

The Relationship Between Racial Identity and Self-Esteem in African American College and High School Students

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The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity was used to examine the relationship between racial identity and personal self-esteem (PSE) in a sample of African American college students ($n = 173$) and a sample of African American high school students ($n = 72$). Racial identity was assessed using the Centrality and Regard scales of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity, whereas the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was used to assess PSE. Four predictions were tested: (a) racial centrality is weakly but positively related to PSE; (b) private regard is moderately related to PSE; (c) public regard is unrelated to PSE; and (d) racial centrality moderates the relationship between private regard and PSE. Multiple regression analysis found that racial centrality and public racial regard were unrelated to PSE in both samples. Private regard was positively related to PSE in the college sample. Racial centrality moderated the relationship between private regard and PSE in both samples, such that the relationship was significant for those with high levels of centrality but nonsignificant for those with low levels.

At the beginning of this century, W. E. B. Dubois argued that the central problem of American society was that of the color line (Dubois, 1903). An examination of the psychological literature over the past 90 years suggests that Dubois was prophetic. Social psychology has been exploring the meaning of race in the lives of African Americans since its earliest inception. Interestingly, much of the research produced by mainstream psychology suggests that African Americans who identify strongly with being Black may be at psychological risk as a result of the stigma associated with the identity (e.g., Horowitz, 1939; Kardiner & Ovesey, 1951; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Other researchers have tended to suggest that a strong identification with one's race can serve as a protective buffer to personal self-esteem (e.g., Azibo, 1989; Baldwin, 1984; Cross, 1971, 1991). These two approaches suggest a conundrum with respect to the "true" relationship between racial identification and personal self-esteem in African Americans. In this article, we attempt to explain this conundrum using the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (Sellers et al., in press; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998).

African American Racial Identity and Self-Esteem Research

Much of the early research in racial identity assumed that African Americans have negative self-images (Cross, 1991). It

was assumed that because one's self-concept is influenced by perceptions of the way one is viewed by others, society's negative views of African Americans must be internalized (Kardiner & Ovesey, 1951; Pettigrew, 1978). Thus, the prevailing opinion among psychologists at that time was that African Americans suffered from an inferiority complex, and consequently, low self-esteem (Cross, 1991). Findings such as those reported by Clark and Clark (1947), in which African American children demonstrated a preference for playing with White dolls, were interpreted as evidence that African American children hate themselves for being Black and wish that they were White.

Over a half century ago, Clark and Clark (1940) noted the problem of confounding racial identification with racial preference in the work of Ruth Horowitz (cf. Cross, 1991). Unfortunately, few researchers have adequately heeded this warning. The assumption that African Americans suffer from an inferiority complex (i.e., low self-esteem) went virtually unchallenged until the late 1960s and early 1970s when researchers challenged it on conceptual and methodological grounds (e.g., Banks, 1976; Brand, Ruiz, & Padilla, 1974; McAdoo, 1970; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1971). Researchers astutely noted that the early work on African American racial identity erroneously assumed that reference group orientation (preference for same race stimuli) was related to, if not synonymous with, self-concept (e.g., Brand et al., 1974; McAdoo, 1970; Porter & Washington, 1979). In fact, research using measures of reference group orientation often was interpreted as if self-concept had been measured, although no explicit measure of self-concept was used (Cross, 1991). A preference for White stimuli was enough for researchers to conclude that they had found support for self-hatred in the African American participants.

When paper-and-pencil measures of self-esteem became more available and accepted in the late 1960s, researchers finally began to measure self-esteem in African Americans directly. Since then, numerous studies have concluded that African

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Americans do not suffer from low self-esteem (e.g., Hughes & Demo, 1989; Porter & Washington, 1979; Rosenberg, 1979b; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1971; Taylor & Walsh, 1979). More recently, researchers have suggested that the inconsistencies between reflective appraisal theory and the actual mental health of African Americans can be explained by the insulating effect of the African American community (Broman, Neighbors, & Jackson, 1989; Rosenberg, 1979b; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1971). The insulation hypothesis argues that because of racial segregation in the United States, the majority of African Americans compare themselves not with members of the broader society, but with other African Americans. As a result, African Americans are insulated from the broader society's negative perceptions of their racial group, and their personal self-esteem is protected (Broman et al., 1989; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1971). One potential buffer against society's negative view toward African Americans is a healthy racial identity. A number of African American researchers have focused on the resilient strengths of African American experiences (Banks, 1970; Burlew & Smith, 1991; Cross, 1971; Kambon, 1992; Milliones, 1980). In contrast to earlier models that were based on the negative impact of oppression on African Americans, models of resilience argue that identification with one's race should result in more positive mental health outcomes such as high self-esteem (e.g., Baldwin, 1984). Thus, identification with one's race is conceptualized as a protective factor for personal self-esteem in African Americans.

Despite these assertions, research investigating the relationship between racial identity and self-esteem is far from conclusive (Brand et al., 1974; Hughes & Demo, 1989; Porter & Washington, 1979). In a review of the African American racial identity and self concept literature, Cross (1991) examined the results from 45 studies conducted from 1939 to 1987. Cross found that 36% of the studies reported a significant positive association between racial identity and self-esteem, whereas 64% of the studies reported no relationship. The majority of the 45 studies used children and teens as participants ($n = 34$). Of the 11 studies that focused on adults, only 3 found results that suggested a positive relationship.

One reason for the inconclusiveness of the literature is that racial identity researchers have failed to explicate the mechanism by which a strong racial identity should result in higher levels of self-esteem (Penn, Gaines, & Phillips, 1993; Sellers, 1993). This gap in the literature is, in part, a function of the fact that many models of racial identity fail to conceptually define dimensions of racial identity that relate to self-esteem. Many existing racial identity measures include items that measure something akin to racial self-esteem (e.g., Baldwin, Duncan, & Bell, 1987; Parham & Helms, 1981). Unfortunately, the relationship between these items and personal self-esteem become obscured when investigators choose to include other aspects of racial identity that are unrelated to racial self-esteem in a single aggregate score. When only items that tap into affective and evaluative aspects of racial identity are included in the model, relationships between racial identity and personal self-esteem are apparent. Parham and Helms (1985), for instance, found that both pre-encounter attitudes (the strongest anti-Black attitudes in their stage model) and immersion-emersion attitudes (the strongest pro-Black attitudes) were negatively

related to self-regard, whereas encounter (questioning initial anti-Black attitudes) attitudes were positively related to self-regard. The measure used to assess the stages of identity development, the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Parham & Helms, 1985), however, is comprised of items that rely heavily on the individuals' affective and cognitive evaluations of African Americans (i.e., racial self-esteem).

The few studies that have measured constructs similar to racial self-esteem separate from other dimensions of racial identity have found a positive relationship between the constructs and personal self-esteem in African Americans. For instance, Hughes and Demo (1989) operationalized racial self-esteem as "the belief that most black people possess positive characteristics and do not possess negative characteristics" in a nationally representative sample of African Americans (p. 140). They found a small, but statistically significant, relationship between racial self-esteem and personal self-esteem such that individuals who reported more positive beliefs about African Americans had higher levels of personal self-esteem. Although it was not a major focus of their study, Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, and Broadnax (1994) reported evidence that African American college students' scores on the private and membership subscales of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES) were positively correlated to personal self-esteem. Specifically, those African American students who felt more positive about African Americans and felt more positive about being African American had higher self-esteem scores. Interestingly, the African American students' perceptions about how others evaluated their race was not related to their own evaluations of their race nor their self-esteem scores. This finding is consistent with the insulation theory in that African American students' feelings about African Americans were more relevant to personal self-esteem than were their perceptions of how others view African Americans. Another reason for the equivocal nature of the literature on racial identity and self-esteem is that many models of African American racial identity presume that race is the most central aspect of the self-concept for all African Americans. As noted by the work of Ingram (1989) and Phinney and Alipuria (1990), such an assumption may not be tenable. Ingram (1989) used the Role Construct Repertory Grid to assess the meaningfulness of various self-constructs in a sample of African American college students. Seventy-two percent of her sample was female. She found that although participants rated race as a meaningful self-construct, gender was rated as the most meaningful construct. Phinney and Alipuria (1990) asked participants to rate five identity domains (occupation, politics, religion, sex role, and ethnicity) on a 4-point scale ranging from *not at all important* to *very important*. Their results revealed that ethnic identity tied for third place with religious identity among the African American participants in their sample.

Cross (1991) used the term *experimenter-ascribed* identity to describe the situation where the experimenter makes assumptions about participants' racial identity simply because they have physical characteristics that identify them as belonging to a particular racial group. In contrast, personally affirmed group identities are those groups that the individual uses to define himself or herself. The literature's dependence on experimenter-ascribed racial identity instead of personally affirmed identities has obscured the true relationship between racial identity and

self-esteem in African Americans (Cross, 1991). Thus, the inclusion of a measure assessing the extent to which race is a personally affirmed identity for individuals may help to provide a more accurate assessment of the true nature of the relationship between racial self-esteem and personal self-esteem. Although a few studies have examined the independent relationships between identification with race and evaluative beliefs about one's race (i.e., racial self-esteem) and personal self-esteem in African Americans (Crocker et al., 1994; Hughes & Demo, 1989), none have investigated the influence of the interaction between personal identification with race and racial self-esteem on personal self-esteem.

A number of theorists have argued that, in general, the extent to which an identity is personally relevant has important implications for its relationship to self-esteem (Gecas, 1982; Hoelter, 1983; Rosenberg, 1979b; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Rosenberg (1979b) delineated four conditions that must be met before society's negative view of a group will result in low self-esteem for an individual member of that group. One such condition is that the individual assumes that the characteristic for which the group is stigmatized applies to him or her personally. An unspoken corollary to this condition is that the individual must believe that the stigmatized group is personally relevant to who she or he is. Similarly, Stryker's identity theory argues that the more salient (personally relevant) a particular role or identity is, the more likely attributes of that role or identity (such as role performance) will be related to both role specific and general self-esteem (Stryker, 1968, 1980; Stryker & Serpe, 1982, 1994).

Although the work of Rosenberg and Stryker provides an important theoretical foundation for the importance of the personal relevance of the identity in studying personal self-esteem, this foundation has not been extended to encompass the various dimensions of African American racial identity. Little empirical work has extended identity research to investigate race as a role or identity for African Americans (e.g., White & Burke, 1987). Most of the empirical work has focused on such roles or identities as religion (Stryker & Serpe, 1982) and parenting (Hyde, Essex, & Horton, 1993; Marsiglio, 1993; Simon, 1992). African American racial identity is qualitatively different from other identities because of the unique experience of being Black in America (Sellers et al., 1998). Rosenberg (1979b) does not directly investigate individuals' feelings about being Black in describing the conditions in which society's stigmatization of African Americans would result in low self-esteem. Thus, a model of African American racial identity that clearly differentiates personal identification with one's race from evaluative attitudes toward one's race (racial self-esteem) is needed in order to investigate the independent influence of each of these dimensions of racial identity, as well as the interaction between the two on personal self-esteem. As a result, in this article, we will employ the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity as a conceptual framework.

The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity

The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) represents a synthesis of ideas from many of the current racial identity models prevalent in the research literature (Sellers et al., 1998). The MMRI defines racial identity as that part of the

person's self-concept that is related to her or his membership within a race. This definition assumes a phenomenological position in that it focuses on the person's self-perceptions (Weiner, 1974). The MMRI proposes four dimensions of racial identity in African Americans. These dimensions consist of (a) identity salience, (b) the ideology associated with the identity, (c) the regard in which the person holds the group associated with the identity, and (d) the centrality of the identity. No single dimension of the MMRI is synonymous with racial identity. Different dimensions are associated with different outcomes (Sellers et al., in press; Sellers et al., 1998).

Racial *salience* refers to the extent to which a person's race is a relevant part of her or his self-concept at a particular moment in time. Salience is concerned with a particular event as the unit of analysis.¹ It is highly sensitive to the context of the situation and the person's proclivity to define herself or himself in terms of race (i.e., centrality). Racial *ideology* is the individual's set of beliefs, opinions, and attitudes with respect to the way he or she feels that members of his or her race should act. This dimension represents the person's philosophy about the ways in which African Americans should live and interact with society.

Racial regard and racial centrality are the two dimensions of the MMRI that are most relevant to the present study of personal self-esteem in African Americans. Racial *regard* refers to persons' affective and evaluative judgment of their race. The regard dimension is based heavily on Luhtanen and Crocker's work on collective self-esteem (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Crocker et al., 1994; Crocker & Major, 1989; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Like their model of collective self-esteem, the regard dimension consists of both a private and a public component. Private regard refers to the extent to which individuals feel positively or negatively toward African Americans and their membership in that group. This component of regard is also consistent with the concept of racial self-esteem found in other research (e.g., Demo & Hughes, 1990; Hughes & Demo, 1989). Public regard refers to the extent to which individuals feel that others view African Americans positively or negatively. The concept of public regard is consistent with the widely held premise that other people's perceptions of an individual influence the individual's perceptions of self (Horowitz, 1939; Lewin, 1936, 1941; Mead, 1934; Stryker, 1980; White & Burke, 1987).

Racial *centrality* refers to the extent to which a person normatively defines herself or himself with respect to race. It is a measure of whether race is a core part of an individual's self-concept. Thus, racial centrality is indicative of the extent to which the individual affirms race to be an important defining characteristic in his or her identity. Implicit in the conceptualization of racial centrality is a hierarchical ranking of different identities with regard to their proximity to the individual's core

¹ Our use of the term *salience* differs significantly from the way that Stryker and his colleagues (Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Serpe, 1982, 1994) use the concept. Their usage of the term attributes transsituational properties that are contradictory to our position that salience is situationally specific. In actuality, their conceptualization of salience is closer to our conceptualization of racial centrality except that we are less inclined to focus on behaviors as indicators of salience (or centrality) than Stryker and Serpe. Instead, we focus on the individual's own self-definition.

definition of self (Banaji & Prentice, 1994). In personal construct theory, central identities are analogous to superordinate self-constructs, and noncentral identities are considered subordinate self-constructs (Ingram, 1989). As such, it is a guide for determining whether the individual's beliefs and attitudes regarding race are likely to influence aspects of the individual's self-concept such as self-esteem. Attitudes and beliefs about race should only predict behavior to the extent that race is a central component of the self.

In this article, we examine the way in which different dimensions of the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity interact to influence personal self-esteem. The relationship among racial centrality, public and private racial regard, and personal self-esteem is examined. The premise that the broader society's negative view of African Americans should result in lower personal self-esteem is also investigated. We present results from two studies. Study 1 attempts to delineate the relationship between racial identification (racial centrality), evaluative attitudes regarding one's racial group (racial regard), and personal self-esteem in a sample of African American college students. Study 2 replicates the analyses from Study 1 in a sample of high school students. Both studies employ a multidimensional conceptual framework to address three questions regarding the role of racial centrality and racial regard in personal self-esteem. First, is racial centrality directly associated with personal self-esteem? Next, is there a direct association between public and private racial regard and personal self-esteem? Finally, does racial centrality mediate or moderate the relationship between private and public racial regard and personal self-esteem?

At present, we have no theoretical basis from which to propose a hypothesis for the first question. Results from previous research (e.g., Crocker et al., 1994) suggest a weak, but significant, positive relationship between racial centrality and personal self-esteem. In accordance with the insulation hypothesis, public regard is predicted to be unrelated to personal self-esteem (Broman et al., 1989; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1971). Based on the premise that properties of self-relevant identities should be related to personal self-esteem (Cross, 1991; Rosenberg, 1979b; Stryker & Serpe, 1982), we hypothesize that private regard will demonstrate a moderate positive relationship with personal self-esteem because race will be a highly central identity for a number of the individuals in the overall sample. Further, we hypothesize that racial centrality will moderate the relationship between private regard and personal self-esteem such that there will be a significant, positive relationship between private regard beliefs and personal self-esteem for high race centrality individuals and no relationship for low race centrality individuals.

Study 1

Method

Participants. One hundred seventy-six African American students were recruited from the introductory psychology participant pool over a four-semester period at a medium-sized university in the southeastern part of the United States. Sixty-five percent of the sample was female. The sample consisted of 49% freshmen, 27% sophomores, 12% juniors, and 5% seniors (7% of the sample did not report their class). The median self-reported family income was between \$55,000 and \$64,999.

Of the 176 participants who were originally sampled, 173 students had complete data on all of the measures used in this study.

Measures. The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) measures the three stable dimensions of racial identity (centrality, ideology, and regard) proposed by the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity for African Americans (Sellers et al., 1997). Participants are asked to respond regarding the extent to which they agree or disagree with the items on a 7-point Likert scale. In the present study, we used only the scores from the Centrality scale, the Private Regard subscale, and the Public Regard subscale. The Centrality scale ($\alpha = .73$) consists of 10 items measuring the extent to which being African American is central to the respondents' definition of themselves (e.g., "My destiny is tied to the destiny of other Black people"; "Being Black is an important reflection of who I am"). A higher score on the Centrality scale is indicative of race being a more important aspect of the individuals' definitions of self. The Regard scale is composed of two subscales, Private and Public Regard. The Private Regard subscale ($\alpha = .73$) consists of 7 items measuring the extent to which respondents possess positive feelings toward African Americans in general (e.g., "I feel good about Black people"; "I am happy that I am Black"). A higher score corresponds to more positive feelings toward African Americans. The Public Regard ($\alpha = .18$) subscale consists of 3 items measuring the extent to which respondents feel that other groups have positive feelings toward African Americans (e.g., "Overall, Blacks are considered good by others"; "In general, others respect Black people"). A higher score on the Public Regard scale indicates a belief that other groups have more positive feelings toward African Americans. Previous use of the MIBI suggests adequate reliability and validity (Sellers et al., 1997).

Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979a). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale ($\alpha = .87$) consists of 10 items measuring levels of self-acceptance. Participants used a 5-point response scale that measured the extent to which they agreed with the items. Examples of the items include: "I feel that I'm a person of worth at least on an equal plane with others" and "On the whole, I'm satisfied with myself." Higher scores correspond to higher levels of self-esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale has proven to be a reliable and valid measure of self-esteem in African Americans (Hoeiter, 1983; Hughes & Demo, 1989).

Procedure. Participants were administered the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, along with a series of other measures unrelated to the present investigation, during a mass pretesting session of the introductory psychology participant pool. The entire testing session lasted approximately 1 hr. Participants participated in the mass pretesting session as a means of fulfilling a requirement for their Introduction to Psychology course. Participants were told that their participation was voluntary and that they could exclude any items that they wished. They were also assured that all of their responses would remain confidential and would be used only for research purposes.

Results

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), using gender as the factor and the four scales (Personal Self-Esteem, Centrality, Private Regard, and Public Regard) as dependent variables, was performed to test for gender differences. No significant gender differences were found for any of the variables. Similarly, an examination of the bivariate relationships among the four variables for men and women in the sample found no significant differences in the pattern of relationships. As a result, all subsequent analyses combine both men and women within their samples. In order to investigate the structure

of the three MIBI subscales, a factor analysis of the items from the Centrality, Private Regard, and Public Regard subscales was performed using a maximum likelihood method with a promax rotation. The factor solution suggested that the three subscales are distinct. Three factors emerged representing each of the three subscales. All factor loadings were above .30, except those for two public regard items.

Table 1 provides descriptive information and zero-order correlations for the racial centrality, racial regard, and personal self-esteem variables. On average, participants were slightly above the midpoint on the Centrality scale ($M = 4.82$), suggesting that race is a central identity for many of the participants. There is also evidence, however, of variability among the participants. In general, the sample reported very positive personal feelings toward African Americans, as reflected in the high mean private regard score ($M = 6.36$). The sample's mean public regard score ($M = 3.22$) was slightly below the midpoint of the scale, suggesting that, on the whole, they felt that other groups tended to hold somewhat negative feelings toward African Americans. It also should be noted that there was evidence of variability within the sample on this variable. Finally, the sample reported relatively high levels of personal self-esteem with a mean of 4.09 on a 5-point response scale.

The bivariate correlational analyses displayed three significant positive relationships (see Table 1). Private regard was positively associated with both racial centrality and personal self-esteem. Thus, individuals who felt more positively toward African Americans viewed race as a more important part of their own self-definition and had higher levels of personal self-esteem. Racial centrality scores were also negatively correlated with public regard scores such that individuals for whom race was more central felt that other groups had more negative feelings and attitudes toward African Americans. However, the bivariate analyses found no significant relationship between racial centrality and personal self-esteem.

In order to examine the direct associations of racial centrality, private regard, and public regard with personal self-esteem, the three racial identity variables were used as predictors of personal self-esteem in a multiple regression analysis (see Table 2). The overall model was significant and explained approximately 5% of the variance. As in the bivariate analyses, private regard scores were positively associated with personal self-esteem ($\beta = .25, p < .05$). Neither racial centrality nor public regard were significant multivariate predictors of personal self-esteem.

The analysis strategy used to test the centrality moderator effect was to regress personal self-esteem on public and private

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of Racial Identity and Self-Esteem Variables

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|-------|------|------|---|
| 1. Racial centrality | 4.82 | 1.04 | — | | | |
| 2. Private regard | 6.36 | 0.62 | .38* | — | | |
| 3. Public regard | 3.22 | 1.05 | -.17* | -.09 | — | |
| 4. Self-esteem | 4.09 | 0.65 | .06 | .23* | -.03 | — |

* $p < .05$.

Table 2
Results of Multiple Regression Analysis of Racial Centrality, Private Regard, and Public Regard as Predictors of Personal Self-Esteem ($n = 173$)

| Variable | <i>B</i> | <i>SE B</i> | β |
|-------------------|----------|-------------|---------|
| Constant | 2.75 | 0.51 | — |
| Racial centrality | -0.02 | 0.05 | -.04 |
| Private regard | 0.24* | 0.08 | .25* |
| Public regard | 0.00 | 0.04 | -.01 |

Note. Model $R^2 = .05$ ($p < .05$).

* $p < .05$.

regard separately for groups characterized by either high or low racial centrality (see Table 3 and Figure 1). A median split on the Racial Centrality scale ($mdn = 4.9$) was used to divide the sample into the two groups. For the low racial centrality group, the overall model was not significant ($R^2 = .03, ns$). Unlike in the bivariate analyses, private regard was not a significant predictor of personal self-esteem for the low racial centrality group ($\beta = .16, ns$). Meanwhile, the overall model for the high racial centrality group was significant ($R^2 = .08, p < .05$). Once again, only private regard was a significant predictor of personal self-esteem ($\beta = .29, p < .05$).

Discussion

The hypothesis regarding a weak, positive relationship between racial centrality and personal self-esteem was not supported. The extent to which African American college students view race as a central aspect of their self-concept is not directly related to their level of personal self-esteem. It seems that strongly identifying with one's racial group does not necessarily result in positive feelings about oneself. Concomitantly, lack of identification with one's racial group does not necessarily result in personal self-hatred. Although our results showed little evidence of a relationship between racial centrality and personal

Table 3
Results of Multiple Regression Analyses of Private Regard and Public Regard as Predictors of Personal Self-Esteem for High and Low Racially Central College Students

| Variable | <i>B</i> | <i>SE B</i> | β |
|------------------------------------|----------|-------------|---------|
| Low central students ($n = 79$) | | | |
| Constant | 3.46 | 0.69 | |
| Private regard | 0.12 | 0.09 | .15 |
| Public regard | -0.04 | 0.08 | -.07 |
| High central students ($n = 94$) | | | |
| Constant | 1.28 | 1.01 | |
| Private regard | 0.44* | 0.16 | .29* |
| Public regard | 0.00 | 0.05 | .00 |

Note. Model R^2 for low central students = .03 (ns); Model R^2 for high central students = .08 ($p < .05$).

* $p < .05$.

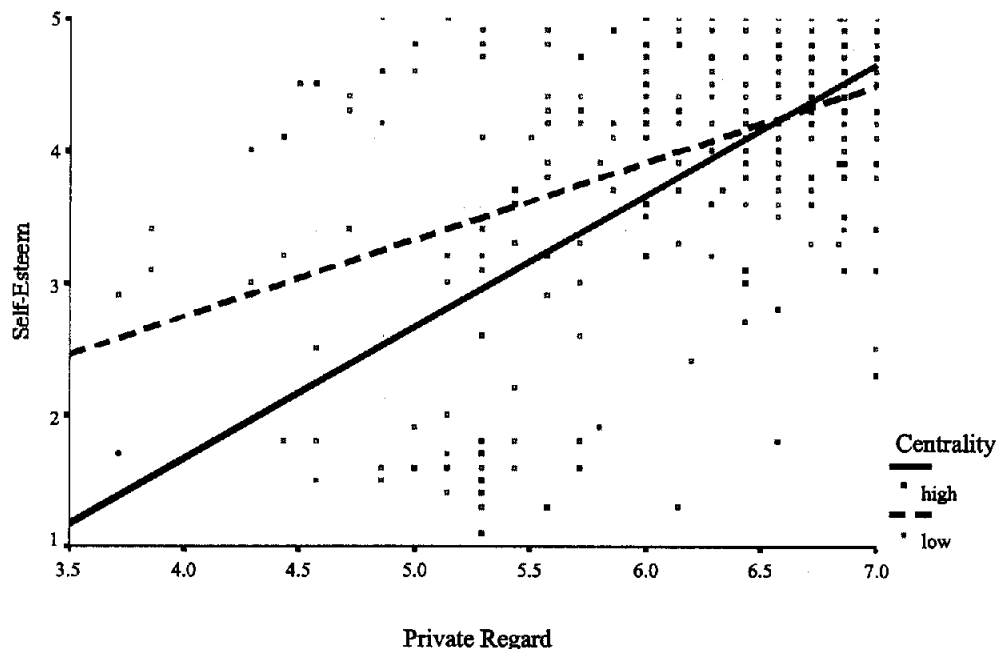


Figure 1. Plot of relationship between private regard and self-esteem by level of centrality in college students.

self-esteem, this does not mean that a highly central racial identity does not provide some benefit. The benefits that are provided may not necessarily be related to the individual self-concept. Some identity research suggests that high race centrality should be associated with greater participation in race-related activities (Stryker & Serpe, 1982, 1994). Several of our recent research findings suggest just such a relationship (Sellers et al., 1997; Shelton & Sellers, 1997). Sellers et al. reported that high racial centrality was associated with enrolling in Black Studies courses, having an African American best friend, and having more social contact with African Americans (Sellers et al., 1997). Furthermore, Shelton and Sellers (1996) found that racial centrality was predictive of race-related attributions in racially ambiguous situations.

Although there was no relationship between racial centrality and self-esteem, the second hypothesis that private racial regard would be positively related to self-esteem was supported. As the interaction analysis illustrates, the responses of the high race central students is responsible for this significant relationship. This result, along with the fact that racial centrality was not related to self-esteem, highlights the need to measure identification and evaluation separately. In this sample, evaluation of the racial group, not level of identification, predicted personal self-esteem. Further, public regard, or the way that one feels that others view African Americans was unrelated to self-esteem. This result is consistent with the findings of other authors who question the applicability of the self-stigma hypothesis for African Americans (Broman et al., 1989; Crocker et al., 1994; Rosenberg, 1979a). The results from this and other studies suggest that African Americans, in general, do not fit the assumptions that Rosenberg (1979b) articulated for a negative self-image as the result of negative reflective appraisals from the broader soci-

ety. Further research is needed to pinpoint which assumptions are not being met.

Although racial centrality did not produce a direct effect on personal self-esteem, the significant Centrality \times Private Regard interaction provides strong support of our hypothesis that racial centrality moderates the relationship between private racial regard and personal self-esteem. As further hypothesized, attitudes regarding African Americans were significantly related to the self-esteem of those individuals for whom race plays an important role in defining themselves and were unrelated for those for whom race is less central to their definition of self. In this sample, individuals' attitudes about their race is only important to how they feel about themselves if race is a personally affirmed identity.

Study 2

It is still an empirical question as to whether the results from Study 1 are an artifact of the college-aged, well-educated, and relatively affluent participants. Some theorists have suggested that racial and ethnic identity may change across the life span (Parham, 1989; Phinney, 1990). Other researchers have found differences in African American racial identity as a function of geographic region (Broman & Jackson, 1988). In order to investigate the robustness of the findings across developmental periods and geographic region, Study 2 will replicate the previous study with a sample of African American high school students.

Method

Participants. Seventy-two African American high school students were recruited from two summer programs. The first program was an

educational and skills-learning program for academically talented, economically disadvantaged students in the midwestern United States. Students in the program represented various high schools in the surrounding county area. Students ranged in age from 16 to 18 years of age ($M = 16.63$ years). Seventy-one percent were female. Students' median self-reported household income was between \$25,000 and \$34,999. Of the 53 participants who were originally sampled, 48 students had complete data on all of the measures used in the study.

The second program was a summer program for economically disadvantaged students from a large urban area in the southern United States. This program contained no enrichment component. Students ranged in age from 13 to 18 years of age ($M = 14.19$ years). Only 25% were female. Although family income was not reported, 53% of the students reported that they received free or reduced-price lunches. Of the 47 students who were originally sampled, 24 had complete data. The large amount of incomplete data was because about half of the students did not complete the MIBI.

Procedure. Participants completed a series of measures including the MIBI and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could skip any items that they wished. Participants were also informed that all of their responses would remain confidential and would be used for research purposes only.

Measures. Study 2 employed the MIBI and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Cronbach's alphas for the measures used with this sample were as follows: the Racial Centrality scale ($\alpha = .73$), the Private Regard subscale ($\alpha = .76$), the Public Regard subscale ($\alpha = .11$), and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale ($\alpha = .82$).

Results

Although there were some differences, results from Study 2 were similar to those found in Study 1. Significant gender differences were only found for the Private Regard subscale (male mean = 5.00, female mean = 5.66). Because there were no differences between males and females in the patterning of correlations, all subsequent analyses combine both males and females within the samples.

Descriptive statistics for the variables in Study 2 were similar to those found in Study 1 (see Table 4). Again, participants were above the midpoint on the Racial Centrality scale and Private Regard subscale. This suggests that race is an important issue for this sample of high school students and that the participants had relatively positive feelings about African Americans in general. Similarity in means across samples may also be evidence that racial identity is, at least for some students, a salient issue during adolescence. The mean score for public

Table 5
Results of Multiple Regression Analysis of Racial Centrality, Private Regard, and Public Regard as Predictors of Personal Self-Esteem in High School Sample (n = 72)

| Variable | B | SE B | β |
|-------------------|------|------|---------|
| Constant | 2.86 | 0.48 | — |
| Racial centrality | 0.11 | 0.08 | .19 |
| Private regard | 0.05 | 0.07 | .10 |
| Public regard | 0.06 | 0.07 | .11 |

Note. Model $R^2 = .07$ (ns).

regard in Study 2 was also slightly below the scale midpoint, suggesting that the high school students also perceive that others have somewhat negative feelings toward African Americans. This sample also had relatively high personal self-esteem ($M = 3.95$ on a 5-point scale).

Bivariate correlations in the high school sample demonstrated a similar pattern to those in Study 1. Levels of significance, however, differed somewhat across samples (see Table 4). In this sample, racial centrality was positively correlated with both private regard and personal self-esteem. It should be noted, however, that the relationship between private regard and self-esteem was positive but not significant. Public regard was unrelated to private regard and personal self-esteem.

A multiple regression was performed with private regard, public regard, and racial centrality as predictors of personal self-esteem for the high school sample (see Table 5). Neither the overall model ($R^2 = .09$, ns), nor any of the individual regression coefficients were significant.

Although the previous model did not yield significant results, a model with racial centrality as a moderator of the relationship between private regard and personal self-esteem was tested. The same method of testing for the interaction between racial centrality and private regard with personal self-esteem used in Study 1 was employed again. A median split on the Racial Centrality scale ($mdn = 4.85$) was used to divide the sample into low and high racial centrality groups. A multiple regression analysis was then performed regressing personal self-esteem on private and public regard scores separately for low and high racial centrality groups (see Table 6 and Figure 2). Again, the overall model for the low racial centrality group was not significant ($R^2 = .01$, ns). Neither private nor public regard scores were significant predictors of personal self-esteem for those participants who were relatively low in racial centrality. On the other hand, the overall model for the high racial centrality group was significant ($R^2 = .25$, $p < .05$) with only private regard as a significant predictor of personal self-esteem ($\beta = .48$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

The results from Study 1 were generally replicated in Study 2. Although some differences were present, the primary prediction that centrality moderates the relationship between racial regard and personal self-esteem was supported. As in Study 1, neither racial centrality nor public regard significantly predicted

Table 4
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of Racial Identity and Self-Esteem Variables in High School Students (n = 48)

| Variable | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|----------------------|------|------|------|------|-----|---|
| 1. Racial centrality | 4.72 | 0.96 | — | | | |
| 2. Private regard | 5.39 | 1.07 | .48* | — | | |
| 3. Public regard | 3.77 | 1.00 | -.08 | -.09 | — | |
| 4. Self-esteem | 3.95 | 0.55 | .23* | .19 | .09 | — |

* $p < .05$.

Table 6
Results of Multiple Regression Analyses of Private Regard and Public Regard as Predictors of Personal Self-Esteem for High and Low Racially Central High School Students

| Variable | B | SE B | β |
|--|-------|------|---------|
| Low central students (<i>n</i> = 37) | | | |
| Constant | 3.83 | 0.71 | |
| Private regard | -0.04 | 0.10 | -.02 |
| Public regard | 0.01 | 0.11 | .02 |
| High central students (<i>n</i> = 35) | | | |
| Constant | 2.08 | 0.59 | |
| Private regard | 0.28* | 0.09 | .48* |
| Public regard | 0.08 | 0.07 | .18 |

Note. Model R^2 for low central students = .00 (*ns*); model R^2 for high central students = .25 ($p < .05$).

* $p < .05$.

personal self-esteem, providing further support for the insulation hypothesis. It was initially hypothesized that private regard would show a moderate, positive relationship with personal self-esteem. However, unlike in Study 1, private regard did not predict personal self-esteem in the full model in the high school sample. This may be a function of the smaller sample size. Nonetheless, the independence of private regard and self-esteem is consistent with previous research with children (e.g., Clark, 1982; McAdoo, 1977; Spencer, 1982). Clark (1982) found that racial group concept was unrelated to personal self-esteem in a sample of elementary-school-aged African Americans. It is possible that the association between dimensions of racial identity and self-esteem varies at different ages or levels of develop-

ment. Longitudinal studies are needed to investigate the development of racial identity across the life span (Sellers et al., in press).

Study 1 supported the contention that racial identification (racial centrality) and racial evaluation (racial regard) are distinct constructs and must be measured separately. Although the positive direct relationship between private regard and self-esteem was not supported in the high school sample, the need for separate measurement of the two constructs was highlighted by the presence of a positive interaction between racial regard and racial centrality. This interaction mirrored the one found in Study 1 where both private and public regard were unrelated to personal self-esteem in participants for whom race was relatively unimportant to their sense of self, but private regard was positively related to self-esteem in those participants for whom race was highly central to their self-concept.

General Discussion

The present findings underscore the importance of taking a phenomenological approach to investigating racial identity. Interpreting the meaning of individuals' attitudes and beliefs regarding their membership in a particular racial group without measuring the significance of the membership to the individuals can be problematic. The use of paradigms that presume a monolithic Black identity for all African Americans simply because of their phenotypic characteristics obscures the true relationship between racial identity attitudes and self-esteem (Cross, 1991). Because race is such a significant part of American society, most African Americans are able to report feelings about being African American. However, the extent to which these attitudes influence their self-concepts is dependent on the subjective meaning that an individual places on race. As a result, research-

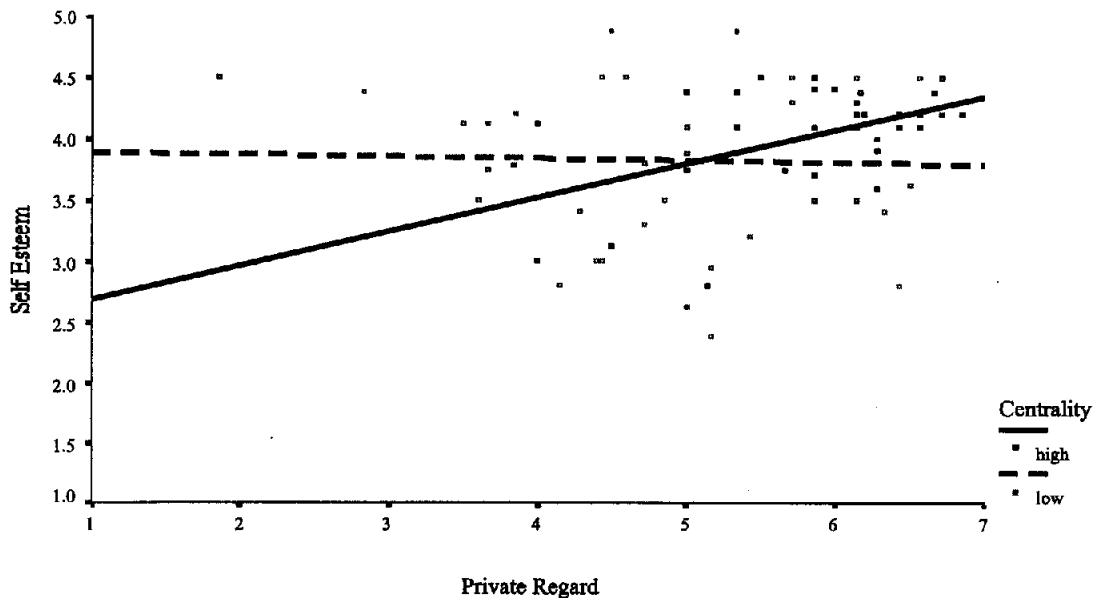


Figure 2. Plot of relationship between private regard and self-esteem by level of centrality in high school students.

ers must not assume that simply because an individual belongs to the societally defined category of African American that his or her subjective identification with that category can be inferred.

One consequence of a view of the self-concept that is multiply determined is that no one aspect (or identity) should explain an overwhelming portion of the variance in global self-esteem. The present findings that private regard attitudes explained a significant but not overwhelming portion of the variance in self-esteem (approximately 8%) is consistent with a conceptualization of the self-concept that emphasizes multiple sources of determination. The conceptualization of a multiply determined self-concept suggests numerous small but important relationships with greater explanatory power (Wegner, 1979). The fact that the present findings were remarkably consistent across the college and high school samples provides strong evidence that the relationship between racial regard and self-esteem is reliable. To expect that racial identity explains a substantial portion of global self-esteem for African Americans would be to reduce the complexity of their existence to their experiences and beliefs associated with race. Such an expectation ignores the many other identities and roles such as gender, occupation, and family membership that influence the way that African Americans feel about themselves as individuals.

Although the results concerning public regard are in keeping with our hypotheses, the Public Regard subscale demonstrated poor levels of internal consistency in both samples. Recent analyses with similar data from a sample of 143 college students suggests that the low reliability resulted from the particular items used to measure that scale. We constructed a larger Public Regard subscale by keeping two of the original public regard items and adding four others for a total of six items. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the scale was acceptable at .75. The original Public Regard scale had been administered to the same group several weeks earlier. The correlation between the two Public Regard subscales was .87. Thus, it appears that public regard is a reliable concept for African American students. The question of its relationship with personal self-esteem, however, is still an empirical question. Therefore, the present results regarding the relationship between public regard and personal self-esteem should be interpreted with extreme caution.

Despite the somewhat small size of the high school sample, a comparison of the standardized coefficients with the college sample suggests that the pattern of relationships among racial centrality, public regard, private regard, and personal self-esteem are somewhat consistent. This consistency across samples provides some evidence of the robustness of the finding. However, interpretations of the present results beyond a college or high school population of African Americans may be tenuous. It is an open question as to whether our results would generalize to a sample at a predominantly African American university, noncollege adults, or younger children. Different relationships may also be observed in different social contexts. For instance, Baldwin, Duncan, and Bell (1987) have reported differences in African Self-Consciousness (another measure of racial identity) for students at predominantly White versus predominantly African American universities. The meaning of race in the lives of individuals also may vary as a result of both developmental and cohort influences (Parham & Williams, 1993). Finally, it should be noted that our college sample was extremely affluent com-

pared to the majority of African Americans. Stokes, Murray, Peacock, and Kaiser (1994) noted that African Americans of higher income more strongly identified with African Americans than individuals with lower incomes. Further research is needed to determine if the relationships between centrality, private regard and personal self-esteem differ according to socioeconomic status.

In conclusion, the overall picture presented by these data suggests that racial identity is a complex structure. Simple relationships do not tell the complete story. It is important that research models incorporate multidimensionality in their conceptualizations of African American racial identity. Similarly, it is important that researchers utilize multidimensional measures when examining racial identity's relationship to other aspects of the self-concept. The present results are also testimony in support of approaches that investigate the meaning of the identity to the individual over approaches that simply assume that the identity in question is important to the individual.

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