

Linking Communalism to Achievement Correlates for Black and White Undergraduates

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This study examined relationships between home-based communal activities and beliefs and student reports of various achievement correlates with 290 black and white undergraduates. MANOVA procedures examined differences in self-esteem, self-efficacy, identified motivation, motivation to know, and amotivation and scores on Home Communalism Measure subscales as a function of race and other demographic variables. No significant race differences emerged for any of the communalism or motivation subscales. Subsequent regression analyses found that reports of communalism were predictive of students' self-efficacy, self-esteem, identified motivation, motivation to know and amotivation scores. Implications and limitations of findings are discussed.

The achievement of undergraduate students in the U.S. continues to be a heavily researched topic among education researchers. A good deal of this concern results from the perceived academic achievement disparities found between ethnic minority and white students (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004; van Laar, 2000). Though the past twenty years have witnessed a significant increase in the number of ethnic minority students enrolling and graduating from undergraduate and graduate/professional degree programs within the U.S. (Cokley, 2003), their expected and actual academic performance has been observed at significantly lower levels than their white counterparts.

To explain this phenomenon, some researchers have subscribed to genetic/biological frameworks (Rushton & Jensen, 2005). Others have employed more comprehensive frameworks to investigate black college students' academic outcomes and their psychological and/or social/contextual antecedents (Garcia-Coll, et al., 1996; Spencer, 1995). Emerging from these frameworks are data advancing the argument that undergraduate performance is linked to several important environmental and familial factors (Cokley, 2003; Neville, Heppner, Ji, & Thye, 2004). Several empirical studies, for example, have noted the importance of various psychological, familial/contextual, and interpersonal factors which promote academic self-efficacy and motivation for black undergraduates as well as those factors that may hinder achievement. Some of these factors include self-efficacy, stereotype threat, institutional attachment, and specific culturally-derived factors such as spirituality and religiosity (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006; Lewis-Coles, Lyris, & Constantine, 2006; Okech & Harrington, 2002; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003; Steele, 1997; Walker & Dixon, 2002). The literature also contains studies detailing the associations between

familial characteristics and achievement-related outcomes for black college students (Hwang, Echols, & Vrongistinos, 2001).

While several person- and context-based variables have been investigated to explain variance in black college student performance, it appears that factors apposite to issues of race (i.e., racial identity, race socialization, racial discrimination) have had a stronghold on the psychological and educational literatures detailing such performance (Pillay, 2005; Sanchez & Carter, 2005; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). Much of this literature contains data illustrating the development and progression of black racial identity and how it, along with the race-based experiences of this population, are associated with college student performance and its various psychological precursors (Mutisya & Ross, 2005; Sellers, et al., 2003; Swim et al., 2003).

Lagging behind this line of research, however, is an understanding of the culturally-premised, person- and context-centered variables that may also account for variance in black college student performance. While several theoretical frameworks illustrate the presence of specific cultural values permeating the socialization experiences of African Americans (Boykin, 1986; Garcia-Coll, et al., 1996), little research has been conducted to determine whether these cultural values are associated with achievement outcomes and their antecedents for this population. Thus, a greater research concentration on the cultural factors permeating black college students' lives and their associations with their academic experiences is warranted.

It is also important to determine whether the cultural values said to exist within black socialization experiences are actually endemic to this population. Given research findings suggesting that some cultural values found throughout black socialization practices

are also demonstrated and preferred by white populations (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002; Tyler, et al., 2006), it is important to determine whether the cultural values and practices deemed to be uniquely black are, in fact, reported by white populations. Whether these cultural values are linked with the psychological antecedents of undergraduates' academic performance is also important to discern.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to: a) examine the reports of black and white college students on a scale measuring the salience of communalism in their lives and b) determine whether these reports are linked to college student's academic self-efficacy, self-esteem, and motivation. While academic performance is the most widely studied index of success at all levels of schooling, it is equally important to examine the psychological antecedents of academic performance, including self-esteem, self-efficacy and academic motivation, especially among college student populations. In addition, many psychologists discussing the role of culture in cognition (Gordon & Armour-Thomas, 1991; Rogoff, 2003) have suggested that cultural values influence not only the behaviors individuals exhibit (i.e., academic performance) but also the psychological factors preceding such behaviors. Thus, following a discussion of the cultural values found in mainstream society and among black and white populations, an examination of whether reports of communal values and practices are 1) differentiated by demographic factors (i.e., race) and 2) associated with college students' reports of efficacy, esteem, and motivation will occur.

Institutions of Higher Learning and Culture

Many education researchers have championed the notion that, by and large, public schools are failing ethnic minority students by not fully recognizing and building upon the cultural capital students are bringing to formal learning contexts (Boykin & Ellison, 1995; Webb-Johnson, 2002). These arguments have recently been extended to the university campus as well. Notably, some research has argued that the university structure in the U.S. serves an implicit socialization function towards particular mainstream cultural values such as individualism and competition (Pei, 2002; Sampson, 1977; Spence, 1985). In order for students to achieve in institutions of higher learning, it is often incumbent for them to adopt a strong orientation towards working on their own and competing against others (Constantine & Sue, 2006; Pai & Adler, 1997; Strickland, 2000). These cultural values—individualism and competition—inform the academic and social institutions that all students, irrespective of developmental level, have to endure throughout their matriculation (Boykin, 1986) and are especially

prevalent during postsecondary education. Some empirical research supports this claim (Gaines, et al., 1997; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 1999).

Black College Students and Cultural Values

Boykin's Triple Quandary framework (1986) articulates nine conceptually distinct, integrity-based (those factors situated in the lived and purposeful experiences of a given population) cultural values and subsequent behavioral patterns said to permeate the socialization activities of African Americans. One cultural value that has been examined with college students is communalism (Jagers, 1988; Tyler, et al., under review). The basis for the communalism construct is found in the work of Boykin, Jagers, Ellison, & Albury (1997), who argue that, among persons of African descent, there is an implicit doctrine of interdependence and extended family system promotion whereby one's obligation extends beyond (but does not exclude) family to other social relations. Overall, there is a salient focus on the well-being of others, irrespective of the other person being an immediate family member. While some research has used the term collectivism and cooperation to discuss communalism (Gaines, et al., 1997; Oyserman et al., 2002; Triandis, 2001), Moemeka (1998) makes a case for conceptualizing communalism as a construct that informs cooperation and collectivism. Thus, the current study will employ a new measure to discern the presence of communal practices and attitudes among black and white college students.

One major assumption regarding mainstream cultural values, especially individualism and competition, is that most European Americans adhere to such values in their day-to-day lives, while African Americans are purported to endorse communal values (Boykin, 1986; Boykin & Ellison, 1995; Moemeka, 1998). Yet, there has been little research to determine whether black and white college students actually differ with respect to reported levels of communalism-based beliefs and corresponding behavioral patterns. In fact, some work investigating proxies of the communalism construct, namely collectivism and family cohesion, reported no significant difference between black and white students' scores of collectivism, while in other cases African Americans reported significantly higher levels of individualism than did their white college student counterparts while maintaining equal levels of reported collectivism (Gaines, et al., 1997; Oyserman et al., 2002; Tyler et al., 2006). For example, Tyler et al. (2006) uncovered that the learning and working behaviors found in both African and white households—as reported by parents of elementary school level children—were high in communalism.

In summation, no published studies to date have employed a theoretically grounded, empirically sound measure of communalism to examine its association with academically-aligned psychological variables such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and motivation, particularly for African Americans and white undergraduates. Moreover, given the finding that European Americans also tend to utilize such culturally-aligned behaviors (Gaines, et al., 1997; Oyserman et al., 2002; Tyler et al., 2006), it is important to understand whether such associations between cultural value endorsement and academically related psychological variables exist for white undergraduates as well.

The major research questions informing the current study ask: 1) whether there are significant differences in the communalism reports between black and white college students and 2) whether communalism attitudes and practices are predictive of college students' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and academic motivation.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 290 black ($N = 165$) and white ($N = 125$) undergraduates from one historically black research university located on the East Coast ($N = 100$), one historically black teaching university located in the South (20%, $N = 63$), one community/junior college (9%, $N = 28$) and one Predominantly White Institution (29%, $N = 90$), both located in the South. Average age was 20.68 ($SD = 4.06$) years and most undergraduates were female (71.2%) and college sophomores (40%, $N = 125$). The response rate was 100%. This sample size would also provide sufficient power to detect a moderate to large effect size at $\alpha = .05$ (Cohen, 1969) in examining the differences between black and white students' reports of the variables in question (i.e., HCM scores, self-esteem, self-efficacy and college adjustment) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996).

Instrumentation

Home communalism measure (HCM). The Home Communalism Measure (Boykin & Bailey, 2000) assesses perceived levels of communalism beliefs and activities of family members. The HCM consists of 20 items arranged on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*very much*), with higher scores indicating greater levels of home communalism. A sample item is "My family usually does things together. We do things that everyone likes to do. Usually, no one is left out. Is your family like this?" Reliability of the HCM has been reported as good ($\alpha = .85$), and criterion validity for the measure has been established in a

sample of 89 black children (Boykin & Bailey, 2000). Tyler and colleagues (accepted for publication) performed a Principal Components Analysis on the HCM. Scree plot examination, along with derived eigenvalues, determined the presence of three factors accounting for 57% of the variance in HCM scores. The communalism factors were called "family importance," "family cohesion," and "sharing." Family importance reflected the values students held towards their families, while family cohesion reflected the behavioral orientations typical throughout family socialization (i.e., helping and doing things together). The sharing factor reflected specific sharing and interdependence-based factors. Reliability indices for the three subscales of the HCM ranged from .71-.78 in the current study.

Self-esteem questionnaire (SEQ). The Global subscale of the SEQ (DuBois, Felner, Brand, Phillips, & Lease, 1996) was used to measure students' reported levels of self-esteem. The global subscale of the SEQ is a generalized indicator of self-worth and consists of eight items on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) with four items reverse-scored in order to avoid response sets. A sample item is "I am as good a person as I want to be." DuBois et al. (1996) found convergent and discriminant validity for the instrument as a self-report measure, and obtained Cronbach's alphas ranging from .81 to .92 over a 2-week period. The alpha coefficient for the SEQ with the current sample was .79.

General self-efficacy scale. The global subscale of the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GS-ES; Sherer & Maddux, 1982) was used to measure students' ratings of self-efficacy. The GS-ES includes 17 Likert-scale items ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) with higher scores reflecting higher levels of perceived self-efficacy. A sample item is "When I make plans, I am certain I can make them work." Sherer and Maddux (1982) reported construct validity of the GS-ES and adequate reliability estimates in its initial validation. Cronbach's alpha for the GS-ES in the current study was .81.

Academic motivation scale: College version. The Academic Motivation Scale: College Version (AMS: College Version; Vallerand et al., 1992) is a 28-item self-report measure used to assess students' intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation. The AMS has seven different subscales, each of which corresponds to a different form of motivation. The intrinsic domain contains three subscales: motivation to know (performing an activity for the satisfaction that one experiences while learning, exploring, or trying something new), motivation to accomplish (engaging in an activity for the personal satisfaction of accomplishing a task or creating something) and motivation to experience stimulation (engaging in an activity to experience sensory pleasure or excitement).

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, Alpha Coefficients, and
Bi-variate Correlations for Continuous Variables.

Variables	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Importance (1)	3.35	.58	.74	1	.58**	.50**	.31**	.36**	.13	.32**	-.31**
Cohesion (2)	3.18	.57	.78		1	.59**	.08	.07	.12	.02	.04
Sharing (3)	3.15	.56	.71			1	.08	.04	.03	.15	.09
Self-esteem (4)	3.46	.86	.79				1	.67**	.02	.56**	-.46**
Self-efficacy (5)	3.40	.64	.81					1	.36**	.51**	-.71**
Intrinsic Motivation (6)	4.93	1.70	.89						1	.18	-.26**
Extrinsic Motivation (7)	5.07	1.60	.90							1	-.37**
Amotivation (8)	3.29	1.99	.84								1

The extrinsic domain contains three subscales: external regulation (behavior is regulated through external means such as rewards and constraints), interjected regulation (behavior is regulated by the expectations of others), and identified motivation (behavior that is internalized because of external factors). Amotivation has its own subscale and is described as behaviors that do not facilitate the achievement of a specific goal.

Scale responses are recorded using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*does not correspond at all*) to 7 (*corresponds exactly*). The motivation to know subscale along with the identified regulation and amotivation subscales were chosen for the current sample in accordance with Vallerand & Bissonnette's (1992) suggestion that these motivation factors are related to important academic outcomes. Sample items for each motivation domain include: "Because I experience pleasure and satisfaction while learning new things" (motivation to know/intrinsic), "In order to obtain a more prestigious job later on" (identified regulation/extrinsic), and "Honestly, I don't know; I really feel that I am wasting my time in school" (amotivation). Vallerand et al. (1992) reported Cronbach's alphas ranging from .83 to .86 for the subscales and test-retest reliability estimates over a one-month period ranging from .71 to .83. Concurrent and criterion validity of the measure were determined using a sample of 217 Canadian students (Vallerand et al., 1992). Alpha reliability for the intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation subscales in the current study was .90, .89, and .86, respectively.

Procedures

Participants were recruited from a variety of college classrooms across the four institutions. Six trained research assistants distributed the survey materials in introductory psychology and related liberal arts classes across the four universities (i.e., Black Studies, History) using standardized administration procedures (including

informed consent procedures, provision of surveys and pencils). From administration and explanation of instructions to survey collection, the data collection process took an hour (i.e., one class period) to complete. Flash drives were raffled to encourage participation in the research.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, and alpha coefficients among the variables investigated. To examine the influence between various demographic variables and reports of communalism via the three identified subscales, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was computed and revealed no significant differences in each of the three communalism subscales as a function of race/ethnicity [$F(1, 189) = .91, p > .05, \eta^2 = .03$], class rank [$F(3, 189) = .47, p > .05, \eta^2 = .02$], gender [$F(1, 189) = 2.02, p > .05, \eta^2 = .06$] or type of university [$F(3, 189) = 1.16, p > .05, \eta^2 = .04$]. In addition, there were no significant main or interaction effects of these demographic variables on self-esteem, self-efficacy, intrinsic or extrinsic motivation and amotivation. As a result, these variables were excluded from regression analyses.

To examine the predictive nature of the communalism subscales reports on self-efficacy, self-esteem, and motivation, multiple regression analyses were computed. Nominal demographic variables were dummy-coded to facilitate prediction of criterion variable with a categorical rather than continuous variable. To control for family-wise error associated with the multiple regression analyses used with the same data, a Bonferroni statistic was computed, thus lowering the conventional alpha coefficient used to determine statistical significance and thus lowering the likelihood of Type I error. The statistic yielded was $(.05 = \alpha \times 5 = \text{number of regression analyses}) .025$.

Self-efficacy findings. For the self-efficacy dependent variable, regression analyses revealed that the model was significant [$F(9, 188) = 5.96, p < .01$], accounting for 16% of the variance in self-efficacy. Age ($\beta = .27, t = 3.8, p < .001$), family importance ($\beta = .44, t = 5.1, p < .001$), and sharing ($\beta = -.21, t = -2.4, p < .02$) emerged as significant predictors of self-efficacy.

Self-esteem findings. For the self-esteem dependent variable, regression analyses revealed that the model was significant [$F(9, 188) = 2.58, p < .01$], accounting for 12% of the variance in self-esteem. Family importance ($\beta = .31, t = 3.3, p < .01$) emerged as a significant predictor of self-esteem.

Motivation findings. For the intrinsic motivation dependent variable (motivation to know), regression analyses revealed that the model was not significant [$F(9, 189) = 1.37, p = .20$]. Thus, no further examination of the standard beta coefficients for each predictor variable occurred. For the extrinsic motivation dependent variable (identified motivation), regression analyses revealed that the model was significant [$F(9, 189) = 2.57, p < .01$], accounting for 12% of the variance in extrinsic motivation. Family importance ($\beta = .36, t = 3.8, p < .01$) and family cohesion ($\beta = -.23, t = -2.8, p < .01$) emerged as significant predictors of extrinsic motivation. For the amotivation dependent variable, regression analyses revealed that the model was significant [$F(9, 189) = 6.29, p < .01$], accounting for 24% of the variance in amotivation. Age ($\beta = -.18, t = -2.6, p < .01$), family importance ($\beta = -.51, t = -6.00, p < .01$), family cohesion ($\beta = .21, t = 2.29, p < .02$), and sharing ($\beta = .28, t = 3.34, p < .01$) emerged as significant predictors.

Discussion

This study had one major focus: to determine the relationships between the identified factors within the HCM and perceived psychological antecedents of postsecondary academic achievement, namely self-esteem, self-efficacy, and motivation. Multivariate analysis of variance findings revealed no significant differences in the three communalism subscales due to demographic variables such as race/ethnicity, class rank, gender, or university. Similar to findings from previous studies where no significant differences in communal and like variable reports emerged as a function of race/ethnicity of students (Gaines, et al., 1997; Oyserman, et al., 2002), the means for the black and white family importance, family cohesion, and sharing dependent variable reports were 3.31 and 3.41, 3.16 and 3.20, and 3.13 and 3.13, respectively. As a result, these demographic variables were excluded from future analyses, and several regression analyses were computed to determine the predictive nature of the three communalism subscales (family importance, family

cohesion and sharing) on various, albeit inter-related antecedents of academic performance, namely self-efficacy, self-esteem, and motivation including intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation. Regression analyses contained the full sample of 290 black and white undergraduates as there were no significant differences in home-based communal activities—the primary predictor of interest—as a function of race.

For the entire sample, family importance was predictive of self-esteem, self-efficacy, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Here, these positive associations suggest that students' families, regardless of racial background, were significant to their feelings of efficacy, personal self-esteem, and their motivation to do well in college. These findings are consistent with the literature suggesting that many students' perceptions of what their families think of them are important to what they consider themselves able to do (Walker & Dixon, 2002; Walker & Satterwhite, 2002). The fact that students' perceptions of their family's importance were negatively linked to amotivation scores also supports the claim that college students' families are a primary motivational force for college students (Tinto, 2006).

Reports of family cohesion and at-home sharing, however, were linked to lower self-efficacy and extrinsic motivation and higher levels of amotivation. Here, it appears that the degree to which students actually come from families where communal themes such as sharing and interdependence are salient is linked to lower levels of extrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. It is plausible that, given the individualistic and competitive values that characterize the college campus and most mainstream institutions (Boykin, 1986; Constantine & Sue, 2006), students coming from home environments largely reflective of communalism report feelings of inefficaciousness and lower motivation. Also, these same students are less motivated in the college campus, as evidenced in the higher amotivation scores.

Several themes, however, can be gleaned from these findings. First, it is important to note the situational nature of students' reported cultural values. While white culture has long been viewed as synonymous with and reflective of mainstream cultural themes such as individualism and competition (Gaines, et al., 1997; Johnson, 2003; Oyserman, et al. 2002; Spence, 1985; Tyler, et al., 2006), we find in this study that European Americans tend to endorse communalism as much as black students. This finding is supported in the literature (Gaines, et al., 1997; Oyserman, et al., 2002). Such a finding challenges education researchers to more fully consider the role of context and how this may influence individuals' culturally-situated behaviors (Mehan, 1998; Rogoff, 2003). That is, it appears erroneous now to assume that race is synonymous with

communalism endorsement, and, thus, researchers must begin to examine the situations and contexts in which communal values are expected, accepted, and exhibited (APA, 2003). To more effectively accommodate students, college and university administrators should begin to more critically examine the types of culturally-aligned behavioral patterns of incoming freshmen and other undergraduates in order to provide on-campus and perhaps in-class programming and activities that would otherwise facilitate students' adjustment to campus life, primarily by making it feel more like the communal experiences they bring with them to campus.

Limitations and Future Research

Though the student representation in this study extends external validity, particularly by recruiting undergraduates from all grade levels and across four different universities, several limitations exist. To begin, results are limited by the correlational nature of the data analysis. Therefore, researchers are cautioned to limit their interpretations to associations rather than causal relationships. Future research should also look to include more male college students. Though gender was not a significant predictor, the current findings are based on a majority female sample (71%), which may compromise interpretation of findings. In addition, this study sought to build upon the findings yielded by Walker & Satterwhite (2002) where family characteristics (support, cohesion, and expectations) were associated with college student GPA. However, we were unable to solicit actual student GPAs from each of the colleges and thus cannot conclude that family-based communal values and practices are associated with student performance vis-à-vis GPA. Future research should examine such associations. Also, considering that self-efficacy, motivation, and self-esteem are antecedents of academic performance (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992), path analytic techniques could be employed to discern whether such psychological factors actually mediate the association between cultural values and academic performance. Of course, a significant relationship between cultural values and achievement is needed prior to mediation investigation (Tabacknick & Fidell, 1996).

Finally, many of the conclusions presented here are premised on the notion that the campus-based experiences of many college undergraduates may reflect mainstream cultural values such as individualism and competition, opposing cultural values of communalism (Boykin, 1986). Yet, this was not ascertained in the current study. To more effectively claim cultural mismatch between students' home cultural experiences and those saturating their college experiences in particular, and to ascertain whether cultural values also serve as a predictor of academic

performance in general, researchers must develop and validate measures that allow cultural values found in undergraduates' home and college experiences to be assessed (Tyler, et al., 2008).

Conclusion

The current study places the importance of culture in the general frameworks (Bean & Mentzer, 1985; Pascarella, 1980; Tinto, 1993) that have advanced research in college student academic performance. Here, black and white college students report virtually the same communal values and activities at home. These reports were predictive of several academic achievement correlates, including self-efficacy and academic motivation. Given these findings, university administrators and faculty should begin to identify and utilize undergraduates' culturally-aligned behavioral patterns in order to provide learning context, instruction, and social interactions that can facilitate their adjustment to campus life, particularly by aligning it with the communal experiences they have at home (Tyler, et al., in press).

The American Psychological Association (2003) has discussed several ways in which therapists can begin to ascertain the cultural values informing clients' behavioral proclivities. One way is to become familiar with the cultural and familial background of the client, thereby allowing culturally grounded behavioral preferences and customs to be illuminated prior to therapy. Similarly, another way faculty members can assess students' culturally aligned and preferred ways of engaging in academic tasks is by simply asking graduate and undergraduate students about their work preferences for completing course requirements (i.e., "What are the conditions under which you carry out your best work?"). Also, it would be helpful to undergraduates to have multiple formats to complete given tasks (i.e., group work versus individualized performance tasks). Allowing students to co-teach lessons would also allow evidence of communal values to be manifested, along with other cultural values brought by diverse college students. With these methods, communal orientations that many black and white students are coming to college with can be duly recognized and utilized throughout students' course completion during their college years (Tyler et al., in press).

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