

The Role of Racial Identity in Perceived Racism and Psychological Stress Among Black American Adults: Exploring Traditional and Alternative Approaches

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This investigation tested whether racial identity status attitudes moderated the relationship between perceived racism and psychological functioning in a sample of 340 Black American adults. The study utilized 2 approaches to racial identity assessment: the standard group-means approach, plus a profile analysis of individual racial identity statuses. Results based on the group-means approach indicated that racial identity did not moderate the relationship between racism and psychological functioning. Findings based on the profile analysis, however, indicated that individuals whose profile type was identified as internalization-dominant exhibited the lowest levels of general life stress, the lowest levels of psychological distress, and the highest levels of psychological well-being. Implications for ongoing research are discussed.

The psychological impact of racism has become an area of increasing interest for scholars and researchers (Paradies, 2006). In general, findings have shown that experiences of racism and discrimination have adverse health outcomes and that the strongest effects tend to be associated with mental health outcomes (Carter, 2007; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). In addition, investigators have consistently found that exposure to perceived instances of racism are varied yet frequent for Blacks and that perceptions of racism predict psychological symptoms over and above general life stress (Klonoff, Landrine, & Ullman, 1999; Pieterse & Carter, 2007; Sanders-Thompson, 2002).

However, it is important to note that findings supporting a positive association between experiences of racism and psychological distress among Blacks are not unequivocal. Williams and Williams-Morris (2000) identified a number of studies that failed to document a positive association between perceived racism and psychological functioning. Watts and Carter (1991) found that Blacks' perceptions of institutional and personal discrimination

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varied, depending on the racial identity statuses of the participants. Thus, according to theory and research, whether a Black person perceives racism might depend on his or her racial identity status.

Accordingly, racial identity is an important construct to consider when focusing on variability in perceptions of discrimination and racism among Black Americans (Helms, 1995; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Watts & Carter, 1991). The current study seeks to examine the extent to which racial identity statuses might influence the relationship between perceived racism and psychological functioning in a sample of Black American adults.

Racist Experience as Stressful

The experience of racism among Black Americans has been well documented (Feagin, 2001; National Urban League, 2006). Scholars have developed models whereby racism-related life experiences for Blacks can be understood within the parameters of psychological stress (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Harrell, 2000). The models tend to build on more traditional stress models, such as that offered by Lazarus and Folkman (1984).

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model is one of the more widely used frameworks to study the effects of stress. The model emphasizes the role of *cognitive appraisal*, or how one assesses a situation to determine if it is a stressor in the development of health and mental health outcomes. In the study of stress, cognitive appraisal is viewed as moderating the environmental stimulus (i.e., potential stressor) and thus either increasing or mitigating a person's (psychophysiological) response to the stimulus. Thus, one must perceive the stimulus to be a stressor.

Building on the stress-as-interaction model articulated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), Harrell (2000) identified *racism-related stress* as the outcome of "transactions between individuals or groups and their environment that emerge from the dynamics of racism, and that are perceived to tax or exceed existing resources or threaten well-being" (p. 44). An important aspect of the model is the extent to which the individual perceives a situation as racist. To do so, one must believe that race is a salient aspect of his or her experience, an awareness that is reflected in one's racial identity. Therefore, racial identity has emerged as a critical component of understanding racism and its correlates among Black Americans (Franklin, 1999).

Racial Identity

Racial identity theory provides a compelling framework in which to understand the psychological processes of Black Americans living in a racist society. Current racial identity models include the multidimensional model of

racial identity (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998), and Cross's (1995) revised model of psychological Nigrescence.

One way of understanding differences among Blacks in their perceptions of discrimination or racism and in perceptions of racism as a stressor is through examining Black racial identity status attitudes or profiles (e.g., Thompson & Carter, 1997; Carter, Helms, & Juby 2004; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). The way in which a Black person identifies with his or her race may influence his or her perception of race-related events (Hall & Carter, 2006).

Helms (1995) and Thompson and Carter (1997) described the Black racial identity model as a set of different worldviews or "ego statuses" that serve as a filter for race-based information. Black racial identity consists of four statuses: *pre-encounter*, which is a status in which one denies the salience of one's race and racial group; *encounter*, which is a status in which one confronts an experience that makes race more salient, leading to a psychological state of transition and confusion; *immersion-emersion*, which is a status that involves an active process of learning about one's race and culture; and *internalization*, a status wherein one integrates race and its meaning with one's personal identity (Carter, 1995). Thus, racial identity might serve as a lens through which racism is experienced. However, despite the vast literature on racial identity attitudes, few studies have examined the relationship between race-related stress, racial identity status attitudes, and effects on mental health (e.g., Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Watts & Carter, 1991).

Empirical findings have indicated that racial identity is associated with a wide array of psychological variables (Carter, 1995), including perceptions of racial bias (Jefferson & Caldwell, 2002; Sellers & Shelton, 2003) and psychological well-being (Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007). Jefferson and Caldwell found that the racial identity statuses of immersion-emersion and internalization were associated with attribution of White bias for Black participants, and that no relationship was found to exist between internalization status attitudes and perceptions of discrimination. Franklin-Jackson and Carter found that encounter status attitudes predicted psychological distress, while internalization status attitudes were predictive of psychological well-being for Black men and women. Thus, the evidence has shown that racial identity is an important construct that is associated with both perceptions of racism and psychological functioning.

In view of the relationship between perceptions of racism and racial identity, some scholars have suggested that racial identity might offer a form of psychological protection for Black Americans when encountering racism-related experiences (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998). While this argument has been presented as theoretical speculation, there have only been a few studies—none of which have used the ego-status model—that have sought to

examine the moderating influence of racial identity in the relationship between perceived racism and psychological functioning.

Sellers and colleagues (Neblett, Shelton, & Sellers, 2004; Sellers & Shelton, 2003), using the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI), documented findings suggesting that individuals with high levels of racial centrality report fewer negative responses to daily racial hassles. More recently, Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, and Lewis (2006) found that high levels of *public regard*, which is the extent to which individuals believe that others view African Americans negatively, led to higher reports of discrimination and lower reports of depression and stress.

While these studies provide preliminary evidence for the moderating role of racial identity, all of the aforementioned studies employed the MIBI as a means of operationalizing racial identity for Black Americans. The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI; Sellers et al., 1998), upon which the MIBI is based, varies somewhat from the ego-status theory of racial identity in that the MMRI emphasizes the extent to which black identity is salient for an individual and the manner in which beliefs about race inform the behavior of Black Americans, ranging from nationalist to assimilationist. The ego-status model, on the other hand, is based on Cross's (1995) model of Nigrescence and reflects the extent to which Black Americans endorse pro-White, anti-Black, or more flexible attitudes toward Blacks and Whites (Fischer & Moradi, 2001). While there is much overlap between the two theoretical models, it is of value to determine if racial identity measured as ego-status attitudes or individual profile groups would produce similar moderating effects.

While racial identity theory continues to advance (Carter 1995; Helms 1990, 1996; Thompson & Carter, 1997), there has been less attention to using racial identity profiles in research, even though profile analysis methods are more consistent with theoretical propositions. A way to use profiles has existed for more than a decade. In the description of how to calculate profiles, Helms (1996) showed that it was possible to determine the frequency of contiguous pairs of racial identity status attitudes in a given sample and to show which status attitude in the pair would be more strongly preferred to the other, thus producing a strength of endorsement profile for a person.

The current study, therefore, differs from prior investigations in two important ways. First, the racial identity status model and its accompanying scale was used (Helms & Parham, 1996). Second, the current study includes the strength of endorsement profile analysis outlined by Helms (1996). The profile analysis used an additional and alternative approach to assess the influence of racial identity on perceived racism and psychological functioning. Therefore, two related hypotheses guide the investigation:

Hypothesis 1. The interaction of racial identity status attitudes with perceived racism (a moderator variable) will be related to lower levels of psychological distress and higher levels of psychological well-being.

Hypothesis 2. Racial identity status attitudes, as measured by a profile analysis, will be associated with varied reports of psychological functioning, perceived racism, and general life stress.

Method

Participants

Study participants were 340 Black American adults (119 women, 221 men) who lived in the areas of New York or Washington, DC. All demographic information was obtained via participant self-report. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 80 years, with a mean of 30.1 years ($SD = 9.7$). The participants described themselves as working class ($n = 150$; 44%), middle class ($n = 155$; 46%), or upper class ($n = 28$; 8%).

With regard to education, 12% ($n = 39$) of participants had obtained an associate's degree, 24% ($n = 80$) had an undergraduate degree, and 13% ($n = 44$) had completed a graduate degree. The educational status of the remaining participants ranged from a high school diploma or equivalent ($n = 67$; 20%) to some college courses taken ($n = 107$; 32%).

The most frequently identified religious orientations and denomination affiliations were Christian ($n = 107$; 32%), Baptist ($n = 93$; 27%), and Catholic ($n = 41$; 12%). A notable number of participants either did not identify any religious orientation ($n = 20$; 6%) or responded as *none* ($n = 20$; 6%). In terms of ethnic group affiliation, 70% ($n = 229$) identified as African American, 10% as American ($n = 34$), and 15% ($n = 52$) as Caribbean.

Procedure

The data-collection procedure involved the following steps. A survey packet was created, which included a cover letter outlining the nature of the study, potential risks and benefits, a personal demographic form, and the research instruments. Participants were recruited at barbershops and hair salons and were informed that they would be participating in research focusing on the experience of discrimination and stress. While not requiring participants to sign a written consent form, the cover letter informed participants that their agreement to participate would be evidence of their informed consent.

Data collection took place over 18 months and occurred in two phases. An initial data collection focused only on men and yielded 237 packets. These participants were given \$5 as reimbursement for their participation. A second data collection focused on women and yielded 124 packets. As a result of a slower than expected participation rate during the second data collection, the reimbursement amount was increased to \$10.

After an initial examination of all packets, 21 surveys were discarded because of incomplete data. The locations of data collection were as follows: barbershops and hair salons in New York City, (68%, $n = 231$; 68%); barbershops and hair salons in Washington, DC ($n = 88$; 26%), and a college campus in New York ($n = 21$; 6%).

Measures

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). The PSS is a 14-item self-report measure of general life stress. A single PSS score is obtained by summing all of the items with high scores reflective of perceptions of high levels of overall life stress. Cronbach's alphas ranging from .84 to .86 have been reported in prior studies (Cohen & Williamson, 1988). The current investigation employed the 10-item version of the PSS, with a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient calculated at .79. Construct and concurrent validity for the PSS have been demonstrated through the positive correlations of the PSS with maladaptive health-related behaviors (i.e., smoking) and vulnerability to depressive symptoms (Cohen, Sherrod, & Clark, 1986; Kuiper, Olonger, & Lyons, 1986).

Schedule of Racist Events-Modified (SRE; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). The SRE is an 18-item self-report measure that assesses the frequency and stressfulness of selected lifetime and past-year racist experiences faced by Black Americans. The SRE provides two types of scores. First, a frequency score is derived from participants' responses as to how often they experienced certain events. These responses range from 1 (*this did not happen to me*) to 6 (*this happened almost all the time*). For the stressfulness score, respondents use a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*not stressful*) to 6 (*extremely stressful*).

The current study employed a modified version of the SRE. The scale was modified by changing the time frames from past year and lifetime to past month and past year. A scale score was computed by summing the items in each subscale. High scores reflect greater frequency and more racism-related stress. The time modification was instituted to be consistent with the past-month time interval of the other measures in the study. The modified version used for the current study produced three separate scores:

past-month frequency of racist events; past-month racism-related stress; past-year frequency of racist events; and racism-related stress.

Klonoff et al. (1999) provided evidence for construct validity through significant positive correlations between scores on the SRE (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996) and scores on the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL-58; Derogatis, Lipman, Rickles, Ulenhuth, & Covi, 1994), such that participants with high stress-related symptoms reported more frequent racist experiences over the past year and lifetime. The SRE is considered an effective instrument for assessing perceptions of racist events and the perceived stressfulness of those events (Utsey, 1998). Obtained Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the subscale used in the current study was .89 for the past-month racist experiences scale.

Mental Health Inventory (MHI; Veit & Ware, 1983). The MHI is a 38-item measure that assesses both psychological distress and psychological well-being in adults. The MHI produces indexes of psychological distress, psychological well-being, and global mental health. A score is derived for each index by summing all items and obtaining a mean score. The MHI is scored so that higher scores on each index indicate higher levels of the construct being measured.

The MHI has been used extensively in studies focusing on nonpsychiatric samples. Evidence of psychometric adequacy has been well established (Siegel, Karus, Raveis, & Hagen, 1998; Veit & Ware, 1983). Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the current investigation were .89 and .93 for psychological well-being and psychological distress, respectively.

Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS-B long form; Helms & Parham, 1996). The RIAS-B is a 50-item self-report measure that assesses the racial identity status attitudes of Black Americans. The scales measure pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization status attitudes. Participants are asked to respond using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Helms and Parham (1996) reported Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients ranging from .51 to .80. For the current study, the alpha coefficients were .78, .46, .72, and .70 for pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization, respectively. Helms, Henze, Sass, and Mifsud (2006; as well as the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999) contended that "adequate" reliabilities are relative to the study and are influenced by sample characteristics and psychological processes, such as individual interpretations of the items. Thus, low alpha reliability coefficients may not be sufficient to infer that the racial identity items on the measure are not accessing the corresponding construct. In view of these arguments, as well as the patterns noted in the correlation matrix, the

encounter scale was kept in the analysis, irrespective of its relatively low alpha coefficient.

Demographics. A personal data sheet was included to obtain participants' demographic information. Those items were age, race, ethnicity, place of birth, social class, occupation, income and educational status, and medical/psychiatric history.

Results

The present study was designed to test two central hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 focused on whether the interaction of racial identity status attitudes with perceived racism (a moderator variable) would be related to lower levels of psychological distress and higher levels of psychological well-being. Hypothesis 2 concerned whether racial identity status attitudes as measured by strength of endorsement profile analyses would be associated with varied reports of psychological functioning, perceived racism, and general life stress.

Preliminary Analyses

In order to assess if there were any differences in the sample according to various demographic characteristics, a one-way MANOVA was conducted, with gender, social class, ethnic group, and data-collection site serving as independent variables; and perceived life stress (PSS), past-month racist experiences (RRE), and the racial identity subscales (RIAS-B) serving as dependent variables. Results of the MANOVA reveal no significant differences in RRE and PSS across these specific demographic variables. However, there was a significant difference for gender, as measured by Wilks's Λ , $F(6, 281) = 4.50$, $p < .01$. Tests of between-subjects effects reveal gender differences for pre-encounter, $F(1, 286) = 11.08$, $p < .01$; and encounter, $F(1, 286) = 15.21$, $p < .01$. Gender, therefore, was entered as a control variable in the subsequent analysis. Correlations and coefficient alphas for the variables under consideration are presented in Table 1; while means, standard deviations, and score ranges are presented in Table 2.

Primary Analyses

To test whether racial identity status attitudes would moderate the relationship between perceived racism and psychological functioning (Hypothesis 1), we conducted two hierarchical regression analyses. As per the

Table 1

Reliability Coefficients and Correlation Matrix

Variable	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. RRE	.86	—						
2. PSS	.79	.32**	—					
3. PSW	.93	-.32**	-.56**	—				
4. PSD	.89	.44**	.64**	-.55**	—			
5. PRE	.78	.19**	.25**	-.12*	.33**	—		
6. ENC	.46	.23**	.14**	-.09	.19**	.39**	—	
7. IEM	.72	.24**	.12*	.01	.10	.23**	.48**	—
8. INT	.71	-.04	-.15**	.21**	-.27**	-.37	-.07	.13*

Note. $N = 340$. RRE = past-month racist experiences; PSS = perceived stress; PSW = psychological well-being; PSD = psychological distress; PRE = pre-encounter; ENC = encounter; IEM = immersion-emersion; INT = internalization.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2

Means and Ranges of Scores for Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	Range
RRE	28.32	12.02	17–83
PSS	16.85	5.84	3–35
PSW	54.08	11.18	19–78
PSD	54.16	18.92	24–113
PRE	38.87	9.78	18–76
ENC	15.54	3.78	6–27
IEM	34.17	7.12	15–54
INT	55.50	6.96	17–70

Note. RRE = past-month racist experiences; PSS = perceived stress; PSW = psychological well-being; PSD = psychological distress; PRE = pre-encounter; ENC = encounter; IEM = immersion-emersion; INT = internalization.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

accepted procedures for testing moderation (Baron & Kenny, 1986), interaction terms were created for past-month racist events (RRE) and each of the racial identity status attitudes (RIAS). The interaction terms were comprised of the cross-product of RRE and each RIAS (e.g., Pre-Encounter \times RRE).

Multicollinearity has been noted to be a problem when attempting to interpret and create interaction terms (Aiken & West, 1991). Therefore, to account for the potential effects of multicollinearity, all predictor variables were initially centered before the interaction terms were created. Centering was accomplished by subtracting a constant (i.e., sample mean) from the value of every variable (see Frazier, Tix, & Barron, 2004).

In the first hierarchical regression, psychological distress was entered as the criterion variable; and in the second regression, the criterion variable was changed to psychological well-being. The predictor variables were the same for each regression and were entered in the following order: Step 1, gender via dummy code; Step 2, perceived stress; Step 3, RRE; Step 4, RIAS-B scales (pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization); and Step 5, four interaction terms comprised of RRE as a cross-product with each RIAS-B scale.

For psychological distress, the results were as follows. On Step 1, gender was not associated with psychological distress ($R^2 = .006$, *ns*). On Step 2, perceived stress was a significant and positive predictor of psychological distress ($\Delta R^2 = .41$, $p < .01$). On Step 3, past-month racist events added to the prediction of psychological distress over and above that accounted for by life stress ($\Delta R^2 = .06$, $p < .01$). On Step 4, the addition of the racial identity status attitudes resulted in an R^2 change of .04 ($p < .05$), meaning that the addition of the racial identity status attitudes added to the prediction of psychological distress over and above general life stress and past-month racist events.

A review of the beta weights indicates that pre-encounter was positively associated with psychological distress ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$), while internalization was inversely associated with psychological distress ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .01$). Finally, for Step 5, the R^2 change (.01) was not significant, indicating that racial identity did not moderate the relationship between perceived racism and psychological distress (see Table 3).

For psychological well-being, the findings were as follows. On Step 1, gender was not associated with psychological well-being ($R^2 = .002$, *ns*). On Step 2, the R^2 change (.31, $p < .01$) was significant, $F(1, 337) = 78.33$, $p < .01$. The beta weight ($\beta = -.56$, $p < .01$) indicates that perceived life stress was inversely associated with psychological well-being and that the relationship was significant. There was no significant increase in R^2 on Step 3, indicating that perceived racism was not a significant predictor of psychological well-being when controlling for general life stress. On Step 4, the R^2 change (.03) was significant ($p < .01$), suggesting that racial identity attitudes were a

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression of Psychological Distress on Study Variables

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Step 1			
Gender	-3.16	2.15	-.08
Step 2			
PSS	2.07	0.14	.64**
Step 3			
RRE	0.41	0.06	.26**
Step 4			
PRE	0.18	0.09	.04*
ENC	0.27	0.23	.05
IEM	-0.08	0.12	-.03
INT	-0.38	0.12	-.14**
Step 5			
PRE \times RRE	0.01	0.06	.33
ENC \times RRE	0.01	0.20	.13
IEM \times RRE	-0.02	0.01	-.45
INT \times RRE	-0.01	0.01	-.34

Note. PSS = perceived stress; RRE = past-month racist experiences; PRE = pre-encounter; ENC = encounter; IEM = immersion-emersion; INT = internalization. Step 1, $R^2 = .006$; Step 2, $\Delta R^2 = .41^{**}$; Step 3, $\Delta R^2 = .06^{**}$; Step 4, $\Delta R^2 = .04^{**}$; Step 5, $\Delta R^2 = .01$. On each step, only additional variables are displayed.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

significant predictor of psychological well-being when controlling for general life stress and perceived racism. A review of the beta weights reveals that internalization was a significant individual predictor, indicating a positive association with well-being ($\beta = .15, p < .01$). Finally, there was no significant increment in R^2 on Step 5 (see Table 4).

The results of the hierarchical regression analyses for the current sample failed to support the notion that racial identity status attitudes would moderate the relationship between perceived racism and psychological functioning. Furthermore, when accounting for general life stress, the results suggest that perceived racism did not influence these individuals' sense of well-being. In sum, for the current sample, perceived racism predicted psychological distress. However, it was not predictive of psychological well-being, and

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression of Psychological Well-Being on Study Variables

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Step 1			
Gender	-1.01	1.27	-.04
Step 2			
PSS	-1.07	0.09	-.56**
Step 3			
RRE	0.00	0.04	.003
Step 4			
PRE	0.10	0.06	.08
ENC	-0.20	0.16	-.07
IEM	0.13	0.08	.08
INT	0.23	0.05	.14**
Step 5			
PRE \times RRE	-0.00	0.00	-.24
ENC \times RRE	0.01	0.01	.29
IEM \times RRE	-0.00	0.01	-.40
INT \times RRE	-0.01	0.08	-.69

Note. PSS = perceived stress; RRE = past-month racist experiences; PRE = pre-encounter; ENC = encounter; IEM = immersion-emersion; INT = internalization. Step 1, $R^2 = .003$; Step 2, $\Delta R^2 = .31^{**}$; Step 3, $\Delta R^2 = .00$; Step 4, $\Delta R^2 = .03^{**}$; Step 5, $\Delta R^2 = .00$. On each step, only additional variables are displayed.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

racial identity did not emerge as a moderating variable in the relationship between perceived racism and psychological functioning.

Racial Identity Profile Analysis

To examine further the role of racial identity and to explore the utility of an alternative approach to racial identity assessment, we employed a profile analysis of racial identity statuses and examined whether racial identity profiles would account for differing levels of general life stress, perceived racism, and psychological functioning. First, a brief overview of racial identity profiles will be provided.

As previously indicated, the RIAS-B has essentially been used to do group-level analysis. According to Helms's (1995) theory, however, each racial identity status functions within an individual as an interacting influence. Racial identity, therefore, can be viewed as an individual-level variable, and procedures that rely on the use of summed scores and group means for each racial identity subscale might not provide the most accurate picture of the influence of racial identity on the variables under consideration.

Currently, most researchers employing the RIAS-B do not use the score-transformation procedures outlined by Helms (1996) and Carter (1996). These procedures were introduced for the purpose of understanding actual or true meanings of racial identity scores. In particular, profiles as score transformations were created as a way to know how each individual participant's statuses relate to one another (Helms, 1996). Therefore, in the current examination, in order to calculate an individual's unique racial identity profile, the RIAS-B scale scores (e.g., pre-encounter, encounter) for each participant were computed.

Standard error of difference bands or point values were then calculated to assess the number of points by which each scale could be considered significantly different from its adjacent scale (e.g., encounter vs. immersion-emersion). The formula used to calculate the standard error of difference bands was as follows:

$$SE_{\text{difference}} = SD\sqrt{2} - r_{xx} - r_{yy} \times 1.96$$

where SD represents the average standard deviation of the scales in each comparison, while r_{xx} and r_{yy} are the reliabilities for each scale in the comparison. In order to standardize each score, z scores were subsequently calculated for each scale score. Additionally, because of the difference in the number of items of the RIAS-B subscales and to eliminate negative scores, the z scores were changed to t scores, using the following formula:

$$\{t_x = (10 \times z_x) + 50\}$$

Using the standard of error difference significance bands and the t scores, each participant's scale scores were then compared with their adjacent scale scores (i.e., pre-encounter vs. encounter, encounter vs. immersion-emersion, immersion-emersion vs. internalization, and so forth) in order to determine their racial identity profile and the according strength of endorsement of racial identity status. Strength of endorsement was based on whether scale scores in each comparison differed significantly from each other for each person. There are three possibilities that existed for each pair comparison:

1. A scale could be less than 1 SE of difference from its contiguous scale. If the scales did not exceed the determined point value, the

- compared scale scores were considered to have no significant difference and were labeled *equal*.
2. The scale scores could be significantly different by 1 *SE* of difference or point value. If the difference between racial identity status attitude scores in a pair was greater than the point value, or 1 *SE* of difference, the comparison was considered statistically significant and was designated *high* in the direction of the higher score.
 3. The two scale scores could differ by 2 *SE*, or twice the point value. If the difference between the scores in the pair exceeded 2 point values, or 2 *SE* of difference or greater, it was considered *very high* in the direction of the higher score (Helms, 1996).

This process allowed us to assess the strength of endorsement of each racial identity status attitude in comparison to the contiguous or adjacent status attitude.

Thus, five options for each contiguous pair comparison were available. For example, in the comparison between immersion–emersion and internalization scale scores, the strengths of endorsement could be (a) very high immersion–emersion; (b) high immersion–emersion; (c) equal, meaning no significant difference was found between immersion–emersion and internalization; (d) high internalization; or (e) very high internalization.

It should be noted that although we only compared adjacent scales (i.e., pre-encounter vs. encounter, encounter vs. immersion–emersion, immersion–emersion vs. internalization, and so forth), it is also possible to compare each scale with every other scale. We decided to use the contiguous-pair comparison because it offers a picture of the sequential influences of each status in the strength of endorsement of participants. This way we could determine from the types of profiles found how they related to the relative influence of each of the racial identity status attitudes.

Once each pair of adjacent racial identity status attitude scores was labeled according to the comparative strength of endorsement, a racial identity profile was generated for each participant. Generating a profile was accomplished by creating a new variable (i.e., profile) using *concatenation*, a procedure that calculates all possible combinations of contiguous scale comparisons. After generating profiles for each participant, the frequency of each profile type in the data set was determined.

Profile Results

For the current sample, using the contiguous comparison method, a total of 39 profile types was generated. The frequency associated with each profile type ranged from 1 to 153; that is, some profile types only occurred once,

while the most frequent profile type occurred 153 times. The 12 most commonly occurring profiles accounted for 86% ($n = 292$) of all of the individual profile types generated. Upon further examination, some of the profile types were collapsed into common configurations; for example, a profile type of high pre-encounter was collapsed with very high pre-encounter to create a pre-encounter dominant profile group. Subsequently, five main profile groups emerged: (a) undifferentiated profile ($n = 161$; 47%); (b) internalization-dominant profile ($n = 56$; 16%); (c) pre-encounter-dominant profile ($n = 32$; 9%); (d) pre-encounter/immersion-emersion blend ($n = 28$; 8%); and (e) immersion-emersion-dominant profile ($n = 22$; 6%).

It is noteworthy that the most frequently occurring profile configuration was an undifferentiated, or flat profile. The majority of participants did not have significant differences across the racial identity subscales, which might mean that no single racial identity status attitude was more dominant than the others when using the profile scoring method. It should also be noted at this point that the decision to collapse profile groups and to eliminate less frequently occurring groups was largely driven by the statistical analysis employed. The five profile groups allowed for sufficient cells sizes in order to perform the MANOVA. It is likely, however, that some information was lost in this process and that an examination of the less common profile configurations might provide additional information in relation to racial identity profiles and psychological processes (see Carter, 1996; Helms, 1996).

MANOVA Analysis

In order to assess the influence of differing racial identity status profiles on psychological functioning, general life stress, and perceived racist events, we conducted a MANOVA. The most frequently occurring racial identity profile groups were entered as independent variables; and perceived stress (PSS), past-month racist events (RRE), psychological distress (PSD), and psychological well-being (PSW) were entered as dependant variables. Results of the overall MANOVA reveal significant differences by profile type for PSS, perceived racism, PSD, and PSW (Wilks's $\Lambda = .84$), $F(16, 889) = 3.29$, $p < .01$.

The results of Tukey's HSD test post hoc analysis are as follows (see Table 5). For PSS, the mean comparison for profile groups shows that the internalization-dominant profile ($M = 14.66$) was significantly lower than the pre-encounter-dominant profile ($M = 18.02$, $p < .05$) and the pre-encounter/immersion-emersion blend profile ($M = 19.54$, $p < .01$). This suggests that for the current sample, individuals who endorsed the pre-encounter-dominant profile and the pre-encounter/immersion-emersion blend profile reported

Table 5
Tukey's HSD Post Hoc Comparison of Mean Scores on Study Variables by Profile Type

Variable	Profile 1		Profile 2		Profile 3		Profile 4		Profile 5	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Perceived stress	16.61 _a	5.66	18.02 _a	5.59	18.32 _a	5.29	14.66 _{ab}	6.09	19.54 _{ab}	4.84
Racist experiences	27.15	10.51	31.97	15.02	32.03	15.04	27.15	10.74	33.08	13.66
Psychological well-being	53.23 _a	10.76	52.91	11.15	55.31	18.87	58.59 _{ab}	10.92	49.52 _b	11.92
Psychological distress	52.29 _a	15.77	62.76 _{abc}	22.22	54.47	18.87	47.29 _{bc}	19.37	67.93 _{abc}	16.12

Note. Profile 1 = undifferentiated; Profile 2 = pre-encounter dominant; Profile 3 = immersion-emersion dominant; Profile 4 = internalization dominant; Profile 5 = pre-encounter/immersion-emersion blend. Means sharing subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$, as assessed by Tukey's HSD test.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

greater levels of perceived or general life stress than did individuals who endorsed the internalization-dominant profile.

As assessed by Tukey's HSD test, no significant differences were found when comparing the means of RRE across the racial identity status profile types. This finding suggests that differences in perceived racist events might not reflect any particular racial identity profile.

When comparing mean scores on PSD, the findings indicate that the internalization-dominant profile had lower mean scores ($M = 47.29$) than did the pre-encounter-dominant profile ($M = 62.76$, $p < .01$) and the pre-encounter/immersion-emersion blend profile ($M = 67.93$, $p < .01$) groups. In addition, the mean score for the undifferentiated profile group ($M = 51.29$) was significantly lower than the pre-encounter/immersion-emersion blend profile group ($M = 67.93$, $p < .01$).

When comparing mean scores on PSW, the internalization-dominant profile ($M = 58.59$) was significantly higher than the pre-encounter/immersion-emersion blend ($M = 49.52$, $p < .01$) and the undifferentiated profile ($M = 53.23$, $p < .05$). Therefore, the results of the mean comparisons for profile groups can be summarized as follows:

1. Individuals within the pre-encounter or pre-encounter/immersion-emersion blend profile groups reported more psychological distress than did individuals in the undifferentiated or internalization-dominant profile groups.
2. Individuals within the internalization-dominant profile group reported less general life stress than did any of the other profile groups.
3. Perceptions of racism-related stress did not appear to vary according to racial identity profile type.

The results suggest that for the current sample of Black adults, the internalization-dominant profile appeared to be associated with more positive aspects of psychological functioning, such as lower levels of perceived stress, higher levels of psychological well-being, and lower levels of psychological distress.

Discussion

Scholars have suggested that racial identity may partly account for the differential ways in which Black Americans perceive racism, as well as the manner in which they are affected by racist experiences (Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007; Hall & Carter, 2006; Klonoff et al., 1999; Pieterse & Carter, 2007; Sanders-Thompson, 2002; Watts & Carter, 1991; Williams et al., 2003).

Some have posited that racial identity might moderate the relationship between perceived racism and psychological outcomes, specifically providing a type of protection from the psychological harm associated with racism-related experiences (Cross et al., 1998; Franklin, 1999). Therefore, the current study tested the hypothesis that racial identity would moderate the relationship between perceived racism and psychological functioning. The study examined this hypothesis using a traditional moderator analysis approach, as well as an alternate profile analysis of racial identity that was introduced by Helms (1996).

While the moderator hypotheses did not receive empirical validation, the profile analysis indicated that the internalization-dominant status was associated with lower levels of general stress, higher levels of psychological well-being, and lower levels of psychological distress. In addition, we found that perceived racism did not vary by profile type. In an attempt to understand these somewhat inconsistent findings, we offer the following points for consideration.

According to theory, racial identity statuses have to do with how an individual functions or processes racial information. Previous studies have found racial identity status attitudes and aspects of multidimensional Black identity to be strongly associated with psychological functioning (i.e., distress or well being; e.g. Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007; Sellers et al., 2006). The current investigation found that perceived experiences of racism did not differ by racial identity status, and the interaction between racial identity and perceived racism was not predictive of psychological functioning.

One possibility here could be that, given the ubiquity of racism within the United States (Feagin, 2001), Black Americans rely on coping patterns that might be more socially based, in comparison to individual and intrapsychic variables, such as racial identity. Thus, racial identity in and of itself might not have specific utility with regard to protecting against the psychological harm associated with racist incidents. To understand more fully the manner in which Black Americans are protected from the psychological harm that is associated with racism, there might be a need to focus on other variables, such as racial socialization and peer networks, and the role of spirituality and religion in the Black community (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Hunter & Lewis-Coles, 2004; Scott, 2003). There is also the possibility that the manner in which the RIAS-B is typically used—that is, employing a group-means approach—is not the best strategy for assessing the process of racial identity in relation to perceived racism and psychological functioning.

Measurement of racial identity has received widespread attention in the literature (e.g., Fischer & Moradi, 2001). The primary use of the RIAS-B

has been in the context of group-related variables, a methodology that is inconsistent with the theory of racial identity as an individual set of resolutions. Subsequently, Helms (1996) outlined an approach for transforming racial identity status scores that she described as being more consistent with the underlying theory of racial identity as characteristic of an individual, as well as to capture its multidimensional and fluid nature. Of note is the fact that when utilizing a profile analysis, the role of racial identity in psychological functioning was different. Here, the undifferentiated and internalization-dominant statuses were associated with less psychological distress.

The internalization status has been viewed as a more complex racial identity status; one that, according to Helms (1995), allows for an “objective response to members of the dominant racial group” (p. 186) and that involves a “positive commitment to one’s own social-racial group” (p. 186). Additionally, the internalization status is viewed as being associated with decision-making strategies that include “assessing and integrating socio-racial group requirements and self-assessment” (p. 186) and that is characterized by “flexibility and analytical thinking” (p. 186). Therefore, it is possible that an analysis that captures racial identity at an individual level offers a different perspective on the relationship between racial identity, stress, perceived racism, and psychological functioning for Black Americans.

The undifferentiated or flat profile, on the other hand, has not been described in the theoretical literature and appears to be the most frequently occurring profile in Black populations (Carter, Pieterse, & Smith, 2008). While it may be tempting to dismiss this profile—the profile in which no dominant racial identity status was observed—one should not assume that the undifferentiated profile has no meaning. The idea that a person’s measured profile can be undifferentiated occurs in other psychological measures, such as the Strong Interest Inventory (Sackett & Hansen, 1995).

Note that the findings indicated that the undifferentiated or flat profile group exhibited lower scores on perceived stress, in comparison to the pre-encounter dominant and the pre-encounter/immersion-emersion blend profile group. These findings suggest that the profile is related to perceptions of the environment. Using racial identity ego-status theory to understand our findings, one might also consider the undifferentiated profile as signifying the state of development that one has prior to the emergence of any dominant status. Statuses may still have different levels of influence, but not to the point of being significantly different. What is clear, however, is that a profile analysis of racial identity as measured by the RIAS-B appears to provide another view of how racial identity might influence psychological processes and perceptions of stress.

Study Limitations

It is important to note the limitations of the current study that might preclude the robustness of its findings. Most studies of racism's impact have not examined the differential emotional and psychological impact of specific types of events (e.g., verbal assaults, poor service, being profiled). Rather, most researchers have statistically related a single item or a sum of items assessing many different events or chronic daily hassles (e.g., SRE) to a global or symptom-specific measure of mental health. This practice provides less information about how to recognize and address the psychological impact of racism effectively.

It is evident that the type of assessment instrument employed to assess racist events captures a wide range of racist events that individuals might experience. The SRE provides a large list of possible racist incidents and then proceeds to assess stress levels associated with those incidents. What is missing from this approach, however, is an understanding of how a specific type of event might be related to psychological distress or well-being. Franklin-Jackson and Carter (2007) found that only perceptions of individual racism—that is, events that consist primarily of experiences of discrimination and hostility while shopping or at restaurants—were associated with greater psychological distress for African American adults. In this sense, the range and nature of the assessed racist events may not capture particular events that are associated with psychological reactions.

Carter (2007) argued for an expanded definition of racism when doing racism-related research. He proposed that acts of racism could be understood according to a typology, either as avoidant racism or as hostile racism. He proposed that symptom clusters that reflect a stress or traumatic reaction might reflect people of color's reactions to specific types of racism. Carter, Forsyth, Mazzula, and Williams (2005) found that experiences of hostile racism (e.g., verbal assaults, workplace hostility) were predictive of more severe emotional reactions (e.g., avoidance, intrusion) than were experiences of avoidant racism (e.g., being denied access or service). Thus, an approach that connects specific events of racism with psychological reactions could be beneficial, in addition to using measures of chronic racism. Furthermore, given the dynamic nature of racial identity, a more elaborate understanding of the emotional responses to specific types of racism could allow for a clearer understanding of the manner in which racial identity might be associated with these specific acts and responses.

An additional limitation of the current approach is the lack of attention to other variables that may have the potential to moderate the relationship between perceived racism and psychological outcomes. While the analyses show no significant differences across certain demographic variables, it is

conceivable that latent variables (e.g., social class, religion), when included in the general linear model, might play an important role as potentially moderating or mediating variables. By definition, latent variables might account for indirect effects. Latent variables were not directly assessed by the statistical analyses that were employed here. Given the wide availability of structural modeling, an analysis testing models that include religious orientation and social class could be an important next step. Because of the exploratory nature of the current study, however, a singular focus on racial identity was adopted.

A final limitation relates to the instructions provided to participants. As was evident in the procedure, no attempt was made to hide the nature of the study from participants. Given that there was a self-selection bias involved with the study, the extent to which the nature of the study might have influenced participants' responses is unclear. Future studies could benefit from providing a more vague set of instructions, thereby decreasing the potential of participants responding in a manner consistent with the outlined goals of the study.

Implications and Future Directions

In this investigation, we focused on racial identity as an individual and culturally based variable that might account for the differential experience of racism among Black American adults. Scholars, however, have referred to other variables, such as spirituality (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002; Hunter & Lewis-Coles, 2004), informal social networks (Franklin & Jackson, 1990), individual and social adaptability (Shade, 1990), gender (Moradi & Subich, 2003), and Afro-centric worldview (Elligan & Utsey, 1999) as factors that might play important roles in how Black Americans cope with or are protected from the damaging psychological effects of racism. Further investigations of the precise role that the aforementioned variables play in buffering the effects of racism must be conducted. Furthermore, replication of the racial identity profile analysis with different criterion or dependent variables is encouraged to ascertain further the utility of a profiles approach to racial identity research.

The current study sought to understand the role of racial identity status attitudes and strength of endorsement profile groups in the relationship between perceived racism and psychological stress. It was noted that the manner in which racial identity status attitudes is measured might be an important determinant of how an understanding of the relationship between racial identity and varied criterion variables develops. Continued attempts to assess racial identity in a manner that reflects more consistently the multidimensionality of this individual-level variable might lead to a clearer

understanding of the manner in which racial identity could be protective for Black Americans when confronted with racist experiences. It is hoped that the findings documented in the current study will further inform clinicians and mental-health practitioners in their attempts to employ more effective and efficient interventions when dealing with the psychological correlates of racism among Black Americans.

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