Racial Ideology and Racial Centrality as Predictors of African American College Students' Academic Performance

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The study focuses on the relationship between racial identity and academic achievement for African American college students. The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) was used to assess the relationship between racial centrality, racial ideology, and academic performance. A total of 248 participants were recruited from a predominantly Black college and a predominantly White college and were administered the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) to assess their racial ideology and racial centrality. Participants also were asked to report their cumulative grade point averages (GPAs). Consistent with the MMRI, racial centrality moderates the relationship between racial ideology and academic performance such that assimilation and nationalist ideologies were negatively associated with GPA and a minority ideology was positively associated with GPA for students who scored high on racial centrality. Racial ideology was not a significant predictor of GPA for participants who scored low on racial centrality.

There has been some concern regarding the academic performance of African Americans in higher education. Relative to Whites, African Americans both apply to college at a lower rate and, once there, graduate at a lower rate (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995). There is also concern

that the number of African Americans who are obtaining college degrees may be declining from the zenith of the mid-1970s (Arbeiter, 1987; Cheatham, Tomlinson & Ward, 1990; Oliver, Rodriguez, & Mickelson, 1985). A number of structural reasons including socioeconomic status, racism, and inferior academic preparation have been proposed to explain the poorer academic performance of African American students (Dornbusch, Ritter, & Steinberg, 1991). Meanwhile, some scholars have focused on psychological and cultural variables in investigating African American college students' experiences including their academic performance (e.g., Allen, 1985; Baldwin, Duncan, & Bell, 1987; Fleming, 1983, 1984; Sedlacek, 1987). One of the psychological and cultural variables that has gained attention is racial identity.

RACIAL IDENTITY AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

The research on racial identity and academic achievement primarily has addressed the question of whether strong identification with being African American is detrimental or beneficial for African American student academic achievement. Some of the research suggests that for African American children, there is the potential for conflict between strongly identifying with one's race and strong academic performance. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) have suggested that for many African American youth, educational achievement is the domain of Whites and antithetical to being African American. Fordham (1988) discusses the concept of "racelessness," an identity in which one distances oneself from the Black community. She concludes that this identity leads to positive academic outcomes for Black students. Fordham further argues that if African Americans as a people are to excel academically, they must be willing to "encourage their children to evince behaviors and attitudes that suggest a lack of connectedness to the larger Black community" (p. 82). Although they did not measure racial identity directly, Steele and Aronson (1995) found evidence that suggests that African Americans' academic performance may be detrimentally affected by the negative stereotypes associated with their race. They found that African American college students whose race was primed performed worse than those students who did not receive a race prime. One might extrapolate from Steele and Aronson's findings that those individuals who chronically think of themselves as African Americans may be more susceptible over time to the detrimental effects of being in the stereotyped group.

Other research suggests that many African American students are able to both identify strongly with being Black and excel academically (Marryshow &

Boykin, 1992; Ogbu, 1985). They argue that for many African American youth, not only is academic achievement not antithetical to being African American but it is consistent with one's African American self-concept (Marryshow & Boykin, 1992). In an empirical investigation of Fordham's (1988) assertions regarding racelessness in African Americans, Arroyo and Zigler (1995) developed a Racelessness scale and examined its relationship to academic achievement, racial identity (as measured by the Collective Self-Esteem scale), and measures of psychological well-being in samples of African American and White high school students. In general, they found relatively little support for a higher prevalence of racelessness in high achieving African American students as compared to White high achievers. Interestingly, they also reported a significant positive correlation between African American students' scores on the Achievement subscale of their Racelessness scale and the students' scores on the Identity subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem scale. In other words, African American students who felt that race was an important part of their self-concept were also likely to believe in the use of education. Unfortunately, because Arroyo and Zigler do not report data on the differences in racial identity for high and low achieving African American students, we do not know if racial identity is related to *actual* academic performance in this sample.

Although there are several studies investigating the relationship between racial identity and academic performance in African American high school students (e.g., Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), our search of the literature failed to uncover a single study that directly assessed the relationship between racial identity and academic performance in a sample of African American college students. This failure to locate studies examining the relationship between racial identity and academic performance in a college sample was surprising, given the number of studies of African American racial identity with a college sample. In fact, one of the primary criticisms of the literature on racial identity has been that it has focused almost exclusively on African American college student samples (Sabnani & Ponterotto, 1992; Stokes, Murray, Peacock, & Kaiser, 1994). These studies have tended to focus on one of three areas. First, there have been validation studies that examine the psychometric properties of a measure of racial identity (e.g., Baldwin & Bell, 1985; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). Second, studies have focused on the relationship between racial identity and various race-related social or demographic experiences and behaviors (e.g., Cheatham et al., 1990; Pyant & Yanico, 1991; Taub & McEwen, 1992). The third area of focus has been investigating the association between racial identity and various measures of psychological well-being and social development (e.g., Baldwin, Brown, & Rackley, 1990; Cheatham et al., 1990;

Parham & Helms, 1985b). Unfortunately, we have little knowledge regarding the relationship between racial identity and one of the most relevant life tasks of African American college students—their academic performance.

Limitations in the racial identity literature may have helped to contribute to the dearth of empirical studies on the relationship between racial identity and academic performance in African American college students. One such limitation is the implicit assumption that race is the most central aspect of self for all African Americans. For example, Baldwin's (1984) conceptualization of African Self-Consciousness assumes that race is a primary defining characteristic for all people of African descent (Kambon, 1992). However, other research calls into question the validity of such an assumption (Ingram, 1989; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). Ingram (1989) found that a sample of African American college students rated gender, not race, as the most meaningful construct in describing themselves. Furthermore, Phinney and Alipuria (1990) conducted a study in which African American participants rated five identity domains (occupation, politics, religion, sex role, and ethnicity) on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from *not important* to *important*. The researchers found that ethnic identity ranked third, tying with religious identity, for the most important identity domain. Phinney and Alipuria also noted some variability in responses such that some participants rated ethnicity as the most important identity domain. This research suggests that an assumption that race is a relevant identity domain for all African Americans is untenable.

Another limitation in the current racial identity research is its failure to distinguish between various aspects or dimensions of racial identity. In particular, the African American racial identity literature has not clearly distinguished between whether the individual identifies with being Black and the individual's attitudes and beliefs regarding what it means to be Black. In attempting to distinguish between those who are and those who are not racially identified, many existing models of racial identity confound the person's particular philosophy regarding the meaning of being Black with the significance of race in the person's definition of self. For instance, Baldwin and Bell's (1985) measure of African Self-Consciousness interweaves items regarding identification with being Black with items that espouse a strong nationalist ideology. Similarly, even though the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS) produces four subscales, each subscale confounds items measuring identification with race and items measuring beliefs about what it means to be Black. Such confounding results in a conceptualization of racial identity in which a particular racial philosophy is considered optimal and other philosophies are considered deficient. For example, a stronger African Self-Consciousness score is considered to represent a more optimal state of mental

health (Baldwin, 1984), and racial attitudes from the Internalization subscale of the RIAS are considered to represent a higher level of identity development (Parham & Helms, 1985b).

MULTIDIMENSIONAL MODEL
OF RACIAL IDENTITY (MMRI)

MMRI is one model that does not assume that race is the defining characteristic for all African Americans or that there is an optimal African American identity (Sellers, Shelton et al., in press). The MMRI represents a synthesis of ideas from many of the preexisting models of identity. It defines racial identity as that part of the person's self-concept that is related to membership within a race. Specifically, the MMRI addresses (a) the significance of race in the individual's self-concept and (b) the individual's subjective meaning as to what it means to be Black. As a result, the MMRI takes a phenomenological approach, emphasizing the individual's self-perception as opposed to objective criteria in determining whether an individual is racially identified. Similarly, the model does not endorse any particular definition regarding what it means to be Black. The MMRI delineates four dimensions of racial identity in African Americans. These dimensions consist of identity salience, the centrality of the identity, the ideology associated with the identity, and the regard in which the person holds the group associated with the identity (see Sellers, Shelton et al., in press, for a detailed description of the dimensions).

The four dimensions are both independent and interrelated. As such, certain dimensions are more relevant to certain phenomena than other dimensions. The present research focuses on racial centrality and racial ideology in investigating African American college students' academic performance. *Racial centrality* refers to the extent to which a person normatively defines herself or himself with regard to race (Sellers, Shelton et al., in press). It is a measure of whether race is a core part of an individual's self-concept. In the case of centrality, we are referring to a cross-situationally stable dimension. It is concerned with whether, in general, race is a central referent for the individual's concept of self. Also implicit in this conceptualization of centrality is a hierarchical ranking of different identities with respect to the individual's core or main definition of self. Thus, centrality is concerned with the significance or importance of race in the self-concept.

Meanwhile, *racial ideology* is concerned with the meaning that the individual ascribes to being Black. It is defined as the general attributes, characteristics, and values that the individual associates with Black people. It

represents the person's philosophy about the ways in which African Americans should live and interact with society. Like racial centrality, racial ideology appears to be somewhat stable across situations (Shelton & Sellers, 1996). An analysis of the racial identity literature and other sources on African American life has resulted in the delineation of four racial ideologies. These ideologies include the following: nationalist, minority, assimilation, and humanist.

The nationalist ideology stresses the uniqueness of being Black. As such, the person views the African American experience as being different from that of any other group. A nationalist ideology posits that African Americans should be in control of their own destiny with minimal input from other groups. The minority ideology emphasizes the similarities between the oppression that African Americans face and the oppression of other groups. Like the nationalist ideology, individuals who espouse this philosophy are acutely aware of the oppression that continues to confront African Americans. However, the minority ideology sees a link between the oppression that African Americans face and that of other minority groups. Although the groups that are included in the minority in-group may vary according to the individual, the emphasis of this ideology is the view that the Black experience is in some way related to the experience of other oppressed groups. The assimilationist ideology is characterized by an emphasis on the similarities between African Americans and the rest of American society. A person with an assimilationist ideology acknowledges his or her status as an American and attempts to enter into the mainstream as much as possible. An assimilationist ideology does not necessarily imply a de-emphasis in the importance of being African American, nor does it necessarily imply a lack of recognition of racism in America. It simply emphasizes that Blacks have a role within the mainstream American society. Finally, the humanist ideology emphasizes the similarities among all humans. Persons with a humanist viewpoint are likely to view everyone as belonging to the same race—the human race. They do not think in terms of race, gender, class, or other distinguishing characteristics. A person espousing a humanist ideology often is concerned more with "larger" issues that face the human race (such as the environment, peace, and hunger). Although these four ideologies are delineated, the MMRI recognizes that individuals' racial ideologies may vary across different life domains (Sellers, Shelton et al., in press). For instance, a person may be nationalist in his or her political views but possess a more humanist view of personal relationships.

The MMRI has argued that the extent to which race is a central aspect of the individual self-concept moderates whether the individual's attitudes and beliefs regarding the meaning of race influences other phenomena (Sellers,

Shelton et al., in press). In a recent study, Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, and Smith (1996) found that the relationship between African Americans' affective feelings for Black people (private regard) and their personal self-esteem was moderated by their level of racial centrality. Specifically, there was no relationship between private regard and personal self-esteem for African Americans for whom race was not a central construct. On the other hand, African Americans' positive feelings toward Black people was significantly related to positive personal self-esteem for those individuals for whom race was a defining characteristic of their self-concept.

PRESENT STUDY

The present study examines the relationship between racial identity and academic performance in a sample of college students from a predominantly African American institution and a predominantly White institution. Specifically, we will investigate the independent associations between both racial centrality and racial ideology and cumulative grade point average (GPA). The work of Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggests that low racial centrality and endorsement of assimilation and humanist ideologies should be associated with higher GPAs. On the other hand, the work of Marryshow and Boykin (1992) suggests that high racial centrality and endorsement of nationalist and perhaps minority attitudes may also be associated with greater academic success. The present study will test the validity of both positions. Building on the Rowley et al. (1996) findings, we will also examine whether racial centrality moderates the relationship between racial ideology and cumulative GPA for a sample of African American students from a predominantly Black and a predominantly White institution. We expect that racial ideology should be significant to the academic performance of only those students for whom race is a central aspect of their self-concept.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Participants in this study consisted of 248 undergraduate students who identified themselves as African Americans. A total of 163 students attended a public, predominantly White university (PWU); 85 students attended a private, historically Black university (HBU). Both schools are located in the

mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The sample was 70.6% female. The median reported family income was approximately $53,700. The participants consisted of 121 first-year, 79 second-year, 29 third-year, and 17 fourth-year students. Two participants did not indicate their class. Preliminary analysis found no difference across schools in the proportion of female students or the distribution of classes. There was a significant difference in income level, with the students at the HBU reporting lower family incomes than the students at the PWU ($48,800 to $58,000).

MATERIALS

Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity

The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) is a paper-and-pencil instrument developed by Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, and Smith (1997) to measure the three stable constructs of the MMRI (centrality, ideology, and regard). The present study focuses specifically on the Centrality and Ideology scales. A 10-item scale with a 7-point Likert-type response scale was used to measure racial centrality. Participants were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with such items as "I have a strong attachment to other Black people" and "Being Black is an important reflection of who I am." Participants' scores were averaged across the 10 items such that higher scores correspond with higher levels of racial centrality. The scale yielded an acceptable level of internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$).

The Ideology scale of the MIBI consists of 4 subscales (Nationalist, Minority, Assimilation, and Humanist) that measure the individual's beliefs, opinions, and attitudes with respect to the way she or he feels the members of the race should act. These four subscales consist of the means of 11 items, each with a 7-point Likert-type response scale measuring the extent to which respondents agree or disagree with items. The Nationalist subscale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$) measures the extent to which an individual's racial ideology emphasizes the uniqueness of the Black experience from those of other groups. Sample items for this subscale include "The struggle of Black people in America is unique and can only be solved by Black Americans" and "Black people must organize themselves into a separate Black political force." The Minority subscale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$) measures the extent to which an individual's racial ideology emphasizes similarities between African Americans and other oppressed groups. Sample items from this subscale include "Blacks should support multicultural activities" and "There are other people

who experience racial injustice and indignities similar to Black Americans." The Assimilation subscale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$) measures the extent to which an individual's racial ideology emphasizes the similarities between African Americans and other Americans. Sample items from this subscale include "Blacks who espouse separatism are as racist as White people who also espouse separatism" and "The destiny of Black people in America is tied to the destiny of all Americans." Finally, the Humanist subscale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$) measures the extent to which an individual's racial ideology emphasizes the similarities among all human beings. Sample items from this subscale include "Being an individual is more important than identifying oneself as Black" and "We are all children of a higher being, therefore, we should love people of all races." Higher scores on the subscales indicate greater endorsement of the ideologies.

Sellers, Rowley et al. (1997) found evidence for the internal and external validity of the MIBI. Factor analyses using Maximum Likelihood extraction with a Promax rotation have found support for a single-factor structure for the Centrality scale as well as a four-factor structure for the Ideology scale. This four-factor solution corresponded with the theoretically proposed subscales (Nationalist, Minority, Assimilation, and Humanist). The Centrality scale and Ideology subscales were also related to such race-related activities as inter- and intraracial social contact and number of Black studies courses enrolled in ways consistent with the MMRI.

Cumulative GPA

Cumulative GPA was obtained via self-report. Participants were asked to report their current GPA. (Both institutions used a 4-point grading scale.)

PROCEDURE

Over a two-semester period, students at the HBU were administered the measures during an introductory psychology class period. Over a 5-semester period, students at the PWU were administered the measures during a mass pretesting session in which they received course credit. All students were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and that their responses would be kept confidential. The students were also informed that they would not be penalized for withdrawing from the study at any point and that they could skip any item to which they did not want to respond.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for students' college GPA, Racial Centrality scale, and the four subscales of Racial Ideology. The mean GPA for the sample was 2.72. Pearson product correlations also were calculated to examine the bivariate relationship between the primary variables in the study (see Table 1). Only the Assimilation subscale was significantly correlated with GPA ($r = -.19$). Individuals with higher GPAs were less likely to endorse assimilation attitudes. All other Ideology scales and the Racial Centrality scale were unrelated to GPA. Racial centrality was negatively related to assimilation and humanist attitudes and positively related to minority and nationalist attitudes.

A previous study using a larger sample that included the present sample found significant school differences in the Racial Ideology subscales (Sellers, Rowley et al., 1997). Consistent with that study, students from the PWU in the present sample reported significantly higher Assimilation scores, 4.88 to 4.09, $F(1, 246) = 60.77$, $p < .05$, higher Humanist scores, 4.47 to 4.89, $F(1, 246) = 18.07$, $p < .05$ and lower Nationalist scores (4.24 to 4.81; $F(1, 246) = 18.19$, $p < .05$. No significant school differences were found for either the Minority subscale, $F(1, 246) = 2.62$, n.s. or the Centrality scale, $F(1, 246) = .25$, n.s. Students at the HBU also reported a significantly higher mean GPA of 2.99 compared to the students at the PWU who reported a mean GPA of 2.54, $F(1, 246) = 21.12$, $p < .05$. As a result of the school differences in racial ideology and GPA, a variable indicating which school the participant attended was entered in the multivariate analysis as a control variable.

Also, one-way ANOVAs and correlational analyses were employed to investigate possible relationships between gender, class, and income with racial centrality, racial ideology, or GPA. Using Bonferoni corrections for multiple comparisons, no significant relationships were found. To conserve statistical power, these variables were excluded from further analyses.

Using simultaneous Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression analysis, students' self-reported college GPA was regressed on their Racial Centrality scores, their scores on the four Racial Ideology subscales, and a dummy variable representing their school (see Table 2). The overall model explained approximately 8% of the variance in college GPA, $F(6, 241) = 3.39$, $p < .05$. Along with the aforementioned school difference in GPA, the model yielded significant coefficients for Racial Centrality, as well as the Assimilation, and Nationalist subscales. Individuals for whom race was a more central aspect of their self-concept reported higher GPAs. Interestingly, both assimilation and nationalist ideologies were negatively associated with academic performance.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Product Correlations
for Grade Point Average, Racial Centrality, and Racial Ideology

	Mean	SD	Range	GPA	Centrality	Assimilation	Humanist	Minority	Nationalist
GPA	2.72	.88	1.00-4.70	1.0					
Centrality	4.92	.94	1.20-6.70	.10	1.0				
Assimilation	4.61	.85	2.09-6.80	-.19*	-.27*	1.0			
Humanist	4.75	.78	2.64-7.00	-.08	-.32*	.54*	1.0		
Minority	5.02	.78	3.00-7.00	.01	.14*	.31*	.23*	1.0	
Nationalist	4.45	.97	1.55-7.00	.02	.55*	-.42*	-.48*	.14*	1.0

*p < .05.

TABLE 2
Racial Centrality, School, and Racial Ideology
Regressed on College Grade Point Average

	B	SE B	Beta	T Statistic
Constant	3.38	.59		
Centrality	.12	.06	.15	1.97*
Assimilation	−.17	.08	−.18	−2.17*
Humanist	−.01	.08	−.01	−.13
Minority	.09	.07	.09	1.34
Nationalist	−.16	.07	−.20	−2.35*
School	−.17	.12	−.18	−2.31*
$R^2 = .08*$				

*$p < .05$.

A median split of the sample was conducted based on racial centrality scores (median = 4.92) to test the moderating influence of centrality on the relationship between racial ideology and GPA (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Bissonette, Ickes, Bernstein, & Knowles, 1990). The two subsamples did not differ significantly with respect to GPA. Simultaneous OLS regression analyses were employed for both the high and low race-central subsamples (see Table 3). The regression equation for the low centrality sample did not explain a significant amount of the variance in college GPA, $F(5, 118) = .26$; n.s. Thus, for students with low race centrality, the Racial Ideology subscales were not associated with their GPAs. In contrast, the regression equation for the high race-central students explained a significant amount of variance in college GPA, $F(5, 118) = 3.88$; $p < .05$. Specific multivariate relationships were found between GPA and racial ideology such that both assimilation and nationalist attitudes were associated with lower GPAs. On the other hand, minority attitudes were associated with higher GPAs. Both humanist attitudes and school were unrelated to GPA.

To investigate possible school differences in whether racial centrality serves to moderate the relationship between racial ideology and GPA, a series of one-way interaction terms were created (Baron & Kenny, 1986). These interaction terms consisted of multiplying scores on each of the Racial Ideology subscales with a dummy variable for school. The interaction terms were entered in the models for both the high and low central students. Such an approach is analogous to testing a two-way interaction (School × Centrality × Ideology). Significant coefficients for the interaction terms would suggest school differences in the relationships between the Racial Ideology subscales and

TABLE 3
**School and Racial Ideology Regressed on College
Grade Point Average by Level of Racial Centrality**

	B	SE B	Beta	T Statistic
Low central students (N = 124)				
Constant	2.88	.90		
Assimilation	−.11	.12	−.10	−.94
Humanist	.12	.13	.10	.97
Minority	.03	.12	.03	.25
Nationalist	−.06	.11	−.06	−.56
School	−.33	.19	−.18	−1.75
R^2 = .05				
High central students (N = 124)				
Constant	4.89	.68		
Assimilation	−.23	.09	−.28	−2.29*
Humanist	−.12	.09	−.14	−1.22
Minority	.16	.08	.19	2.03*
Nationalist	−.25	.08	−.31	−3.01*
School	−.19	.13	−.14	−1.49
R^2 = .14*				

*$p < .05$.

GPA for both high and low central students. No significant interaction terms were found in the two models, which suggests that the moderating relationship of racial centrality appears to be consistent across both the HBU and the PWU.

DISCUSSION

Both racial centrality and racial ideology were significantly related to African American students' cumulative GPA. When examined together, racial centrality was positively associated with academic performance, whereas both nationalist and assimilation ideologies were negatively associated with academic performance. It also appears that the relationship between racial ideology and academic performance is moderated by racial centrality. For low race-central individuals, none of the racial ideologies were significant predictors of GPA. However, nationalist and assimilation ideologies were negatively associated and a minority ideology was positively associated with GPA for high race-central individuals. Although a school-level difference was

found for GPA, there was no evidence of school differences in the pattern of results.

Racelessness does not seem to be an effective strategy for African American college students. When used as a main effect in the prediction model, racial centrality was positively associated with college GPA. Also, ideologies that de-emphasized the importance of race (humanist) and emphasized the connection with the mainstream (assimilation) were not associated with academic success. In fact, an assimilation ideology was associated with poorer academic performance. It seems that an ideology that emphasizes the individual's place in the mainstream may have a deleterious impact on her or his academic performance. The reality that race is a very salient concept in our society may make a strategy of racelessness unmanageable. Some authors have suggested that a de-emphasis of one's race may have deleterious psycho-social consequences for African American college students (Parham & Helms, 1985a, 1985b; Pyant & Yanico, 1991). In particular, a strategy of racelessness may leave a person vulnerable to the adverse impact of racial discrimination. They may be more likely to attribute negative experiences and performance to themselves instead of racism. Such internal attributions have been associated with more negative perceptions of the self, whereas external attributions regarding racism have been self-protecting (Crocker & Major, 1989).

It is clear that our results are discrepant from the previous research on racelessness. One reason for this discrepancy is that our study focuses on a college population. The research on racelessness primarily has used data collected from high school samples (e.g., Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Fordham, 1988). This is important because adolescence is an important period in the development of ethnic or racial identity (Phinney, 1989). For many individuals, high school is a time when one struggles to define oneself as an individual. This struggle includes determining what is the significance and meaning of being Black in one's self-concept. The struggle to develop a coherent and mature racial identity may result in extreme views on the role of race in their lives (Cross, 1991). These extreme views may be in the form of a hypersensitivity or a hyposensitivity to interpreting their experiences according to their race. In contrast, college students may feel more secure in their racial identity. As a result, they may be better able to disentangle academic achievement from race. Further research is needed to investigate the developmental trajectory of the relationship between racial identity and academic performance.

An ideology that emphasizes the uniqueness of being Black (nationalist) also was associated with poorer academic performance. It is possible that such an ideology may result in a heightened sensitivity toward racism in the

environment that may in turn result in feelings of racial isolation and alienation. Such a state may result in a depletion of cognitive resources that may adversely affect the students' scores. It is also possible that an ideology that emphasizes the uniqueness of being Black may be in conflict with a society that has devalued African Americans. In other words, a nationalist ideology may be a lightning rod for discrimination or, at the very least, it is in opposition to a mainstream view of the world. Such an argument would suggest that the relationship between academic performance and the nationalist ideology should differ for students at the HBU and the PWU. Our evidence suggests that there are mean level differences in ideology and academic performance across schools but no difference in the way that any of the variables relate to each other across schools. It should be noted, however, that this was not a central question of the present study. Further research is needed before any firm conclusions regarding the impact of the interaction between school environment and racial identity on academic performance can be made.

Interestingly, the only positive relationship found between ideology and academic performance was for the minority ideology among high centrality students. Some research suggests that awareness of racial barriers is related to academic success for Black students and that de-emphasis of such barriers (as can be the case with the assimilation ideology) is negatively related to academic performance (e.g., Bowman & Howard, 1985). Though the nationalist ideology stresses these barriers, it also stresses the uniqueness of a single group. As a result, individuals with strong nationalist beliefs may feel that society (including education) works differently for their group. Research has suggested that such beliefs may be detrimental to academic outcomes (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Mickelson, 1990).

It is possible that for individuals for whom race is central, having strong minority ideological views may help buffer the possible negative psychological effects of the awareness of racism. This buffering process may consist of the individuals' viewing other groups as having similar experiences in terms of racial discrimination. Subsequently, though individuals may be aware of racial inequities, feelings of social isolation may be reduced. Williams and Leonard (1988) report that 81% of a sample of Black college students had racial identity views indicating identification with other racial groups. They suggest that for Black students, in particular those at PWUs, an ideology that involves acceptance of other groups is important for academic success.

Because the study is cross-sectional, we cannot be sure of the causal direction of the relationships. It is possible that persons who perform poorly academically develop ideologies to complement their performance and protect their self-image. This interpretation of the findings is especially plausible when one considers the fact that these relationships were only significant in situations in which the person felt that race was an important part of their self-concept. When race is an important part of their self-concept, individuals may develop racial ideologies that distance their poorer academic performance from their race. In some cases, individuals may adopt an ideology that emphasizes the connection with the mainstream society such that their poorer academic performance may be attributed to their own personal inabilities. In other cases, individuals may focus on the unique experiences of African Americans, especially emphasizing racism, as a way of protecting against making a negative attribution regarding race. At present, these interpretations are speculative. Further research is needed with more controlled measures of academic performance, task-specific measures of ideology, and multiple trials before more definitive interpretations can be made.

It should also be noted that the reliance on self-report measures of GPA may be a potential limitation of the study. There is still some debate regarding the reliability of self-reported GPA. Benton (1980) found no significant differences between self-reported grades and students' transcripts. In contrast, other researchers have found evidence that suggests that students, particularly those who are performing less well, tend to inflate their grades (Dobbins, Farh, & Werbel, 1993). Interestingly, Martin and Nagao (1989) found that inflated self-reports of grades occur more often in face-to-face interviews than methodologies like the one employed in the present study in which students wrote their GPA on a questionnaire.

The fact that racial centrality was a significant moderator of the relationship between racial ideology and academic performance once again points out the importance of assessing the personal relevance of race separately from assessments of the individual's beliefs regarding what it means to be Black. It is clear that not all African Americans believe that race is a central aspect of their self-concept. It is also clear that this variance in centrality has important implications for the relationship between beliefs about what it means to be African American and other phenomena in the individual's life (i.e., academic performance and self-esteem). This view of racial centrality as a moderator begins to provide us with clues that help us delineate the processes that explain how racial identity influences various aspects of our existence, including behavior at the level of the event (Sellers, Shelton et al.,

in press). In another study, we have found that racial centrality interacts with properties of the situation to influence the way that individuals interpret an event (Shelton & Sellers, 1996).

In our examination of the relationships between racial identity and other phenomena, it is important to recognize that racial identity is not a panacea (Rowley et al., 1996). Even for the most race-central person, we expect that racial identity should only play a minor role in explaining phenomena such as academic performance. There are too many other factors that should logically influence academic performance for racial identity to play a major role. For instance, we would expect factors such as innate ability, motivation, course selection, and school- and class-specific factors such as difficulty of grading to influence grades more than racial identity. Thus, it is not surprising that we explain what some might consider a small amount of the variance in academic performance (14% of the variance in the high central students). In fact, we would be concerned if racial identity explained too much of the variance in academic performance. From a theoretical perspective, what is most important about our results is that the overall pattern of relationships (i.e., the moderating effect of centrality) is consistent with the MMRI (Sellers, Shelton et al., in press). With a clear understanding regarding the nature of the relationship between racial identity and academic performance, we are better able to develop responsible strategies of intervention. Centrality's moderating relationship with racial ideology and academic performance suggests that the inclusion of racial identity as a major part of our intervention with African American college students may only be warranted for the students for whom being Black is an important part of their self-concept.

Finally, one should note that the associations between various racial ideologies and academic performance represent multivariate relationships in which the influences of the other ideologies on GPA are partialed out. (Only assimilation had a significant bivariate relationship with GPA.) As such, these relationships must be viewed in the context of the other ideologies. This presents a very complex picture. We have noted in previous discussions of racial ideology that most individuals possess more than one ideology that may differ according to domains of the person's life (Sellers, Shelton et al., in press). It is important that future investigations begin to operationalize this complexity in ideology. For instance, future researchers may want to take more of an intraindividual approach to investigating how different ideological profiles are associated with academic performance. In the meantime, this study provides important preliminary evidence for the relationship between racial ideology and academic performance on which future research may build.

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