Socialization and Racial Identity Among Black Americans

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This study examines the social structural processes and arrangements related to racial group identification for a national sample of black American adults. We argue that primary socialization experiences, particularly parental messages concerning the meaning of being black, are important in shaping racial identity. The findings support this prediction; further, they suggest that adult relations with family, friends, and community are important in fostering a sense of group identity. Findings also suggest that integration into mainstream society, as reflected in interracial contact and adult socioeconomic attainment, is associated with less in-group attachment but more positive black group evaluation. Adult SES and interracial contact bolster black group evaluation. Collectively, these findings support a multidimensional conceptualization of black identity.

Studies of black group identity generally have taken two approaches. One is to examine the effects of group identification and group consciousness on other variables such as political participation (Miller, Gurin, Gurin, and Malanchuk 1981), racial militancy (Marx 1967; Tomlinson 1970), personal efficacy (Gurin and Epps 1975; Hughes and Demo 1989), and minority group self-esteem (Hughes and Demo 1989; Kardiner and Ovesey 1951; Pettigrew 1964). The second is to identify the socioeconomic and demographic determinants of black identity (Allen, Dawson, and Brown 1989; Broman, Neighbors, and Jackson 1988). Few scholars, however, have examined the influence of various social factors over the life course on racial identity of black adults. The central objective of this study is to examine the impact of socialization experiences and social structural arrangements in both childhood and adulthood on various dimensions of racial identity among black adults.

BACKGROUND

Black Identity

As sub-units of the self-concept, identities are "meanings a person attributes to the self as an object in a social situation or social role" (Burke 1980, p.18). Structurally, being black in American society means occupying a racially defined status; associated with this status are roles in family, community, and society. One psychological consequence of being black is black group identity, the intensity of which should vary with the nature of role experiences.

The literature on racial identity (e.g., Broman et al. 1988; Gurin, Miller, and Gurin 1980) uses this concept fairly consistently to refer to "the feeling of closeness to similar others in ideas, feelings, and thoughts" (Broman et al. p. 148). Yet as suggested in Cross's (1985) discussion of black reference group orientation and Allen et al.'s (1989) study of the African American belief system, black group identity is clearly multidimensional and includes not only in-group factors such as closeness to other blacks and black separatism, but also racial group evaluation.

Factors That Influence Black Identity

Yancey, Ericksen, and Juliani (1976) and Taylor (1979) argue that ethnicity is an emergent phenomenon arising from structural

conditions and processes in American society, and that sociologists "have generally failed to identify the *internal* forces of the black community which have contributed to this emergent phenomenon" (Taylor 1979, p. 1403, author's emphasis).

Two recent empirical studies demonstrate the importance of social and demographic factors for racial identity among black adults. Broman et al. (1988) found that people who were older, southern, rural, and less educated scored higher on an index measuring closeness to other blacks. Allen et al. (1989) found that socioeconomic status was related negatively to closeness to other blacks and black autonomy but positively to favorable evaluations of blacks as a group. They also found that religiosity and exposure to black-oriented media were related less strongly, but positively, to black identity variables. Neither of these studies considers the importance of social background, socialization, or social interaction variables that may be important determinants of black identity.

Childhood socialization. The family context is generally regarded as the most influential socialization setting for forming the child's emerging sense of self, values, and beliefs (e.g., Gecas 1981). The significance of familial relations is evident in the amount, scope, and intensity of parent-child interaction; in the ongoing, reciprocal processes of attachment, identification, modeling, and role-playing; and in the impact of familial relationships on children's dispositions toward self and others (Demo, Small, and Savin-Williams 1987; Gecas and Schwalbe 1986). Through these processes socialization serves to transmit values, norms, morals, and beliefs from one generation to the next.

Peters's analysis of racial socialization in black families suggests that "building self-respect and pride concerning their racial identity undergirds every parent's child-rearing philosophy" (1985, p. 165). Although the literature discusses problems of racial socialization (e.g., Boykin and Toms 1985), there is little empirical evidence regarding the *content* of parental socialization or its role in the development of racial identity.

Interracial interaction during the preadult years also structures interpersonal experiences in ways that may influence racial identity profoundly. Rosenberg (1975, 1979) demonstrated that dissonant racial contexts affect racial group identification adversely by increasing exposure to prejudiced communications and to out-group norms, values, and attitudes. Similarly, McGuire, McGuire, Child, and Fujioka (1978) showed that awareness of one's ethnicity decreases as the ethnic group becomes less distinct (or more integrated) in the social environment. Thus we would expect interracial contact to influence black identity negatively.

The social class of the family of origin may be particularly important because it structures opportunities and resources for children, the types of schools they attend, the friends they have, and the values and attitudes to which they are exposed (Gecas 1979). Following the literature on social structure and personality, however, we would expect much of the effect of parents' social class on racial identity to be indirect, operating through microsocial interaction processes such as parental socialization and interracial contact.

Adult socialization. The empirical literature on determinants of racial group identification among black adults is even more limited than that among children. One important reason is that socialization theory and research have focused on children and generally have neglected the social psychological processes shaping the identity of adults. An important question is the degree to which adult social structure and social process variables affect black identity independent of childhood background and socialization variables. Analysts of the life course point to the crucial impact of adult roles on personality (Clausen 1986; Elder 1981; Gecas and Mortimer 1987). Adults' cognitive processes also are more advanced and more sophisticated than children's; they are characterized by dialectical reasoning (Basseches 1984) and peak intellectual abilities (Horn and Donaldson 1980; Schaie 1983). Thus the social and cognitive-developmental processes bearing on adults' identity and self-concept are different from the processes bearing on those of children (Suls and Mullen 1982).

Studies suggest that the quality of interpersonal relations with family and friends, religious involvement, socioeconomic status, interracial interaction, and age should be important determinants of black identity.

Family and friends: An important context for the formation of adult attitudes toward self and others is interpersonal relations with family and friends (Demo et al. 1987; Gecas and Mortimer 1987). A recent study (Hughes

and Demo 1989) demonstrated that the quality of social relationships with family and friends is an important determinant of self-esteem (also see Hoelter 1982) as well as of racial self-esteem (what we refer to in this paper as racial group evaluation), and is correlated positively with measures of black separatism and feelings of closeness to other blacks.

Religious involvement: Another important interpersonal dimension of black socialization is religious involvement. The church provides opportunities for blacks to occupy important and respected positions that may be denied them in the wider society; it also creates experiences and relationships that bolster self-respect, evaluations of one's racial group (Hughes and Demo 1989), and psychological well-being (Ortega, Crutchfield, and Rushing 1983).

Socioeconomic status: As noted above, two recent studies (Allen et al. 1989; Broman et al. 1988) show that socioeconomic status is related negatively to feelings of closeness to other blacks. In addition, Allen et al. (1989) found that socioeconomic status was related negatively to black autonomy and positively to evaluations of blacks as a group. These findings suggest that integration into the social and economic mainstream of American society has important consequences for various dimensions of black identity, but these effects could be due to variables other than socioeconomic status.

Adult interracial interaction: Work by Rosenberg and Simmons (1972) and Rosenberg (1979) suggests that as blacks move out of isolated environments and interact more frequently with whites and members of other groups, they are detached to some degree from traditional black culture, and group identification is weakened. Broman et al. (1988) demonstrate that education, urban residence, and residence in regions other than the south and the northeast are associated with weakened group identification among black adults.

Age: Age locates blacks in particular sociohistorical contexts. Porter and Washington (1979) and Cross (1985) suggest that social changes stemming from the black movement may strengthen racial identity and may have the greatest effect on younger blacks. Although some evidence supports this view (Krystall, Friedman, Howze, and Epps 1970; Toomer 1975), a more recent study

reports stronger racial identification among older blacks (Broman et al. 1988).

The Problem

Empirical studies of identity development in childhood are limited because they employ only a limited range of explanatory factors and are not very helpful in understanding adult identity. Empirical studies of adult black identity have shown what demographic variables are related to black identity but have not illuminated the impact of family background and childhood experience. Further, there are no studies that examine both childhood and adult experiences as they relate to adult racial identity.

In particular, we do not know how the following factors affect adult black identity: parents' socioeconomic status, content of parental socialization, preadult interracial contact, quality of family and friendship relations, and adult interracial contact. In our analysis we examine these factors along with religious involvement, current socioeconomic status, gender, and age. The two primary questions we ask concern 1) the effects of family background and socialization on black identity, and 2) whether family background and socialization variables account for the previously documented relationship between socioeconomic status and black identity.

DATA AND METHODS

The Sample

The National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA) data were collected in 1979–80 by the Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan; a multistage sampling procedure was used. The response rate was approximately 69 percent. The NSBA is a nationally representative sample involving interviews with 2,107 black Americans 18 years of age and older. Robert Taylor (1986) observed that the demographic composition of the sample is comparable to that of the general black population except that the sample contains an overrepresentation of women (61%), is slightly older, and is less western. Other details concerning the data set and sampling procedure may be found in Jackson and Gurin (1987, pp. i-vii); a demographic profile of the sample is available in Broman et al. (1988).

Variables

Dependent variables: black identity. Because racial identity is multidimensional (Cross 1985; Porter and Washington 1979; also see Allen et al. 1989), in the present study we use three measures that tap black identity in somewhat different ways.

Feelings of closeness to other blacks: Our measure of black identity is based on a measure developed by Gurin et al. (1980) for use in their study of racial group identification among black adults, and is nearly identical to the measure used by Broman et al. (1988). Respondents were asked how close they felt to eight different classifications of black people: 1) poor, 2) religious, 3) young, 4) middle-class, 5) working-class, 6) older, 7) elected officials, and 8) professional people. Scores were summed for each respondent and then were averaged across the eight items. The alpha reliability coefficient for the scale is .82. If responses were missing on three or fewer of the items, we entered the mean response of the items with valid responses for the missing data.

Black separatism: This scale, also used by Allen and Hatchett (1986) and Hughes and Demo (1989), measures commitment to African culture and the degree to which blacks should confine their social relationships to other blacks. A virtually identical scale is used by Allen et al. (1989) and is termed "black autonomy." Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the following: 1) black children should learn an African language, 2) blacks should always vote for black candidates when possible, 3) black women should not date white men, 4) black people should shop in black-owned shops whenever possible, 5) black men should not date white women, 6) black parents should give their children African names. The responses were coded as follows: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. Because the two questions on dating were correlated very strongly, they were combined into a single item by averaging the responses. The resulting five items were averaged for each respondent. These items yield an alpha reliability coefficient of .61. Our estimate of the reliability of this scale is lower than that presented by Allen and Hatchett (1986) because we combine the two highly correlated items on dating into one variable. If responses were missing on two or fewer of the five items, we entered the mean response on the items with valid responses for the missing data.

Black group evaluation: The operationalization of this variable is not standardized. Porter and Washington (1979) use the term "racial self-esteem" to refer to "how the individual feels about the self as black, i.e., about his group identity" (p. 54). Similarly, we operationalize black group evaluation as the belief that most black people possess positive characteristics and do not possess negative characteristics. The measurement amounts to an overall evaluation of black people as a group; Allen and Hatchett (1986) used the same items to examine what they term black group perception. The question was worded: "How true do you think it is that most black people _____ ?" The question was completed with the following characteristics: 1) keep trying, 2) love their families, 3) are ashamed, 4) are lazy, 5) neglect their families, 6) are lying and trifling, 7) are hard-working, 8) do for others, 9) give up easily, 10) are weak, 11) are proud of themselves, 12) are honest, 13) are selfish, 14) are strong. Responses were coded as follows: 1 = true, 2 = somewhat true, 3 = a little true, and 4 = not true at all. We recoded responses so that all items were in the positive direction. The alpha reliability coefficient for this scale is .80.

Socialization variables. Family and friendships: We used three items assessing closeness of and satisfaction with family relationships and one item assessing the respondent's role as a friend. Four response categories were provided for each question: 1) "Would you say your family members are very close in their feelings to each other, fairly close, not too close, or not close at all?" 2) "How satisfied are you with your family life, that is, the time you spend and the things you do with members of your family?" 3) "Given the chances you have had, how well have you done in taking care of your family's wants and needs?" 4) "Given the chances you have had, how well have you done at being a good friend?"

Religious involvement: The items are as follows: 1) "How often do you usually attend religious services?" 2) "How religious would you say you are?" 3) "How often do you read religious books or other religious materials?"

The alpha reliability coefficient for this scale is .71.

Interracial contact: The items in the survey measuring interracial contact show the respondent's level of involvement with white people over his or her lifetime. Respondents were asked to judge the racial composition of eight social settings in their life: 1) grammar or elementary school, 2) junior high school, 3) high school, 4) college, 5) neighborhood while growing up, 6) present neighborhood, 7) church or place of worship usually attended, 8) present workplace, if employed. Responses were coded as follows: 1 = all blacks, 2 = mostly blacks, 3 = about half blacks, 4 = mostly whites, 5 = almost all whites. From these items we constructed two measures of interracial contact: 1) a preadult interracial contact scale (Items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5), and 2) an adult interracial contact scale (Items 6, 7, and 8). For each scale we calculated the average score over the items containing valid data for each respondent. If there were no valid responses across the eight items, we coded the variable as missing data for that respondent.

Parental socialization: In order to develop a measure of how respondents were socialized by their parents concerning what it is to be black in America, we examined responses to a complex set of questions included in the NSBA. Respondents were asked open-ended questions concerning the most important things they had told their children to help them know *what it is to be black* and *how to get along with white people*. Respondents whose socialization by their parents differed from their socialization of their own children, respondents who had not taught their own children anything about these matters, and respondents with no children were asked directly what their parents had taught them about what it is to be black and what other things they had been told about getting along with whites.[1] If respondents stated that they socialized their own children in the same way as they were socialized as children, we took their indication of their own children's socialization as an indication of how they had been socialized.

Initially we constructed two measures; one indicated what the respondent had been taught about what it is to be black, and the other indicated other things the respondent had been told about getting along with whites. For both variables we used the NSBA classification scheme (see Jackson and Gurin 1987) and collapsed the responses further into four categories: 1) respondent was taught to take an *individualistic and/or universalistic* attitude without specific racial references: work hard, excel, take a positive attitude toward self, be a good citizen, all are equal; 2) respondent was taught to take a positive group-oriented *integrative/assertive* attitude: racial pride, importance of black heritage, acceptance of being black, importance of getting along with whites, try to understand whites, stand up for rights; 3) respondent was taught a group-oriented *cautious/defensive* attitude: social distance, deference, white prejudice, whites have the power; and 4) respondent was taught nothing about being black or getting along with whites.

We constructed three dummy variables (1 = individualistic/universalistic, 0 = other; 1 = integrative/assertive, 0 = other; and 1 = cautious/defensive, 0 = other) for each of the two basic parental socialization variables (what respondent had been taught about *what it is to be black*, and what other things respondent had been taught about *getting along with whites*), creating a total of six dummy variables. Because the two original questions are linked (the second one asks about what "other" things respondent was taught), we constructed three final variables for the analysis by summing 1) the two individualistic/universalistic variables, 2) the two integrative/assertive variables, and 3) the two cautious/defensive variables.[2]

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[1] Although first-, second-, and third-mentioned responses were included in the data, we used only first-mentioned responses in our analyses because of the paucity of second- and third-mentioned responses.

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[2] In our development of these three categories of racial socialization, we were guided in part by Boykin and Toms (1985, p. 46), who discuss the "triple quandary" facing black adults in their socialization of children: "socialization in the mainstream of American society, socialization informed by oppressed minority status, and socialization linked to a proximal Black cultural context that is largely noncommensurate with the social dictates of mainstream American life." Our scheme thus distinguishes socialization patterns that promote racial awareness (integrative/assertive and cautious/defensive) from those which emphasize a nonracial orientation (individualistic/universalistic) and distinguish those which mostly emphasize mainstream involvement (integrative/assertive and individualistic/universalistic) from those with a more alienated orientation (cautious/defensive). We also distinguish between positive and

Age: Age is the self-reported age of the respondent in years.

Adult socioeconomic status: Our measure of current socioeconomic status combines the z-score for respondent's education (which was recorded in 18 one-year categories from 0 through 17 or more, inclusive) with the z-score for respondent's occupational prestige (see Hughes and Demo 1989), weighting each equally.

Parents' socioeconomic status: Respondents were asked: "When you were growing up, what was the main job of your father?" They also were asked: "How many years of school did your father complete?" The same questions were asked about the respondent's mother. The survey does not provide the three-digit occupation code for parents' occupations, so no occupational prestige scores could be assigned. Instead, after the interview, parents' occupations were coded into 31 categories ordered roughly by prestige. Education was coded as for the respondent.

Unfortunately, there were so many missing data on parents' education that we could not use this variable directly in determining parents' socioeconomic status. Instead we relied on the occupational prestige of the parent with the higher rating. If the rating was missing for one parent, we used the rating for the other. We reclassified both father's and mother's occupation into eight ranked occupational prestige categories. Because Glenn's (1963) analysis demonstrated the primacy of education as a prestige indicator among black Americans, we confirmed the prestige orderings for both father's and mother's occupation by examining the correlation between education and the occupational prestige indicator for those cases in which education was available. The correlation (r) between mean parental education and our occupational prestige indicator is .50 for mothers and .46 for fathers.

The eight categories are as follows: 1) farmers, 2) service workers and unskilled laborers, 3) operatives, including transport, 4) craftsmen, foremen, government protective service workers (police, etc.), and members of the armed forces, 5) small business persons, 6) clerical and sales workers, 7) managers, 8) professionals.

FINDINGS

Table 1 presents the correlation matrix along with means and standard deviations. The major point illustrated by these data is the multidimensionality of black identity. Although our three indicators of black identity are related positively to each other, as one would expect, the correlations are not so high as to suggest that all three variables are tapping the same underlying dimension. For example, black group evaluation has correlations of .076 and .089, respectively, with black separatism and feelings of closeness to other blacks.

In Table 2 we present the results of stepwise regression analyses in which preadult socialization influences were entered first, followed by adulthood variables. For all three indicators of black identity, age is unrelated; socioeconomic status of family of origin is unrelated when adult socialization variables are included in the analysis. The latter finding is consistent with our expectation that the influence of early socioeconomic conditions would be indirect, operating through adult social experiences.

When we examine feelings of closeness to other blacks, the data show that the strongest correlates include two preadult influences: integrative/assertive parental socialization and interracial contact. Three aspects of adult socialization are quite important: interpersonal relations with family and friends, religious involvement, and socioeconomic attainment. Adult interracial contact is unrelated to feelings of closeness to other blacks. The findings and conclusions presented by Broman et al. (1988) and Allen et al. (1989) are supported strongly by the fact that adult socioeconomic status is related negatively to closeness and separatism and positively to black group evaluation after background, socialization, and social relationship variables are controlled.

Examining the data for both feelings of closeness and black separatism reveals some similarities in the correlates of these two indicators. When preadult and adulthood variables are entered in the analysis, it is evident that blacks who were reared in an integrative/assertive manner ("don't be prejudiced, recognize all races as equal, treat whites the way you want to be treated") identified more closely with black people, their history, and their culture than did blacks

generally integrative racial awareness (integrative/ assertive) and that which is more detached (cautious/ defensive).

Table 1. Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations, Aspects of Black Identity

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)
(1) Black separatism	1.00																
(2) Closeness to other blacks	.278**	1.00															
(3) Black group evaluation	.076**	.089**	1.00														
(4) Individualistic/universalistic	.031	.031	.054**	1.00													
(5) Integrative/assertive	.015	.093**	.012	-.197**	1.00												
(6) Cautious/defensive	.066*	.062**	-.026	-.187**	-.193*	1.00											
(7) Interracial contact (preadult)	-.195**	-.241**	.045	.026	.020	-.101**	1.00										
(8) Parents' SES	-.127**	-.162**	.028	.036	-.001	-.096**	.244**	1.00									
(9) Family closeness	.037	.202**	.125**	.053*	.042	-.004	-.033	.010	1.00								
(10) Family satisfaction	.115**	.263**	.057**	.060**	.063**	-.015	-.147**	-.108**	.245**	1.00							
(11) Caring for family	.068**	.200**	.032	.044*	.009	.018	-.126**	-.058*	.116**	.253**	1.00						
(12) Being good friend	.061**	.212**	.057*	.044*	.007	.011	-.016	.031	.081**	.156**	.263**	1.00					
(13) Interracial contact (adult)	-.163**	-.173**	.140**	.018	.022	-.063**	.348**	.172**	.007	-.133**	-.048*	-.101	1.00				
(14) Religious involvement	.080**	.349**	.011	.064**	.074**	.082**	-.182**	-.131**	.155**	.179**	.196**	.159**	-.083**	1.00			
(15) Adult SES	-.225**	-.244**	.132**	.025	-.012	-.065**	.305**	.353**	.062*	-.169**	-.055	-.012	.340**	-.104**	1.00		
(16) Female	-.040	-.099	-.019	-.038	-.020	-.030	.003	-.004	-.025	-.006	.107**	.050*	-.100**	.208**	.30	1.00	
(17) Age	.163**	.292**	-.012	.058**	-.018	.124**	-.289**	-.269**	.073**	.222**	.231	.092**	-.197**	.368**	-.424**	.020	1.00
Mean	2.96	3.36	3.05	3.87	4.24	3.22	1.83	3.04	3.48	3.39	4.54	4.72	2.01	2.38	.02	.62	43.15
Standard Deviation	.72	.51	.44	.59	.61	.57	.90	1.95	.74	.75	.65	.51	.76	.88	.88	.49	17.71

Ns range between 1849 and 2087.
* $p \leq .05$
** $p \leq .01$

Table 2. Standardized Regression Coefficients Showing the Impact of Socialization and Social Structural Variables on Dimensions of Black Identity and Black Group Evaluation

	Closeness to Other Blacks		Black Separatism		Black Group Evaluation	
	(Preadult variables)	(All variables)	(Preadult variables)	(All variables)	(Preadult variables)	(All variables)
Preadult Variables						
Parental socialization						
Individualistic/universalistic	.084**	.018	.057*	.041	.067*	.054*
Integrative/assertive	.136**	.081**	.068**	.057*	.008	.002
Cautious/defensive	.086**	.038	.059*	.043	.000	.000
Interracial contact	−.235**	−.117**	−.170**	−.098**	.023	−.022
Parents' SES	−.080**	−.008	−.071**	−.012	.026	−.018
Adulthood Variables						
Quality of family and friendship						
Family closeness		.108**		.018		.084**
Family satisfaction		.106**		.031		.035
Caring for family		.056*		.012		.002
Being good friend		.124**		.046		.068**
Interracial contact		−.038		−.084**		.132**
Religious involvement		.234**		−.007		−.023
Adult SES		−.130**		−.142**		.113**
Female		−.076**		−.037		.000
Age		.043		.036		.055
R²	.094**	.261**	.048**	.088*	.006	.053**
N	(1559)		(1556)		(1558)	

* p<.05
** p<.001

who were reared in an individualistic/ universalistic manner ("be yourself, take care of yourself, you're as good as anyone else, work hard") or in a cautious/defensive manner ("whites believe they are superior, blacks don't have the chances whites have, don't ever put your trust in whites"). Preadult interracial contact, however, is related inversely to feelings of closeness and black separatist attitudes; this finding supports Rosenberg's (1975, 1979) contention that dissonant racial contexts detract from blacks' feelings of group identification and attachment.

These two indicators also show important differences. In contrast to feelings of closeness, black separatism is unaffected by religious involvement or interpersonal relations with family and friends. Further, interracial contact during adulthood is related negatively to black separatism, a phenomenon paralleling the effect of integration earlier in the life course.

The only primary socialization variable that is related significantly to black group evaluation is individualistic/universalistic socialization. Examining adulthood variables, we found that close social relationships with

family and friends are associated with positive group evaluation, as are interracial contact and socioeconomic attainment. These results contrast sharply with our findings regarding feelings of closeness, which are influenced (negatively) by interracial contact in the childhood and adolescent years. This finding suggests marked differences in the impact of preadult and adult experiences on dimensions of racial identity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The three distinct dimensions of black identity examined in this study are affected differently by predictor variables. This suggests that it is reasonable to conceptualize black identity as a multidimensional phenomenon, and that being black means different things to different segments of the black population.

The findings also support the hypothesis that group identity is shaped by the content of parental socialization. Compared to blacks who do not remember their parents telling them anything about being black or getting along with whites, those who were reared in an integrative/assertive manner or a cautious/

defensive manner had stronger feelings of closeness to other blacks and a stronger commitment to black separatism. Individualistic or universalistic messages from parents enhanced black group evaluation weakly but positively among adults in our sample. There is also evidence that parental socialization has broader consequences in that cautious/defensive messages were related inversely to interracial contact during both preadult and adult years.

Our findings regarding parental socialization and interpersonal relationships in black families substantiate the important role of black families in providing social support and familial bonds (Hill 1972; McAdoo 1978; Stack 1974; Taylor 1986). The data show that feelings of closeness and black group evaluation are enhanced by positive interpersonal relations with family and friends, and thus confirm the importance of these resources to black Americans.

Using the same data set that we analyzed, Broman et al. (1988) report that age is an important variable in that older blacks have stronger racial identification. Yet the results of our regression analysis involving age and other predictors of feelings of closeness (nearly identical to the racial identification scale used by Broman et al.) show that age is unrelated to dimensions of group identity. This finding suggests that the effects of age are explained by religious involvement and close family relations, both of which are stronger among older blacks. In analyses not presented here but similar to those presented in Table 2, we found that compared to their elders, younger blacks assign greater importance to being black; this result supports the findings of other investigators (Krystall et al. 1970; Toomer 1975) and suggests that some dimensions of black identity may be associated with age. These inconsistencies across studies provide further evidence of the multidimensionality of black identity and suggest that if we are to understand the formation of racial identity over the life course, we must understand more fully the nature of its different dimensions.

The relationships between interracial interaction and black identity variables suggest that the impact of interracial interaction depends on its timing in the life course. Such contact during childhood and adolescence — when youths are striving to attain a sense of who they are and what they stand for — has a negative impact on the in-group variables, namely closeness and black separatism. In contrast, interracial relationships during adulthood promote positive black group evaluation. One explanation for the latter finding is that racial integration in neighborhoods and workplaces represents the fulfillment of individual and group goals, thus bolstering racial pride. A second explanation is suggested by the work of McGuire et al. (1978), who show that members of minority groups are more aware of their distinctiveness and their ethnicity than are members of majority groups. The heightened salience of one's ethnicity, coupled with the self-esteem motive, may lead blacks (and others) to evaluate positively the characteristics of their group. Further evidence of this view is provided by Lau (1989), who demonstrates that "the more strongly other people treat a person as part of a group, the more strongly will that group become a part of the person's social identity" (p. 222).

The pattern of effects for socioeconomic status parallels the pattern for interracial interaction. Both variables have a generally negative effect on closeness and separatism variables but a positive effect on black group evaluation. These findings suggest that institutional racial inequality may promote black identity in the sense of increasing in-group concerns, but that it tends also to promote a negative evaluation of blacks as a group. If there are declines in institutional inequality that are associated with socioeconomic advancement and decreasing racial segregation, the character of black identity should change such that less emphasis is placed on in-group concerns and more on positive group characteristics.

The negative impact of inequality on black group evaluation echoes our earlier finding that institutional inequality and discrimination inhibit the development of personal efficacy among black Americans (Hughes and Demo 1989). These findings are important because numerous studies have examined self-esteem and have concluded that racial inequality has little or no impact on black self-perception. The accumulating evidence suggests that self-esteem is too narrow a focus to warrant such a conclusion, and that although self-esteem may be insulated from macrosocial systems of social inequality, other aspects of black identity and self-perception are affected adversely.

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