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ABSTRACT

This study addressed the quality of the racial environment, the "racial climate," that students of color face on predominantly white campuses and the impact this has on student satisfaction and successful academic performance. The second question is that of the role of ethnic or racial identification in students' adjustment to the campus environment. Unique to this study is the inclusion of academic satisfaction, which refers to the extent to which students feel satisfied with their academic experience, both for its intellectual challenge and its career relevance. Responses of 96 African American students (65% female) to questionnaires that were part of a larger study provided data on students at college entrance and in the fourth year. Significant predictors of African American students' cumulative grade point average, general satisfaction, and academic satisfaction differed for each outcome. For African American students in the sample, academic achievement was primarily related to background characteristics, but not to race-related campus experiences. A negative campus environment appeared to have a negative effect on student satisfaction, but not on academic performance. It also appeared that ethnic identity, as an individual characteristic a student brings to college, is a strength that enhances student academic performance. (Contains 4 tables and 43 references.) (SLD)

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Ethnic Identification, Racial Climate and African American Undergraduate Educational Outcomes in a Predominantly White University

Abstract

Significant predictors of African American students' cumulative grade point average, general satisfaction, and academic satisfaction differ for each outcome. A negative campus environment appears to have a negative effect on their satisfaction but not on academic performance. Further, it appears as if ethnic identity is a strength that enhances their academic performance.

Ethnic Identification, Racial Climate and African American Undergraduate Educational Outcomes in a Predominantly White University

It has been over thirty years since the Civil Rights Movement provided the impetus for predominantly white institutions to open their doors to African American, and later to other students of color. Despite many advances, there remain concerns about how to maximize the experience and success of students of color on predominantly white campuses. While there has been much speculation, there has been little large, systematic, empirical longitudinal research on the factors that affect this experience and success. As a consequence, there has not been a body of research upon which to draw to help guide educational policies that seek to maximize the adjustment and success of students of color in our increasingly racially and ethnically diverse universities.

The present study addresses two major questions for which research is needed. One is the quality of the racial environment, the "racial climate," that students of color face on predominantly white campuses and the impact this has on students' satisfaction and successful academic performance. The second question is the role of students' ethnic or racial identification in their adjustment in the campus environment. While both of these questions - "campus racial climate" and "ethnic identity" - have been a major focus of concern in the literature and research on underrepresented students of color, the conceptual issues have been underdeveloped and the empirical evidence limited. While the campus racial climate has generally been viewed as negatively affecting the educational outcomes of students of color, there has been little attempt, conceptually or empirically, to tie particular dimensions of the climate to specific outcomes. The role of identity is even more uncertain and a matter of often heated disagreement, particularly with respect to the relationship between identity and academic commitment and performance.

Some who favor a "color blind" approach to education see underrepresented students' ethnic identity as undermining their involvement in academic endeavors, while others view identity as a strength that enhances academic involvement. Neither of these perspectives is clearly supported by the empirical evidence in the literature. This study of these issues attempts to address some of the conceptual and empirical limitations of the existing literature.

THE RACIAL CLIMATE AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE UNIVERSITIES

Much of the literature on campus racial climate has focused on tension and conflict in interracial relationships (Sedlacek 1987; Sedlacek & Brooks 1976; Tracey & Sedlacek 1984, 1985, 1987a, 1987b). Several conceptual approaches to explaining these conflicts have been proposed (Hurtado 1992; Richardson & Skinner 1990; Stassen 1990). Stassen, for instance, reported that many white faculties on predominantly white college campuses have negative attitudes toward African American students that affect their interactions and serve as models for white student behavior. In combination these perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors contribute to the perception of a negative racial environment by African American students.

African American students' perceptions of a negative racial environment on predominantly white college campuses have led many to conclude that the consequences are negative for their educational outcomes (Ogbu 1987, C.M. Steele 1992; Steele & Aronson 1995). While a few studies have suggested this relationship between a negative racial environment and negative outcomes for underrepresented students (Astin 1975, Fleming 1984), this conclusion has not been consistently supported by empirical research. The negative environment-negative outcomes formulation ignores the fact that many underrepresented students of color attain high levels of achievement and graduate within four to six years despite the environment. Thus, other scholars and empirical studies have questioned the exclusive focus on the negative consequences

of a negative racial environment and are focusing on the correlates of success among underrepresented students in campus environments perceived as negative (Allen 1985, 1988; Hurtado 1990, 1992, 1994). Some studies have related students' race-related experiences on campus to specific student outcomes: academic achievement (Allen 1985, 1988; Fleming 1984; Hurtado 1990; Nettles 1988, 1991; Nettles, Thoeny, & Gosman 1986; Smith 1991), dropout and retention (Astin 1975; Eimers & Pike 1997; Hurtado 1992, 1994; Hurtado, Carter & Spuler 1996; Smedley, Myers & Harrell 1993; Nora & Cabrera 1996), and student satisfaction (Cabrera & Nora 1994). Thus far, the research results do not indicate that a negative racial environment necessarily has negative effects on student achievement.

THE ROLE OF ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION

While most scholars and commentators agree that the experience of African American students in predominantly white institutions has negative aspects, there is less agreement as to how to counter the negative effects. One area of disagreement is over the relationship between ethnic identification and academic achievement, and the value of institutional initiatives that attempt to use identity as a means to academic success. Some scholars feel that encouraging ethnic group identification and consciousness, particularly among African American students, exacerbates the problem of negative educational outcomes (Patterson 1995, S. Steele 1992). Scholars who take the contrary viewpoint out that the concern that ethnic identification has negative outcomes fails to consider the importance of identity in helping students cope and achieve in a hostile, derogatory environment (Allen, Epps, and Haniff 1991, Gurin and Epps 1975, Hurtado 1994).

This issue of the effect of identity on student achievement has significant implications for institutions of higher education because many of the institutional initiatives they have introduced

attempt to use identity as a means of helping underrepresented students adjust to and succeed in these institutions. While historically ethnic studies and specialized programs for underrepresented students were a response to the demands of African American students in the late 1960s and 1970s, some scholars have pointed out that ethnic studies provides an opportunity to direct students' identity concerns and demand for relevance into traditional intellectual channels (Gurin & Epps 1975).

Not all scholars agree that institutional initiatives that foster identity were beneficial for underrepresented students. Student demands for relevance and the institutional responses to them were the subject of much discussion during the 1970s. In their landmark study of the impact of increased enrollments of black students on predominantly white college campuses, Peterson and his colleagues (1978) cautioned against the tendency to "minimize conflict by developing separate student organizations and separate support services and/or academic programs" (p. 319). The authors warned of the potential negative consequences for campuses wherein race relations were characterized by "voluntary segregation or by indifference thinly covering interracial conflicts and feelings of mistrust" (p. 319). They cautioned that separate programs for every "minority" group would prove duplicative and expensive, and that combining them would prove difficult because of the unique interests of the groups concerned. The authors concluded that failing to deal with these or any other student, institutional, or programmatic issues was "likely to become a source of difficulty at some point in these institutions' relationships with minorities" (p. 316). More recent empirical research indicates some positive consequences of providing separate programs for underrepresented students. There are indications that separate programs contribute to underrepresented students' involvement in

student activities, interaction with faculty, use of general support services, and more frequent informal interracial interactions (Hurtado, Dey & Trevino 1994, Gilliard 1995).

It is interesting that a generation after the study by Peterson and his colleagues we are still debating the positive and negative consequences of ethnic studies and special programming for underrepresented students of color, and the implications of the ethnic identity that these programs foster. The continuity of the debates reflects not only the complexities of the issues involved, but also the dearth of empirical research that has systematically examined the consequences for students' individual achievement of a strong sense of group identity and an institutional environment that heightens this identity.

The research literature on the impact of ethnic identity on student outcomes has focused on academic achievement. In general, with occasional exceptions (e.g., Jackson & Swan 1991; Sellers, Chavous & Cooke 1998), empirical studies of African American students have shown no relationship between identity and academic achievement (Allen 1985; Gurin & Epps 1975, Hall & Allen 1982; Smith 1991). This also appears to be true for Latino students (Hurtado 1994). Thus, the empirical literature does not support the view that the identity fostered by campus programs oriented toward African American students has negative or positive effects on academic investment and performance.

While some clear consistent findings have emerged from the literature on underrepresented students of color -- for example, the relationship between a negative racial climate and greater dissatisfaction of African American students -- much of the research has led to ambiguous conclusions, particularly when academic achievement (GPA) is the student outcome. Three limitations in the existing body of theory and research may have contributed to the ambiguities and inconsistencies in our current knowledge. First, the literatures on identity

and racial climate have tended to view student outcomes as "good" or "bad," without explicitly and systematically investigating the differential predictors of different desired outcomes, particularly the distinction between factors related to GPA and those related to student satisfaction. Second, the literature has not investigated the impact of the identity that entering students bring to their university experience. With few exceptions, research on identity has not been longitudinal in nature so it has not been possible to interpret whether a relationship between students' identity and their experiences and behaviors in college represent the impact of these experiences on identity or the tendency of identified students to get involved in these experiences. Third, studies of the racial climate have tended to focus on the issue of racial tension and conflict. With rare exceptions (for example, Hurtado 1990), an aspect of the climate that is probably more important for students of color -- the sense of the university as committed to diversity -- has not been included in these studies.

All three of these issues -- the systematic comparative analysis of predictors of three different outcomes, the measurement of identity at both entrance and after four years of college, and the investigation of institutional commitment as an aspect of the racial climate -- are central aspects of the present study.

METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is presented in Figure 1. The basic premise of [Place Figure 1 Here]

the framework is that educational outcomes are the result of both personal characteristics students have upon entering college and what they experience while there. The model begins with background demographic characteristics that affect the ethnic identity that students bring to

college. Ethnic identification in turn is viewed as influencing the race-related experiences that students get involved in; these experiences in turn affect the students' identity and view of the racial climate of the college at the end of their college career. Identity and views of the climate influence each other, and each in turn influences the three student outcomes of interest in this study: academic achievement (cumulative grade point average), general satisfaction with the college experience, and academic satisfaction. As indicated by the arrows in the model, the study is concerned with both the direct relationships of pre-college characteristics and college experiences to outcomes, and the indirect relationships that trace the process from background characteristics to outcomes, as mediated in turn by ethnic identity at entrance, student race-related campus experiences, and ethnic identity and perceptions of the racial climate at the end of four years of college.

The model incorporates three characteristics not typical in the literature -- three different outcomes, the measurement of identity at both entrance and after four years of college, and institutional commitment as an aspect of the racial climate. It is a basic assumption of this study that the factors in the framework that influence student outcomes vary according to the type of outcome.

Two of the three outcomes of interest in this study, academic achievement and general satisfaction, are standard outcomes in the college student impact literature. Unique to this study is the inclusion of academic satisfaction, which refers to the extent to which students feel satisfied with their academic experience, both for its intellectual challenge and its career relevance.

This exploratory study concerns the possible effects of the campus racial environment on students. Since this is not an inter-institutional study, it cannot measure the impact on students

of objectively measured environmental characteristics because these characteristics do not vary in a single institution. Rather the study explores the impact of a student's experience with and perception of the racial environment at one institution.

Data Source and Sample

The present research is part of a larger longitudinal study conducted at a major midwestern Research I University, which was designed to investigate the development of a campus community based on diversity, through an understanding of the expectations and experiences of undergraduate students. In the larger study, surveys were administered to all student of color and a large representative sample of white students who entered the university in 1990. The questionnaires used in the larger study were distributed at four time periods - at entrance in the beginning of the Fall 1990, and after one, two, and four years at the University in Winter 1991, Winter 1992 and Winter 1994 terms. The results of the present study are based on the responses of 96 African American students, of whom 62 were female (65%) and 34 were male (35%), who responded to both the entrance (1990) and end of fourth year (1994) questionnaires. The entrance and fourth year survey response rates for African American students were 42% and 58%, respectively.

Variables

Pre-College Characteristics. As indicated in Figure 1, the following background and experience variables are included in the study: gender, parental education, interracial community and school experiences, and academic preparation. Most studies indicate that gender is an important determinant in the success and satisfaction of African American college students (Allen 1992; Astin 1982; Carter & Wilson 1992; Kuh 1995; Mow & Nettles 1990). However, others indicate no significant effects (Fleming 1984; Gilliard 1995; Nettles 1988). There are also

equivocal findings on the predictive value of parental education, with some researchers reporting a positive association with student achievement and persistence (Astin 1982; Gosman, Dandridge, Nettles, Thoeny 1983; Jackson & Swan 1991), while others report that it has no predictive value (Allen 1992; Gilliard 1995; Allen & Haniff 1991; Mow & Nettles 1990; Nettles 1991). Despite these somewhat equivocal findings, gender and parental education are standard background controls in studies of student impact, and were therefore included in the study. Students' interracial neighborhood and school experiences were included in order to explore the suggestion that African American college students are disadvantaged by living in segregated neighborhoods and attending racially segregated high schools (Astin 1982; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen & Allen 1996; Jackson & Swan 1991; Mow & Nettles 1990; Nettles 1991), although here too the research evidence is somewhat inconsistent. Braddock (as cited in Mow & Nettles 1990) found that high school desegregation experience has little impact on Black students' grade point average, and in studies by Nettles (1991) and Nettles, Thoeny & Gosman (1986) home neighborhood does not appear to be a significant predictor of student achievement. Academic preparation, as measured by SAT/ACT composite scores, was also included as a background control even though it is the subject of much debate, particularly with reference to African American students. Astin (1982), for example, found that high school class rank or high school grade point average has equal or greater predictive value. Other research indicates that neither standardized test scores nor high school class rank or grade point average are as valid for Black students as they are for Whites (Nettles, Thoeny & Gosman 1986; Sedlacek 1987). There is, however, sufficient evidence for its predictive value to student outcomes to justify its continued inclusion as an input variable in studies of college impact (Franklin 1995; Mow & Nettles 1990; Pantages & Creedon 1978; Sanford 1982).

Ethnic identification, both at entrance and the end of four years, was measured in a two-item index that has been used in the social psychological literature (Gurin, Miller & Gurin 1980; Gurin, Hatchett & Jackson 1989), which asked students to indicate the centrality of being African American, and their sense of shared fate with other African Americans.

College Race-Related Experiences. Student race-related experiences comprise four measures that include both students' intra-group and intergroup relationships. Discrimination was measured by a question that asked whether students' felt they had personally experienced harassment or discrimination during their years at the University. Alienation was measured by a two-item index, which tapped into students' feelings of personal rejection within the institution, and from the "messages", students of color often receive about the "legitimacy" of their presence at the University. In general, research indicates that African American students' experiences of personal discrimination are related to their feeling alienated from the institution generally (Feagin 1989; Fleming 1984; Gilliard 1995; Cabrera & Nora 1994), although there are exceptions in the literature (Hurtado 1992).

Participation in ethnic-specific organizations and activities was measured by several survey items indicating the students' degree of participation in groups or activities reflecting African American culture or ethnic background, and in campus-wide events devoted to other ethnic groups (e.g., Hispanic Heritage Celebration events). In the literature, participation in African American activities on campus has been positively related to African American students' grade point average, satisfaction with the overall college experience, and sense of integration and belonging in the campus community (Allen 1988, 1992; Davis 1991; Gilliard 1995; Sedlacek 1987).

Relationships with faculty was measured by a two-part survey question that asked students whether there was a faculty member who had a major impact on their personal or intellectual development, and were also asked to identify the faculty member's ethnicity. It is well established in the college impact literature that faculty-student relations contribute to all students' achievement and satisfaction (Astin 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini 1991; Allen et al. 1991). One issue that has been identified in the literature is that the effects of faculty-student relations differ according to who is interacting and the type of interaction. For example, Nettles (1991) found that compared to White students, African American students had less out-of-class contact with faculty, lower GPAs, and were less satisfied. Another issue is related to the significance of African American faculty to student success. Prillerman, Myers & Smedley (1989) offered that the presence of Black faculty has a positive effect on the relationship between African American students' feelings of well being and academic success. The measure used in the present study addresses both of these issues.

Student race-related orientations include students' perceptions of the campus racial climate, as measured by a survey item that asked students to rate certain patterns of relations between people of color and white people on campus. Two dimensions of climate emerged: campus racial conflict and interracial tension, a two-item index, and university commitment to diversity, a three-item index that asked students' feelings about the University's values and overall message of support and respect for students of color.

Outcomes. Cumulative Grade Point Average represents the students' grade point averages at the end of four years in college. The general satisfaction index is a composite of two items related to satisfaction with college choice and sense of belonging at the University. The

academic satisfaction index is a composite of two items related to intellectual quality and challenge, and career relevance of courses.

FINDINGS

Correlation Coefficients

Pearson correlation coefficients were used to test all of the bivariate relationships between predictors and outcomes in the model (Table 1). This table presents a very interesting pattern, [Place Table 1 Here]

which indicates the striking differences between the factors related to the different outcomes, particularly the distinction between factors related to academic achievement and factors related to satisfaction with the university experience. For the African American students in the sample, academic achievement is primarily related to background characteristics, but not to race-related campus experiences. Satisfaction, in contrast, is primarily related to race-related campus experiences but not to background characteristics.

The background factors related to achievement are similar to those that have been shown in the college impact literature to be related to grade point average in all students, regardless of their ethnicity and identity. Higher achieving college students come to the university with better academic preparation (as measured by standardized test scores) and from higher educated homes. The one finding of interest that has not typically been investigated in the literature on college students is the integration or segregation of the student's neighborhood and school backgrounds. The correlation coefficients indicate that students with higher CGPAs come from more integrated neighborhoods and high schools, a finding which is consistent with the higher education of their parents, since both parental education and more integrated environments reflect the higher socioeconomic status that is typically related to higher CGPA. As with all students, therefore,

African American students who will do well academically enter the university with academic strengths that come from backgrounds that have encouraged and supported their individual academic achievement.

The positive relationship with ethnic identity at entrance indicates that high academic achievers also come to the university with strengths derived from their ethnic group identifications. Individual achievement orientation and collective identification are not antagonistic for African American students, as some scholars and commentators have viewed them. On the contrary, both are strengths that African American students bring with them and enable them to achieve in a predominantly white, highly academic, demanding university. These findings contradict the argument some have made that group identity has been used by African American students to avoid and reject academic demands and performance.

Perhaps more surprising than the relationships between background characteristics and cumulative grade point average are the lack of significant relationships between CGPA and the students' views of and experiences in the racial environment of the campus. The correlations contradict the somewhat common sense argument that strong ethnic identification and negative race-related experiences in a negative campus racial climate have negative consequences for African American student academic achievement. Identity and negative experiences do, however, have clear consequences for the students' overall satisfaction with their university experience. Students with strong African American identity, who have experienced discrimination and rejection on campus, who view the campus racial climate as tension-filled and conflictive, and who view the university as uncommitted to the concerns of students of color, all are less satisfied with their university experience. The findings with respect to identity are particularly interesting because identity at entrance is the one predictor in the model that has

opposite implications for the two outcomes: a strong African American identity is positively related to cumulative grade point average but negatively related to general satisfaction.

Two other predictors that are differentially related to the two outcomes should be noted. Having attended an integrated or predominantly white high school and having had a mentoring relationship with a faculty member at Michigan (particularly a Black faculty member) are both significantly related to the student's academic achievement at Michigan ($r=.25$ and $r=.26$, respectively), but bear no relationship to the student's satisfaction with the University experience ($r=.03$ and $r=.09$, respectively). The high school findings suggest that African American students who go to Michigan benefit academically from the superior educational resources available at integrated and white high schools, but do not have experiences that make them more satisfied with the predominantly white environment they will find at Michigan. The findings with respect to the faculty mentor suggest, perhaps surprisingly, that the impact of faculty that students remember as particularly influential are confined to the academic arena. Faculty members are particularly important for helping the students get connected to the academic endeavor but do not seem to provide a broader personal or even intellectual model.

Compared to a student's general satisfaction with the University, academic satisfaction is related to a narrower set of predictors. Academic satisfaction shows no relation to identity or personal experiences of discrimination, that is, to the personal aspects of the racial environment. Rather, it is related to perceptions of the institutional climate with respect to race.

Regression Analyses

In the next stage of the data analyses, all significant predictors were included in a set of blocked entry ordinary least squares regressions. The results of these regressions are shown in Tables 2, 3, 4. These tables present the Beta coefficients (standardized regression coefficients)

for variables included in the model after each block, as well as the Beta coefficient (beta in) for each variable that has not yet entered the regression. The beta in represents what the variable's beta would be if the variable were entered into the regression at the next step.

Cumulative grade point average (Table 2). Parents' education, pre-college interracial
[Place Table 2 Here]

experiences at home and in high school, and standardized test scores (SAT) had significant bivariate relationships to students' academic performance in college; higher grade point averages were achieved by students whose parents had some college or beyond, who lived in neighborhoods or attended high schools that were predominantly white, and who had higher SAT scores. However, the relationships between GPA and SAT became insignificant when parental education and pre-college interracial experience were controlled through the application of multiple regression techniques. Parents' education and the combination of living in an ethnically diverse neighborhood and attending an integrated high school appear to be the critical background characteristic affecting academic performance. Since the three background characteristics are highly correlated with each other, apparently the bivariate relationship between GPA and SAT scores is reflecting the combined impact of the home environment, living in more affluent neighborhoods, and attending schools with more and better educational resources.

Ethnic identity at entrance is positively and consistently related to cumulative grade point average, retaining its' significance even after taking into account family and academic background. The African American students who enter the university with a strong identity have a higher cumulative grade point average over the next four years than students who enter college less identified.

The relationships to GPA of all three of these significant background factors – parents education, integration of neighborhood and high school, and identity at entrance – are slightly reduced when the college experience, climate and identity at the end of four years are entered into the regression. This indicates that the impact of the background factors is mediated to some extent by these college experiences.

Cumulative grade point average is not much affected by the racial environment for students in this study. Their perceptions of the campus racial climate and their interracial experiences in college are not related to their academic achievement. The college experience that does matter for these African American students is the same one that the research literature indicates matters for all students, namely, the experience of having a faculty mentor. Students with higher GPAs were more likely to have had a faculty mentor. Students who had a Black faculty mentor had slightly higher grade point averages than those who had one who was not Black, but the critical significant difference was between students who had any faculty mentor and those who had no mentor at all. An examination of the bivariate relationship reveals that 42% of the students with a mentoring relationship with a Black faculty member had a GPA of 3.0 or higher and 32% of those with a White faculty member attained that GPA level, in contrast to only 14% of the students with no faculty mentoring relationship.

General satisfaction (Table 3). The data clearly indicate that the factors that affect African [Place Table 3 Here]

American students' satisfaction with their college experience are primarily related to the experience itself rather than to student background characteristics. The discrimination that students find at the University, combined with their perceptions of racial tension and lack of institutional support, form a set of experiences and attitudes that result in a college experience

that is generally less than satisfying. Ethnic identity, as already indicated, is negatively related to satisfaction.

Academic satisfaction (Table 4). As noted in the discussion of the zero order correlations, [Place Table 4 Here]

perception of the university's commitment to diversity is the one significant predictor of academic satisfaction. The satisfaction-climate relationship suggests that, for the students in this study, University commitment implies more than just tolerance of difference; it implies a particular type of openness, one that embraces the sensibility of their collective academic interests as African Americans, and reflects those interests in the core structures of the institution. Perhaps for these students, being academically stimulated and challenged requires that the University's academic priorities reflect a valuation of various perspectives, particularly those that are uniquely appealing to them as African Americans.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

One aim of this study was to clarify the relationship between African American students' ethnic identity and educational outcomes. The study results suggest that ethnic identity is an individual strength that a student brings to college, which enables the student to perform effectively in a demanding academic environment. This relationship contradicts the popular opinion that academic achievement motivation is weakened by an African American student's ethnic identity. To the contrary, entering the university with a strong ethnic identity is an asset that seems to facilitate positive academic outcomes.

The racial environment does affect African American student outcomes but not necessarily in a negative way. The effects differ depending on the particular outcome, and on the particular aspect of the environment being considered, that is, whether the focus is on individual

experiential aspects of the environment (e.g., personal experiences of discrimination) or on institutional aspects (e.g., perceptions of the university's commitment to diversity). For example, personal experiences of discrimination are not predictive of a student's cumulative grade point average, but do have a negative effect on a student's satisfaction with college. While the lack of a relationship between negative racial experiences and academic performance is in some sense counter-intuitive, it is not surprising given that African Americans have a long history of success despite racist environments. Although they are confronted daily by some form of racism, prejudice, or discrimination on the job, in business and government, at play, and in educational institutions, there are sufficient middle and working class African Americans to demonstrate that a negative racial environment does not ipso facto result in negative outcomes.

Theoretical Implications

Apparently, it is one thing for African Americans to succeed academically in college and another to be satisfied and intellectually stimulated. This difference suggests that when examining the effects of the racial environment it is necessary to expand the conception of what matters to think more broadly about educational outcomes, focusing on overall satisfaction and on the quality of the intellectual experience, and not just on grade point average and attrition.

The patterns of relationships revealed in this study indicate that, in studies of the impact of the racial environment on the educational outcomes of students of color, it is necessary to distinguish among different outcomes and to conceptually and empirically disaggregate the racial environment. These distinctions are necessary in order to clarify the independent effects of different aspects of the environment on the different outcomes. For research on the impact of ethnic identity on the educational outcomes of students of color, this study's findings underscore the importance of a longitudinal design that begins at the point of the student's entrance into

college. The fact that this study measured identity at both entrance and after four years of college has helped to clarify the relationship between identity and academic performance that is ambiguous in the literature.

The finding that ethnic identity is related to academic performance appears to directly contradict scholars such as Ogbu (1987), who stressed the negative impact of identity on academic performance. The work of Sellers et al (1998) might help to explain this apparent contradiction. Unlike other research on this topic, Sellers et al distinguish between whether the person identifies with being Black and her or his attitudes and beliefs regarding what it means to be Black. In other words, they make a distinction between the centrality and importance of race in a person's definition of the self, and the ideology associated with the identity. Consistent with the present study, which measured the centrality of identity, Sellers' results indicate that racial centrality was positively associated with academic performance among college students. However, Sellers and his colleagues also found that the relationship of racial ideology to performance depends on the particular ideology. The confusion in the literature on ethnic identity and academic performance appears to result from not making the distinction between the personal relevance of race and the meaning ascribed to it, and also different types of meaning. Thus, it is crucial to our understanding of the relationship between identity and performance to investigate identity in all of its complexity.

Practical Implications

In the literature on higher education, the attention paid to the significance of a positive campus racial environment for student overall and academic satisfaction pales in comparison to the attention given to its impact on the "hard" outcomes of academic performance and student attrition. This study clearly indicates that more attention should be paid to student satisfaction

because the campus racial environment, and particularly institutional commitment to diversity matter, and importantly, they matter for academic satisfaction. What is also clear from the data is that their standardized test scores do not affect the academic achievement of the students in this study, when background characteristics are statistically controlled.

The finding that ethnic identity is positively related to cumulative grade point average supports the argument that it is not necessary for students to relinquish ethnic group or cultural affiliation to achieve academic success (Allen 1985; Hurtado 1994). Inherent in programs that discourage ethnic identification is the assumption that identity takes something away from the individual student and adds nothing of benefit to the academic experience for the identified student or for other students with whom she/he shares experiences. To the contrary, this study suggests that identity and programs that foster it can add value to the student's educational experience and outcomes.

To the extent that the University is concerned with student satisfaction and academic engagement as educational outcomes, resources would be well spent improving its commitment to diversity and to developing an environment conducive to the success of all students. Improving institutional commitment can be realized in a number of ways. For instance, the University can broaden the curricular "canon" so that it is explicitly and consistently inclusive and reflective of the ethnically or racially diverse perspectives that contribute to knowledge; implement faculty development initiatives designed to improve White faculty responses to ethnic or racial diversity; increase the ranks of underrepresented faculty of color and explicitly support, recognize, and reward their unique scholarly interests and student-related responsibilities; and include or increase the number of people of color as top level administrators, policy and decision makers. Programmatically, there should be a focus on the development and support of initiatives

that encourage sustained interaction with members of ethnic/racial groups different from one's own, as these can help to dispel myths and stereotypes that negatively affect intergroup interactions.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There were several limitations to this study. It was based on a secondary analysis of existing data, which limited the ability to get highly reliable multi-item indices to test the conceptual model. The sample size was small; thus, it was not possible to use all four waves of surveys from the larger study to help determine causality among the reciprocally interacting variables in the model. Finally, the study was limited to a single institution, which raises questions about the generalizability of the findings. For example, is the finding that a strong identity is a strength that positively affects GPA particularly true at highly demanding prestige institutions like the one that was the site of this study?

Obviously future research should address these three major limitations. First, studies should be developed to specifically test the study model, with reliable multi-item indices for major concepts. Second, studies should be multi-institutional, with a large enough sample of institutions to test institutional effects objectively, and with institutional measures of racial climate beyond the institutional perceptions of the students. Third, this multi-institutional study should yield a large enough sample of African American students to enable the inclusion of more than two waves of data in a longitudinal design, providing the design necessary for an analysis of the causal processes operating in the model.

Although this study has focused on factors thought to be particularly pertinent to the African American student, the research model is also appropriate for use with other ethnic groups. It has identified a number of elements to be tested in a causal model. It highlights the

significance of examining various educational outcomes. Importantly, it reveals that satisfaction, particularly academic satisfaction, is affected by university commitment to diversity. Future research should involve a more in-depth analysis of students' intellectual responses to the college experience and of policies and practices that reflect institutional commitment to ethnic/racial diversity.

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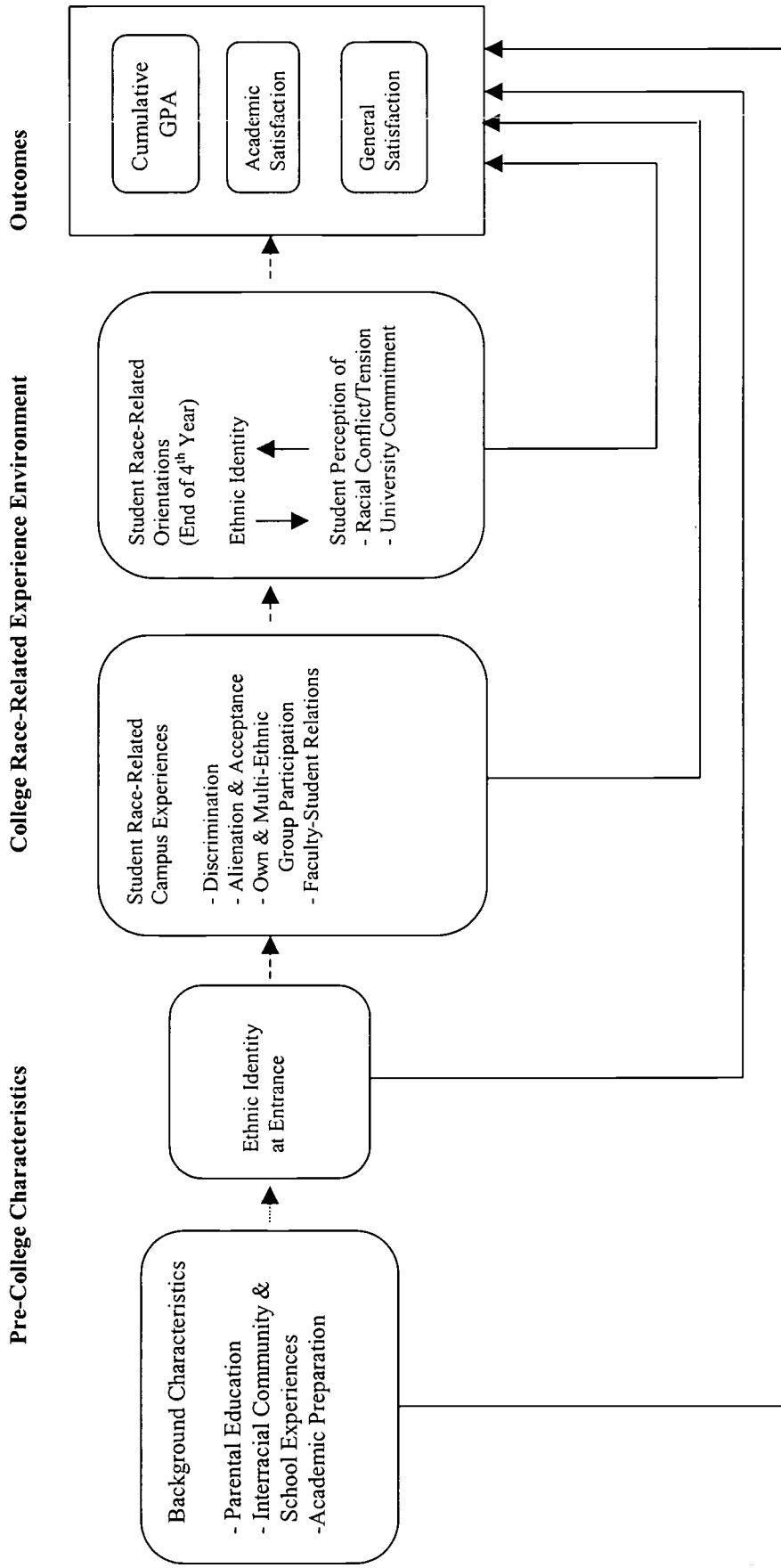
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Figure 1: Conceptual Model



Note:
 —————> Indicates direct relationships to outcomes
 - - - - -> Indicates indirect relationships to outcomes

Table 1: Zero-Order Correlation Coefficients for Predictor Variables & Outcomes

Predictor Variables	Grade Point Average		General Satisfaction		Academic Satisfaction	
	r	n	r	n	r	n
<i>Background Characteristics</i>						
Gender	.02	96	-.08	96	-.06	96
Father's Education	.34***	86	.04	86	-.13	86
Mother's Education	.22**	94	.03	94	-.07	94
Experiences with Diversity:						
Neighborhood Composition	.29***	96	.12	96	.12	96
High School Composition	.25***	94	.03	94	.05	94
Academic Preparation:						
SAT/ACT Score	.20*	95	-.11	95	-.03	95
Ethnic Identity at Entrance	.25**	94	-.20**	94	.03	94
<i>Race-Related Campus Experiences</i>						
Interracial Experiences:						
Discrimination	.09	93	-.23**	93	-.02	93
Rejection	.06	96	-.26***	96	-.02	96
Own Group Experiences:						
African American Student Orgs & Activities	.05	96	-.08	96	.09	96
University-Sponsored Ethnic-Specific Events	.08	96	-.09	96	.14	96
Student-Faculty Relations:						
Significant Relations with Black Faculty Member	.26***	96	.09	96	.10	96
<i>Race-Related Orientations</i>						
Perceived Racial Tension & Conflict after 4 Yrs	.12	96	-.26***	96	-.07	96
Perceived University Commitment to Diversity after 4 Yrs	.15	93	.36***	93	.24**	93
Ethnic Identity after 4 Yrs	.15	96	-.25***	96	.01	96
***p≤.01 **p≤.05 *p≤.10						

Table 2: Beta Coefficients for Blocked Entry Regression on Cumulative Grade Point Average after Four Years of College (N=96)

Independent Variable	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4
	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
Parents' Education	.19*	.19*	.18*	.17
Integration of Home Neighborhood & High School	.22**	.21**	.17	.16
SAT/ACT	<u>.08</u>	.03	.12	.13
Ethnic Identity at Entrance	(.19*)	<u>.19*</u>	.15	.13
Experienced Discrimination or Rejection on Campus	(.03)	(.01)	-.06	-.06
Had Significant Relationship with Faculty Member	(.28***)	(.25**)	<u>.26***</u>	.26**
Ethnic Identity after 4 Yrs	(.12)	(.07)	(.07)	.09
Perceived Campus Tension/ Conflict after 4 Yrs	(.02)	(.01)	(-.01)	-.01
Perceived University Commitment to Diversity after 4 Yrs	(.12)	(.13)	(.12)	.12
R ²	.14***	.18***	.23***	.25***

() Beta coefficients for variables not entered in regression with that block are in parentheses.

***p≤.01 **p≤.05 *p≤.10

Indicates significance of Beta coefficients and significance of change in R² following entry of each block.

Table 3: Beta Coefficients for Blocked Entry Regression on General Satisfaction after Four Years of College (N=96)

Independent Variable	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4
	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
Parents' Education	.06	.06	.08	.11
Integration of Home Neighborhood & High School	.08	.09	.09	.11
SAT/ACT	<u>-.15</u>	-.10	-.07	-.11
Ethnic Identity at Entrance	(-.19*)	<u>-.19*</u>	-.19*	-.15
Experienced Discrimination or Rejection on Campus	(-.30***)	(-.29***)	-.34***	-.23**
Had Significant Relationship with Faculty Member	(.06)	(.11)	<u>.20*</u>	.18*
Ethnic Identity after 4 Yrs	(-.28***)	(-.25**)	(-.18*)	-.09
Perceived Campus Tension/ Conflict after 4 Yrs	(-.33***)	(-.32***)	(-.26***)	-.19*
Perceived University Commitment to Diversity after 4 Yrs	(.31***)	(.30***)	(.26***)	.22**
R ²	.02	.06	.17***	.28***

() Beta coefficients for variables not entered in regression with that block are in parentheses.

***p≤.01 **p≤.05 *p≤.10

Indicates significance of Beta coefficients and significance of change in R² following entry of each block.

Table 4: Beta Coefficients for Blocked Entry Regression on Academic Satisfaction after Four Years of College (N=96)

Independent Variable	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4
	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
Parents' Education	-.15	-.15	-.16	-.15
Home Neighborhood & High School Diversity	.13	.13	.11	.11
SAT/ACT	<u>-.02</u>	-.03	.02	.01
Ethnic Identity at Entrance	(.03)	<u>.03</u>	.01	.01
Experienced Discrimination or Rejection on Campus	(-.02)	(-.03)	-.06	-.02
Had Significant Relationship with Faculty Member	(.12)	(.11)	<u>.13</u>	.12
Ethnic Identity after 4 Yrs	(.01)	(-.00)	(.00)	.06
Perceived Campus Tension/ Conflict after 4 Yrs	(-.10)	(-.11)	(-.12)	-.09
Perceived University Commitment to Diversity after 4 Yrs	(.22**)	(.22**)	(.22**)	.21*
R ²	.03	.03	.04	.09

() Beta coefficients for variables not entered in regression with that block are in parentheses.

***p≤.01 **p≤.05 *p≤.10

Indicates significance of Beta coefficients and significance of change in R² following entry of each block.



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