial identity.

A second strength of this study is that it explores the relationship between the intricate nature of Black racial identity beliefs and the differential manner in which they may facilitate or impede academic achievement, rather than adopting a comparative approach which merely presents the academic performance of Blacks relative to that of Whites. Hence, it reveals differences in group identification, affective, and evaluative judgments of one's race and awareness of racial barriers that shed light on the complex nature of racial identity and the ways in which it may influence behavior, particularly in educational settings.

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