The Effect of Racial Identity on Self-concept and the Motivation for Black High School Students to Pursue a Postsecondary Education

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**CHAPTER II**

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between racial identity, self-concept, and the motivation to pursue post-secondary education in Black urban high school students. Racial identify is a complex, multifaceted construct that involves the attitudes of individuals about being members of a particular racial group (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010; Sanchez, 2013). The concept of racial identity captures the racial experiences that individuals go through because of their membership to a particular racial group. Self-concept on the other hand refers to the general attitude that an individual has about himself/herself (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013; Evans et al., 2011). The terms self-image and self-identity can also be used interchangeably to refer to self-concept.

For decades, black students in the United States have lagged in academic achievement. Compared to other races (Whites, Hispanics, and Asians,) black students are at a higher risk of being less successful in school (Carnoy & Garcia, 2017). For instance, a 2012 survey by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) showed that the high school graduation rate for the White and Asian students was 95% and 94% respectively while the graduation rate for the Black students was 89% (Stark & Noel, 2015). The graduation rates for the American Indians (natives) is however lower at approximately 79%. The black students are reported to face difficulties within education in the United States (McFarland et al., 2016). For example, black students exhibit a lack of sense of belonging as well as a lack of support and resources. Further, studies have shown that black students experience racial discrimination, especially in predominantly white schools (Cabrera, 2014; Hope et al., 2015). The image painted of the Black Americans in the US has been negative. For example, Blacks have been portrayed as pimps, rapists, thieves, prostitutes, athletes, entertainers, and prisoners to mention a few (Williams & Chung 2013). These barriers pose significant challenges for black high school students and it impacts negatively on their motivation to pursue post-secondary education.

According to Ross et al. (2016), many class students are demotivated from pursuing post-secondary education due to feelings of racial aggression, cultural mistrust, and loss of sense of self-worth. Black students are usually challenged with adjustment difficulties that are not experienced by students from other races such as Whites and Asians (Gardner et al., 2014). Black students suffer from a reduced sense of belonging and experience discrimination, alienation, and a feeling of inferiority compared to other dominant cultures (Heaven, 2015).

To better understand the effect of racial identity on self-concept and the motivation for Black high school students to pursue post-secondary education, this review will first focus on the theoretical frameworks that guide racial identity. The key theoretical frameworks to be discussed include; the racial identity theory and looking glass self-theory. These two theories are relevant to the study because each theory helps to enhance the understanding of the key concepts of the research topic; racial identity and self-concept. The racial identity theory focuses more on the racial identity aspect while the looking glass self-theory focuses on self-concept.

**Racial Identity Theory**

The racial identity theory was first coined by Cross (1978) who developed a Nigriscence model that discussed the progression in the development of black identity (Thompson & Carter, 2013). According to the theory, individuals engulfed in the different stages learn to embrace and appreciate their blackness (Hughes et al., 2015). The negriscence model comprises of five stages; pre encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. During the pre-encounter stage, there is the acceptance of the belief that blacks are inferior to other races including the Whites, Hispanics, and Asians. Moreover, there is the internalization of Eurocentric values as well as concepts and definitions. The encounter stage is characterized by significant experiences that challenge the Eurocentric perspective (Hurtado et al., 2015). The immersion-emersion stage involves the shift towards engagement in the black experience and increased awareness of racism. The internalization stage is characterized by the achievement of positive and personal pride of individuals to the black identity, the acceptance and tolerance of others, and the engagement in social justice activities. The racial identity theory allows researchers to examine race and its impacts on educational achievement among students (Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016).

**Looking Glass Self Theory**

The looking glass self-theory is credited to a sociologist known as Charles Horton Cooley who sought to explain the society by examining the daily forms of interactions between individuals (Ruiz-Junco & Brossard, 2018). Cooley’s theory of self enables individuals to learn who they are through their interactions with others (Fricke & Frederick, 2017). This is referred to as ‘the looking glass self’. The looking glass self-theory is based on three key assumptions;

The first assumption is that an individual in a social situation imagines and reflects how they appear to others. The theory proposes that ‘if others look up to us and treat us with respect, then we will respect ourselves, but if they oppress us, our self-esteem will be low’ (Rahim, 2010). In general, this assumption holds that an individual’s self-respect is based on the respect of others. This implies that black students will internalize the negative evaluation of the school environment based on their racial identity and consequently develop low esteem and lack of motivation (Fricke & Frederick, 2017).

The second assumption holds that individuals imagine the perception that other people have of their appearance. According to this assumption, self-esteem is a consequence of comparisons made by individuals of themselves with others and making either positive or negative self-evaluations (Rahim, 2010). Per this assumption, black students experience low levels of academic achievement by comparing themselves with superior races (Whites, Asians, and Hispanics). This results in the development of low self-esteem and a lack of motivation to pursue higher education (Nadal et al., 2014).

According to the third assumption, an individual develops feelings about external judgments and responds to those perceived judgments through their self-esteem. Self-esteem results from individuals observing their behavior and characteristics and examining their successes and failures (Downey, 2015). The desire by the black students to pursue post-secondary education can be deterred by discrimination. This negatively impacts on their self-esteem and motivation.

Based on this theory, self-image comes from self-reflection about interactions with other people and how these perceive them. Through the interactions, individuals can develop an idea of who they are (Rahim, 2010). The theory holds that individuals take on characteristics that are predominately influenced by what we believe society perceives us to be. Under this theory, stereotyped individuals come to integrate society’s label of them as their identity and will reproduce the behaviors associated with that identity (Sullivan & Paltenburg, 2017). This is critical in understanding how the black students view themselves based on their interactions with students from other races.

The looking glass self-theory underlies the assumption that low societal standing will in general result in low self-esteem.Self-esteem has been viewed as having a positive correlation with one's general societal standing (Siongkowinarto, 2018). For instance, being black in a white-dominated school has been identified to produce negative effects on the development of self-esteem among black students. This in turn affects their motivation to pursue further education (Fricke & Frederick, 2017).

When looking at race as a variable in differential self-esteem, much of the research and theory supports the hypothesis of lower self-esteem for black students (Rahim, 2010). The interaction with students from other races often causes black students to perceive themselves as being inferior. Other studies have characterized the perception that black students have of themselves as self-hatred, self-contempt, and low self-esteem (Fricke & Frederick, 2017; Nadal et al., 2014). This results in black students exhibiting feelings of helplessness and identity conflict. The conflict can further enhance feelings of self-doubt and a sense of inadequacy or self-hatred.

For many years, black students have had little else by which to judge themselves other than the second-class status assigned them in America. Along with this inferior treatment, they have constantly been filled with the clamor of white racists egotistically insisting that Whites and Caucasians are innately superior to the Blacks (Nadal et al., 2014). Consequently, many black students consciously or unconsciously, accept in part these assertions of their inferiority.

**Critical Race Theory**

The critical race theory (CRT) is critical for understanding the effect of racial identity on the motivation of black students to pursue post-secondary education and is based on the assumptions that race, history, and voice matter in shaping the lives of individuals, especially those belonging to the black race. Delgado & Stefanic (2012) identified six tenets of CRT including;

* Racism is ordinary – this belief holds that approaching situations from a racial perspective is the normal way that society conducts its business.
* Interest convergence – presents the idea that many individuals belonging to the white society have little or no incentive to eliminate racism due to material or psychic purposes.
* Social construction – according to this tenet, races are groups incented and manipulated by society. The groups can also be eliminated or retired by society when convenient.
* Differential racialization – this presents the perspective that the racialization of groups occurred at different times in history.
* Intersectionality – this presents multiple over-lapping identities between races.
* Voice-of-color – this tenet is of the view that minority status brings with it a presumed competence to air concerns about race and racism.

By going through the six tenets of CRT and examining the experience of race among students, it is evident that race goes beyond the color of the skin of individuals. Racial identity, therefore, is the result of the meanings placed on it by society. There is a belief that race exists to spur racism. Delgado & Stefanic (2012) further indicated that racism plays a critical role in advancing the interests of the whites and Caucasians while undermining those of the minority groups such as blacks. As a result, the dominant groups (whites) have minimal incentive to eliminate it.

Based on the view presented by Delgado & Stefanic (2012) race is a critical factor that brings about inequality in access to education by black students. A focus on Black students’ racial and achievement self-conceptions using CRT provides more understanding into why black students exhibit maladaptive behaviors for academic success in school. The available evidence indicates that black students’ racial identity impacts academic achievement and the desire to pursue post-secondary education (Patton, 2016).

Studies have shown that having a sense of self as a member of the black community is a key protective factor that facilitates black students’ development of positive achievement beliefs and subsequent academic adjustment in school (Reid, 2013). A positive black identity schema comprises of three important aspects for the black students. First, they view themselves as members of the black racial group. Secondly, they become aware of stereotypes and limitations that they encounter both at school and in the society and the impacts it can have on their educational achievement. Finally, they develop a perspective of self where they consider themselves as members of a succeeding racial group. These aspects are critical for facilitating academic achievement among black students (Whaley & Noël, 2012).

Building on this framework, various researchers have indicated that racial identity is correlated to enhanced self-concept, increased motivation, and higher academic achievement among the black students (Butler-Barnes et al., 2012; Byrd & Chavous, 2011). Black students have increased awareness of racism as a key limitation to their academic achievement and the potential to pursue post-secondary education. This awareness motivates the black students to develop a positive racial identity which impacts positively on their academic performance (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010).

Further, research findings have shown that the awareness of back students of the existing structural barriers to success motivates them to assume an attitude that desires to prove the society wrong about the use of racial discrimination and social inequality as reasons to explain their poor academic achievement (Cokley et al., 2012; Reid, 2013). The black students have been reported to assume race-based, class-based, and gender-based perspectives regarding how schooling impacts on their academic achievement.

Some black students have however been shown to develop a collective oppositional identity toward schooling and disengage from academic tasks based on their awareness of the limited job opportunities due to societal racism (Harper & Davis III, 2012). This reduces the motivation of students to engage in academic activities and is responsible for high drop-out rates of black students and the reduced number of those pursuing post-secondary education (Verkuyten et al., 2019).

For the black students to succeed academically and pursue post-secondary education, they should be adequately grounded in their identity as members of a racial caste group, such that they have a way to interpret and make sense of instances when they experience discrimination, specifically in the school setting (Reid, 2013). Moreover, it has been established that black students with a critical awareness of racism as a barrier to their success and a positive racial identity can develop adaptive strategies for schooling that allow them to persist academically (Sleeter, 2017).

A study examining the racial and achievement self-conceptions of high-achieving black students in a predominantly white high school found that the black students exhibited a critical race achievement ideology about schooling (Carter-Andrews, 2012). The presence of the critical race consciousness was central to the black students embracing schooling as an important avenue for their success in life. The critical race consciousness among black students also plays an important role in enhancing their motivation to achieve academic success and pursue post-secondary education (Sleeter, 2017).

The black students also understand the historical and current impact that racism has in perpetuating social inequality in the U.S., particularly for members of the black racial group. The awareness of structural constraints on social mobility derived from a strong identification with one’s racial group. The presence of such consciousness coupled with a pragmatic attitude about the importance of schooling can motivate the black students to achieve success in their academic and life goals despite facing various constraints (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

**Self Determination Theory**

Self Determination Theory (SDT) was developed by psychologists Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan. This theory addresses human motivation, personality, and optimal performance (Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT employs the use of a growth-centered approach to understand why some black students are motivated, why some are likely to drop out, and why some pursue post-secondary education.

SDT differentiates motivation into classes that vary in relative autonomy. Autonomous motivation comprises of the behaviors that are high in autonomy - done out of choice, with a sense of volition and self-endorsement (Jeno & Diseth, 2014). This is the opposite of controlled motivation which is low in autonomy and comprises activities performed for a different consequence (such as avoiding internal or external contingencies). Autonomous motivation is reported to be common among the black students and is linked to high-quality functioning, positive psychological well-being, and increased desire for academic achievement in school. Autonomous motivation and perceived competence positively predict academic achievement among black students (Froiland & Oros, 2014; Jeno et al., 2018).

Teachers are the primary providers of the much-needed support by students and have been shown to have a strong effect on students’ dropout and academic achievement. Black students admitted to predominantly black schools receive support from their teachers and this predicts their motivation to achieve academic success and pursue post-secondary education. Supportive teachers comprise those who identify, nurture, and develop students’ inner motivational resources during the process of teaching (Kusurkar et al., 2011). This concept can also be used to explain the situation of black students enrolled in a predominantly white school. The black students did not receive adequate support from the white teachers, and this impacted negatively on their motivation and desire to complete their studies. Teachers, therefore, play an important role in either nurturing or stifling the academic performance of students (Rocchi et al., 2017).

Need-support and need-satisfaction are important for student motivation and aspiration and are considered to be necessary for academic achievement among black students. According to SDT, need-support is an important factor that promoted internalization by black students and is responsible for transforming their external values and behaviors into self-regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The SDT outlines that need-support and autonomy among students are critical for enhancing intrinsic motivation. They are therefore proximal factors for internalization (Ryan & Deci, 2017)

Further, SDT outlines that personal goals are important factors that influence motivation and academic achievement in black students. SDT provides two types of goal aspirations (intrinsic and extrinsic goals) that students can pursue, and which affect their learning. Intrinsic goals comprise aspects such as personal growth, physical health, and community involvement. Extrinsic goals on the other hand comprise aspects such as money, image, and fame.

SDT posits that need satisfaction and need-support can promote intrinsic aspirations among students. Framing a learning goal as intrinsic in a need-supportive way relative to an extrinsic goal in a controlling way, improved the black students’ autonomous motivation, persistence, and the desire to pursue higher education. Intrinsic aspiration, as opposed to extrinsic aspiration, has been shown to have an indirect effect on academic achievement and the motivation to pursue post-secondary education among black students (Fryer et al., 2014; Utvaer, 2013).

**The History of Black Education**

The early American education system was established under the segregation of the White and Black students. The segregation and differences in the learning environment have contributed to persisting inferior education for black students and other minorities in the current American education system (Jones, 2012). The blacks have had a long journey in the way in which they have been viewed – first as private property, then as ‘lesser citizens’, and finally being granted inferior rights in segregated environments (Black, 2012). Even though segregation has slowly been eliminated, the black students still face inequalities in the curricula regarding the formats used in teaching and learning (Chikkatur, 2013).

The black students did not receive an organized and formal means of education until after the Civil War. Before the end of the Civil War, education for blacks was forbidden (Coats, 2010). The blacks were mainly used as slaves and thus it was against the law to educate slaves. The Freedman’s Bureau was one of the earliest sources through which the blacks received training and education during the Reconstruction period. The training provided was targeted at adults so that they could get employment and facilitate the establishment of black and white work structure (Carson et al., 2010). During the reconstruction period, the blacks took advantage of the free public education that was available to them. In the South where more than 90% of the blacks lived, schools that segregated the blacks from the whites were established (Frankenberg et al., 2017; Hannah-Jones, 2014). Separate public schools for black and white students were established following the Supreme Court decision of Plessy vs. Ferguson (Toldson, 2014). The decision by the Supreme Court also limited the black students from enjoying equivalent educational advantages to the whites. Some of the blacks and whites believed that the segregation system was effective because it allowed the curricula to directly support the education needs of each group (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014).

One of the key issues during the early segregated education system was the imbalance in the allocation of resources and funding for each group (Fiel, 2013). The lack of proper and fair funding for black schools affected the quality of the education provided. Teachers could not give black students adequate individual attention. The black students were made to work harder to succeed. There was an argument about whether black students should receive formal education and whether it was necessary to provide equal support for the education of black students just like the white students (Karkouti, 2016). There was also an argument that the extension of more rights to the black students would erode the existing social fabric, particularly in the South (Fiel, 2013). With these arguments, funding, and support for educating the black students were withheld. This was aimed at ensuring that the blacks remained behind in the acquisition of skills needed to advance beyond the whites.

The struggle for fair and equal education for Blacks was long and hard, but much progress was made through the efforts of civil rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and individuals like Oliver Brown, who pushed for fairness in the education system (Walker, 2013). Schools in the United States were legally desegregated in 1954 by the Supreme Court decision of Brown vs. Board of Education, which overturned Plessy vs. Ferguson (McPherson, 2011). In making this ruling, the Supreme Court indicated that separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Ruby Bridges-Hall was the first Black student to integrate into an elementary school in the South (Meadows, 2011). Her experience would later open future opportunities for other black students. The struggles experienced by Ruby Bridges helped inspire other blacks to challenge the predominant ‘separate but equal’ attitude in the South. This marked the beginning of the long process of desegregation in American public schools (Meadows, 2011).

Another significant integration that occurred in the South took place in Little Rock, AR in 1957. Groups of black students such as the ‘Little Rock Nine’ (nine black students) started attending school in the previously ‘all-white’ schools (Poff, 2016). The Federal government showed support for the integration, with the President dispatching National Guard troops to provide security to the students as they joined the school despite resistance by the state and local government leaders. The entrance of Vivian Malone and James Hood into the University of Alabama also set precedence for de-segregation (Mokrzycki, 2012). This however received strong resistance from the leaders of the state.

These de-segregation activities were important in supporting the legal ruling made in the Supreme Court (Brown vs. Board of Education) from the elementary level to the post-secondary education level (Powell, 2014). They also promoted efforts aimed at disassembling segregation. The black students who attended white schools faced numerous challenges (mainly due to differences in cultural values) as they sought to adapt to the new classroom environments where they were the minority (Jones, 2012). The entrance of black students into white schools also presented challenges to the white teachers who did not have experience dealing with students from different cultural backgrounds (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010).

With the promotion of desegregation, black students began to attend the previously ‘white schools’ at increased rates (Meadows, 2011). However, a lot of work was required to promote equality in the admission of black students in higher education institutions. President John F. Kennedy established the Committee on Equal Opportunity Employment which made it illegal to discriminate against individuals based on race (Toldson, 2014). Executive Order 10925 also facilitated the balancing of admission practices of higher education institutions and aided in the establishment of affirmative action (Johnson, 2017).

There have been significant challenges to the adoption of affirmative action. One illustration of the challenge to affirmative action was the case of Grutter v. Bollinger, which was against the consideration of race for admission into the Law School at the University of Michigan (Deo, 2011; Garces, 2012). The Supreme Court however upheld the use of affirmative action in this case claiming that it helped to promote diversity. Despite the existing challenges, policies such as affirmative action are critical to ensuring that balances remain in place and that the rates of enrolment of black students and other minority groups at higher education institutions continue to increase (Moses et al., 2019; Park & Liu, 2014).

From this discussion, it is evident that even though the school system in the U.S. still struggles with issues relating to segregation and unfair treatment of black students, the nation has made significant strides since the founding of the first colored schoolhouse by Winter Park in 1890.

**Racial Identity**

Racial identity is a critical psychological and cultural variable when studying the motivation of black high school students to pursue post-secondary education. As outlined earlier, racial identity describes the attitudes of individuals about being a member of a particular racial or ethnic group (Thompson & Carter, 2013). The concept of racial identity is based on the minority status of the Black Americans and it focuses on describing their human experience (Lee & Ahn, 2013). An individual’s sense of self-image contributes to generating identity. Identity is bound to social categories as individuals with a specific category and differentiate themselves from others. In this context, racial identity involves the association with a particular social category – racial or ethnic designation (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010).

Research has been carried out to demonstrate how racial identity operates for black students in both the societal and school contexts. The Nigrescence model developed by Cross (1978) effectively describes racial identity for the blacks as a process of becoming black within a socio-political context (Thompson & Carter, 2013). Under this model racial identity is assumed to occur in phases where an individual’s pre-conceived orientations of blacks are challenged by having experiences with blacks that induce change to the pre-established perspectives. Through this process, individuals form new perspectives of black identity and participate in activities that are meaningful to the entire black race (Cokley et al., 2012).

Based on Cooley’s theory of ‘the looking glass self’ it can be inferred that how individuals view/see us can influence how we see ourselves (Downey, 2015). The concepts presented by this theory suggest that the public perception informs how the blacks perceive themselves. Finding one’s position in the social environment contributes to the subjective experience of a meaningful life. Social rejection by individuals from other racial or ethnic groups can have negative effects on diverse facets of the well-being of individuals. The internalization of negative group-based societal images may impact negatively on the blacks, including on their mental health (Settles et al., 2010).

Two critical concepts (centrality and public regard) can aid in understanding racial identity. Racial centrality refers to the extent to which individuals view their racial identity as a critical aspect of their self-concept. Racial centrality reflects the sense of connectedness that individuals have over their racial group. Public regard on the other hand refers to the affective meanings that individuals to their racial identity. For instance, public regard may include beliefs regarding how other members of society view black people. It may also involve reflecting on the awareness of students about racial bias in school.

Further analysis of the racial centrality and public regard dimensions of racial identity is important for studying the meaning-making processes of black students in the context of discrimination in schools (Butler-Barnes et al., 2013). The two racial identity dimensions have important roles to play in describing black student motivation and the desire to pursue post-secondary education (Cokley et al., 2012).

According to Ellis et al. (2018), racial centrality has a positive correlation with academic achievement and attitudes of black students. Racial centrality is protective for black students in harmful racial environments. Chavous et al. (2008) found that among black male students exhibiting high levels of centrality helped to inhibit the harmful effects of discrimination on academic achievement and self-concept. Scholars have found that racial identity in black students is important especially in assessing its impact on motivation and enabling black students to pursue post-secondary education.

Black students’ historical experiences of discrimination and barriers to economic and social mobility contributed to the development of an oppositional culture toward educational institutions and pro-academic values and behaviors. This oppositional alignment allows people to maintain close ties with in-group members who might support them for their school engagement. Moreover, psychological frameworks focused on the effects of stigma hold that for socially stigmatized minority members of the society, stronger group identification, and increased awareness of the stigmatized status of their group can lead to academic demotivation or disconnection of their identity from academic contexts (McClain et al., 2012).

The persistent racial discrimination experienced by black students in high school may be a barrier to their success and may bring about negative academic expectations and stereotypes. This in turn reduces their motivation to pursue higher education. Black students with stronger connections to their racial identity (higher centrality) and the students perceiving increased stigma (lower public regard) are likely to exhibit oppositional orientation to learning (Grills et al., 2016). Further, they are at a higher risk for academic demotivation and dis-identification to their experiences with discrimination. Other studies have however shown that black students with a strong connection to their racial identity (higher centrality) and low public regard may be motivated by their race-related challenges to achieve success in their academics and pursue post-secondary education (Grills et al., 2016; Lozada et al., 2017; White-Johnson, 2012).

Students’ key motivation is their identity and the quality depend on how students fit into the social setting in school (Reid, 2013). For instance, black students often do not fit with students from other races such as Whites and Asians due to their different racial identities. Being exposed to the negative race-related interactions increases the negative feelings of black students, leading them to struggle with their abilities and perceived limitations of their counterparts (Stewart, 2015). In white-dominated schools, black students may develop a negative sense of self or possibly feel rejected. Black students struggle to split themselves from their cultural norms as they realize they must behave like white students to be accepted. Such negative outcomes and conflicts in the identity process may be dire for students, leading them to maladaptive coping responses in life (Hughes et al., 2015). Racism and negative stereotypes impact negatively on identity development for black students. As black students pursue their education, their negative self-identity may interfere with their motivation to achieve pursue higher education and to achieve their goals. Research studies have demonstrated a negative correlation between racial identity and academic achievement among black students. Black students who perceived some form of discrimination in education exhibited a loss in motivation to pursue further studies (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010; Sanchez, 2013).

Various empirical studies support racial identity (black identity) as a risk and as a promotive factor towards academic achievement and increased desire to pursue post-secondary education (Lozada et al., 2017; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). For example, research with various black students has demonstrated the existence of positive direct associations between racial identity (racial centrality) and academic achievement (Miller-Coto & Byrnes, 2016; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Positive public regard beliefs have also been shown to have a positive correlation with improved motivation and school engagement (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014).

In addition to improving school engagement, racial identity plays protective roles concerning the negative race-related experiences (such as discrimination) encountered by black students in their daily social contexts (Thomas et al., 2009). Racial identity beliefs that reflect higher centrality contribute to mitigating the effects of discrimination while improving academic outcomes (Butler-Barnes et al., 2013). Similarly, negative public regard beliefs play an important role in mitigating the negative effects of discrimination on the mental health and behavioral outcomes of black students. The beliefs provide a lens through which black students can process and cope with their experiences in school (Sellers et al., 2006).

Researchers have successfully outlined gender differences in the racial identity processes of black students including experiences of school-based discrimination (Murphy et al., 2013). School settings have been shown to present unique challenges to black male students that help illustrate the achievement disparities between black male students and males from other races (Whites, Asians, and Latinos) (Leath et al., 2019). Black male students are particularly likely to be considered as violent and aggressive, especially as they develop during adolescence (Rogers & Way, 2015). These gendered racial constructions influence the adjustment outcomes of black students at school. A study by Mason et al. (2014) found that black male students have increased rates of suspension and expulsion compared to males from other races with similar infractions. Moreover, black male students have a higher likelihood of being referred to remedial classes based on their behavior.

Limited studies have been conducted to examine the school-based discrimination experiences of black female students. In most cases, black females are excluded from the literature focusing on gender processes in schools (Brown, 2010). Studies conducted by Blake et al. (2011) and Murphy et al. (2013) sought to examine the race-related treatment of black female students in schools. The two studies found that black female students received harsher discipline compared to female students from other races. This type of treatment was linked to the racialized gender expectations by the teachers (Murphy et al., 2013). For example, teachers have been reported to label black female students as disruptive, defiant, aggressive, and combatant. The behaviors of the black female students were considered to be incongruent with White femininity norms such as quietness and passivity. The black female students faced an increased likelihood to be punished for going against these norms (Blake et al., 2011).

In general, the black students (both males and females) suffer discrimination in their daily school settings, although the nature and frequency of these experiences may vary across gender groups (Byrd & Chavous, 2012). Black males and females also respond differently to discrimination, mainly due to their differences in gender socialization (Babbitt, 2013). For example, black male students’ experience of punitive and disrespectful treatment at school by teachers (based in negative stereotypes around black males) has been linked to their development of oppositional orientations toward schooling (such as lack of motivation and reduced desire to pursue further education) (Beasley et al., 2014; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). The maladaptive behaviors are reinforced by teachers (through harsh treatment) who do not understand how black male students develop identities as coping strategies for survival in unsupportive learning settings.

Some scholars involved in studying social identity have suggested that given females are socialized to value relationships, discriminatory experiences that threaten valued relationships may be damaging to their academic engagement and achievement (Thomas et al., 2011). Racial socialization scholars suggested that black female students were more likely to maintain the required school values and full engagement in the classwork despite being subjected to discrimination due to cultural and gender socialization (Chapman, 2015; Hope, 2015).

In a study conducted by Chavous et al. (2008) involving black male high school students from a suburban school, it was found that the males reported increased cases of racial discrimination by teachers and peers than the females. These experiences affected the motivation of male and female students in different ways. Among the male students, teacher and peer discrimination negatively affected their academics in terms of performance and self-concept. Among the female students, racial discrimination had minimal effect on their academic engagement but negatively affected their psychological adjustment outcomes (Chavous et al., 2008). It has also been established that black male students experiencing racial discrimination at school are at an increased risk for disengagement while the black female students may be less vulnerable to the negative impacts of these experiences on their academic engagement (Cokley et al., 2012; Reynolds et al., 2010).

Black identity is mainly considered to be a promotive perspective. However, for black female students, lower racial centrality can play a protective role. Teacher discrimination has also been shown to be linked to higher academic self-concept among black female students with lower race centrality (Leath et al., 2019).

**Roles of schools in enhancing racial identity**

Several studies have sought to determine the association between racial identity and school demographic contexts (Leath et al., 2019). Schools are influencing academic adjustment and student motivation in diverse ways including through interactions between teachers and students (Thibodeaux, 2013). Studies examining racial identity have focused on students from diverse demographic contexts including predominantly black schools, predominantly white schools, and racially and ethnically diverse schools (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015; Mirpuri & Yip, 2017; Hurd et al., 2013). Findings from these studies showed that black students usually experience race-related stressors in white schools. These stressors contribute to undermining the academic engagement of black students and demotivates them from pursuing post-secondary education (Carter-Andrews, 2012). Carter-Andrews (2009) conducted a study involving black students in a predominantly white school to examine the impact of racial identity on their academic achievement and motivation. The students exhibited a high level of awareness regarding how racism operated in their school setting. Racial identity however becomes a key motivator for black students to achieve academic success like their white counterparts. The black students rejected the notion that academic achievement was reserved for the white students only but instead were motivated to succeed in a white hegemonic environment.

A study by Venzant-Chambers & Huggins (2014) illustrated the racial opportunity costs of academic success for black students who were required the challenges and expectations of the white schools. The costs included daily interactions and treatments that reflected prejudice and stereotyping of their racial groups (blacks), exclusion from social circles and peer groups, the de-emphasis of the cultural backgrounds of the blacks within the white school settings. The racial identity theory can help understand the societal racism that the black students were exposed to. Findings from this study also showed that students with strong centrality and lower public regard experienced challenges in school engagement and academic achievement in predominantly white schools.

Racial identity processes are also relevant among students in predominantly black school settings. The predominantly black schools are usually poorly resourced, including lacking teachers who are highly experienced (Diette, 2012). As a result, the black students in such school settings face the increased prospect of being taught by white teachers with no multicultural training or those who have minimal or no prior experience working with minority communities (Goldenberg, 2014). The black students in these schools may be subjected to racial discrimination via negative racial stereotyping. Such situations limit effective classroom engagement of the black students and thus impact negatively on their motivation and academic achievement. Due to their skin color (race), black students may be subjected to both intergroup and intragroup peer discrimination. Intragroup discrimination usually occurs in in-group contexts (Williams et al., 2012).

Researchers have shown how predominantly black schools can support racial identities that contribute to enhancing the academic success of students (Leath et al., 2019). It has been established that for some students, interactions with in-group peers, including those who perform well academically can result in a shared sense of racial and community connectedness (high centrality). This can in turn contribute to improving the motivation and engagement of black students. Black students enrolled in same-race schools demonstrate an appreciation of the black identity which also contributes to enhancing academic achievement and improving their self-esteem. High centrality and low public regard are critical for promoting academic engagement by black students (Byrd & Chavous, 2011; Hurd et al., 2012).

**Self-concept of Black Students**

Self-concept can be described as the self-perception of individuals formed through experience with and interpretations of their environment (Evans et al., 2011). Academic self-concept is linked to this definition but involves the self-perception if students based on their academic ability. Academic self-concept refers to how a student views his or her academic ability in comparison to other students’ abilities. Students who think well of themselves are believed to be more motivated to succeed (Mega et al., 2014). People engage in experimenting and discovering behaviors that lead to the development of their identity. The development of self-concept differs significantly for black students compared to white students. The difference in the development of self-concept between the two groups is linked to the numerous challenges faced by black students including discrimination, lack of educational resources, and lack of support (Singh et al., 2010).

Measures of academic self-concept reveal that black students exhibit high levels of academic self-concept, which they maintain despite lower academic achievement (Cokley et al., 2012; Peixoto & Almeida, 2010). Most studies do not support the idea that black students do not value academic achievement compared to their white students or that they attribute their failure to factors outside themselves. Developing a positive self-concept and self-awareness contribute to enhancing the motivation of black students and increasing their desire to pursue further education (Chiniwar, 2012). Being exposed to any negative race-related interactions increases the negative feelings of black students, causing them to struggle with their abilities and perceived limitations of their peers. Lacking a solid foundation of self-concept can make the black students feel unsure of themselves, isolated, and disengaged from their studies. This was supported by a study conducted by Brittian (2012) which reported that black students can develop negative sense themselves or feel a sense of rejection. Such negative outcomes and conflicts in racial identity may have negative impacts on students, causing them to adopt maladaptive coping strategies in life (Bridges, 2011; Hesse-Biber et al., 2010).

As black students advance into higher education and focus on their professional careers, their negative self-concept may interfere with their motivation to achieve their goals (Cokley et al., 2012). The development of students’ identity can be restricted to the stage in which they experienced conflict in their lives. Without successfully moving through the cycles of psychosocial development, students may conflict with who they are and have difficulty navigating through various stages of their lives (Brittian, 2012).

Spending a lot of time processing and enduring the actions of other individuals (such as aggressions) and trying to alter their behavior to show that they can withstand the aggressions can be detrimental to the self-confidence of many black students and it will reduce their motivation to pursue post-secondary education (McGee, 2013). Though subtle and most often left uninvestigated most times, aggression is a pervasive form of racism that amplifies black inferiority. Enduring aggression and negative stereotypes can produce negative effects on the self-identity and self-concept among black students. Brittian (2012) showed how the identities of individuals are influenced and shaped by their environment. Given that black students are continuously exposed to negative comments, frequent reminders of their inferiority, and neighborhood violence, they become highly sensitive to aggression and racism (Bridges, 2011).

The media can also contribute to deflating the self-concept of black students by over-presenting white content images on the different media platforms (Tukachinsky et al., 2017). This can cause black students to feel inferior and uncertain of their position in society. The continued portrayal of blacks in a negative light and the misrepresented of their culture can reinforce negative stereotypes against black students (Adams-Bass et al., 2014; Holt, 2013). As a result, it can evoke feelings of anger, mistrust, and self-doubt.

In most cases, for black students to achieve success and pursue their goals in education they may be forced to dissociate from their culture and adopt behavior and attitudes of the mainstream culture (mostly White culture) (Glenn & Johnson, 2012). This impacts negatively on their self-concept and increases the feelings of identity confusion, guilt, and depression. Black students can find it difficult to dissociate themselves for their racial identity and cultural norms to speak, look, and behave as the Whites to be accepted. Black high school students also face serious struggles in their education as they may be required to get scores above average to be accepted to post-secondary institutions (Papay et al, 2010).

To address the educational disparities between black male students and other racial groups must seek to determine how racial stereotypes influence black students’ perceived capabilities to be successful in school (Cokley et al., 2012; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). One way to achieve this is to understand the factors that affect how black males perceive and internalize racial stereotypes that influence their perceptions about their capabilities to thrive in school. (Ellis et al., 2018). Internalizing academic stereotypes influences how black male students develop relationships with their peers and socially integrate into the school environment. The ability of black male students to socially integrate into affluent school settings is based on their bodily abilities compared with black female students whose social integration in the school was based on their academic ability (Byrd, 2015).

A strong self-concept is associated with determination and academic success. Studies have demonstrated the existence of a positive correlation between racial centrality and more positive academic performance among black students (Boston & Warren, 2017; Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016). Race is thus considered a critical part of one’s identity and may contribute positively to improved academic performance for the black students.

Teachers play an important role in eliminating disparities in black academic achievement. This is achieved by eliminating teacher bias and differential treatment of other students based on the ethnic and racial backgrounds to promote academic achievement (Cherng, 2017). The awareness of black students of discrimination, bias, and stigmatized racial status is directly associated with poor educational achievement and feelings of despair (Rolland, 2011).

Black students enrolled in predominantly white schools have poorer adjustment compared to their peers at predominantly black schools. Using data obtained from the National Study on Black College Students, Cokley stated that college racial composition was a key predictor for social involvement among black students and it also predicted their enhanced career aspirations (Cokley et al., 2012; Franklin et al., 2017). The main predictors of academic achievement among the black students were good relationships with faculty and diverse racial composition on campus. Students admitted to predominantly black schools reported the establishment of better student-faculty relationships, more positive self-perceptions, and better GPA scores than black students at predominantly white colleges (Franklin et al., 2017).

There are various factors associated with academic self-concept for black students. These factors include; racial identification, student-teacher interactions, and academic classification of students, and self-esteem. The unique application of these factors may significantly influence the academic achievement of black students (Franklin et al., 2017).

Racial identity is a critical and qualitative meaning that black students ascribe to their membership within the Black racial group (Lige et al., 2017). The multidimensional model of racial identity (an updated form of racial identity theory) appreciates the significance of racial identity and does not assume that race is a defining feature for all blacks or that there is an optimal level of black identity (Seaton et al., 2017). The nigrescence model of racial identity incorporates an optimal final stage of identity. The nigrescence model assumed that the final stage of racial identity among the blacks resulted in their self-actualization, which implied the acceptance of a positive black identity (Whaley, 2016). With the advancement in research, the nigrescence model has been updated to include diverse experiences within the five stages that could be positive or negative (Fries-Britt et al., 2014).

Racial identity is embedded in the self-concepts of black students, which are multiple hierarchically structured identities. The available evidence indicates that racial identity is positively correlated with psychosocial constructs such as self-esteem, mental health, and improved academic outcomes within the black student population (Lige et al., 2017; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014).

Studies examining the relationship between racial identity and self-concept among black students have revealed gender differences (Buckley, 2018; Cokley et al., 2015). In a study that used a high sample of female students, racial centrality, which outlines the degree to which individuals feel that their race is important, was positively related to academic self-concept (Franklin et al., 2017). However, racial centrality was not related to the academic self-concept among male students. Five of the six stages of racial identity as outlined by the nigrescence model were found to be negatively correlated to the academic self-concept of the black students (Awad, 2007).

Summary of Studies on Racial Identity and Self-Concept

The studies highlighted above have demonstrated how racial stereotypes can have deleterious effects on the academic self-concept of black students and influence their endorsement of stereotypes related to their academic capabilities. How black students interpret negative racial stereotypes can impact greatly on their engagement in school (Harper, 2015). Studies have found that many black students feel that they may be subjected to stereotypes related to academic competence and these perceptions can lead to disengagement in school, reduced motivation, and underperformance in their academics (Ellis et al., 2018; Hope et al., 2015).

**Studies on Motivation**

Motivation can be defined as the impetus that gives purpose or direction to individuals and operates at either a conscious or unconscious level (Cokley et al., 2012; Reynolds et al., 2010). For black students to pursue post-secondary education, they have to develop a sense of motivation. Motivated behavior can be either internally driven or controlled by outside causes (Byrd & Chavous, 2011). Students who are more externally motivated experience greater anxiety and a poorer ability to cope with failures (Cokley, 2015). Research suggests that promoting greater self-determination and intrinsic motivation is related to more positive academic and psychological outcomes (Taylor et al., 2014).

Studies have revealed significant within-group and between-group differences in academic motivation among black students and white students (Hope et al., 2013; Konold et al., 2017). Black students attending historically black schools reported higher intrinsic motivation, more positive self-concepts, and greater faculty encouragement than black students attending predominantly white schools (Byrd & Chavous, 2012; Cokley et al., 2012). There were no differences between white and black students’ perceptions of faculty encouragement at predominantly white schools.

A grade-point average (GPA) was the strongest predictor of academic self-concept (Cokley et al., 2015; Komarraju et al., 2010). Students with higher GPAs had higher academic self-concepts, yet, GPA was not related to self-esteem. Black students maintain high self-esteem regardless of GPA (Lige et al., 2017).

With regard to gender, studies have demonstrated a significant association with academic motivation. Black female students were found to be more intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to achieve academic success and pursue post-secondary education than the males (D’Lima et al., 2014; Fan & Wolters, 2014; Wood et al., 2014).

Although there exist differences in academic performance, black students do not lack academic motivation and they do not experience reduced self-esteem or significantly lower academic self-concept than white students (Cokley et al., 2012; Hope et al., 2013). The intrinsic motivation of black students is not linked to their academic self-concept. The educational environment contributes greatly to enhancing the academic motivation of black students (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). The black students attending predominantly black schools perform better academically and exhibit a high level of intrinsic motivation (D’Lima et al., 2014). The predominantly black environment is believed to contribute to increased academic confidence.

The variable of faculty encouragement is also critical in enhancing the motivation of black students (Gregory et al., 2016). The impact of faculty encouragement is even more important compared to the racial environment. Cokley urges educators of black students not to underestimate the power of encouragement (Cokley et al., 2015). The motivation of the black students to succeed may be rooted in their interactions with the school environment and their cognitive and affective learning experiences (Baeten et al., 2013). An effective approach is for teachers to motivate students to enjoy and want to learn by making the lessons relevant to the students’ everyday lives (Furrer et al., 2014). Currently, the classrooms are more diverse, and the needs and values of students have changed significantly from what they were in the past few centuries. This implies that there is a need for a shift to embrace a student-centered instructional approach (Coffey & Farinde-Wu, 2016; Talbert et al., 2019).

Motivation theories have shown that individuals who have high academic aspirations are predisposed to being motivated; they make learning a high priority and endeavor to succeed (Oyserman & Lewis Jr, 2017). Such individuals are reflective in their thinking, in that they think about the past, present, and future, and, particularly, how their past and present actions and choices influence ongoing efforts for achievement. Motivation is important in determining the success and failure of students and the ability to pursue further education (Hau & Ho, 2010).

While motivation is a key factor that contributes to increasing the number of black students attending post-secondary education, black students still perform poorly than their peers (Whites, Asians, Latinos) in the proceeding to post-secondary education (Fan & Wolters, 2014). The disparity is attributed to stereotyping, discrimination, and differential opportunities that persist in schools and society today (Bottiani et al., 2017; Cabrera, 2014; Hope et al., 2015). The research revealed that teachers, counselors, and other school professionals often have low expectations for black students and fail to provide them with adequate opportunities for success (Williams et al., 2014).

Li & Hassan (2010) conducted a study to examine the factors that motivated academic success among black students in a historically black school. The findings of this study showed that supportive learning environments with positive relations between teachers and students, in addition to proactive personal traits are important motivators for the success of minority students. A supportive learning environment and positive interaction with teachers are important to black students’ academic engagement (Wang & Eccles, 2013). A positive learning environment at school, quality interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, and teachers’ high expectations of students were among the facilitating concepts and motivations for success (Furrer et al., 2014; Strati et al., 2017). The gaps in these studies support the current research.

First, these gaps point out the need to clarify personal and circumstantial factors that reinforce the efforts of black high school students to persevere in their learning experiences.

Second, the gaps indicate the need for adult role models including teachers who will act mentors to black students as they motivate students by holding them to high expectations (Egalite et al., 2015).

According to Hurd et al. (2012), black students who hold their racial group in high regard feel connected to other members of their group, are aware of societal biases against their group and perceive higher academic achievement as an opportunity to overcome negative stereotypes of their group, resulting in an internal locus of control (Byrd & Chavous, 2011; McGee & Martin, 2011). The presence of mentors, specifically non-parent and non-family adults, in the lives of black high school students, has been identified as a motivator for academic perseverance and success (Burtler-Barnes et al., 2012).

In their study, Bush & Bush (2010) reported that black students who perceive their school environment as supportive, as demonstrated by their interactions with faculty, school counselors, and peers, and the school climate and student involvement, reported higher connectedness to their learning and are more motivated to succeed.

Successful black students develop unique coping strategies to avert negative peer pressure (Reynolds et al., 2010). Some adopt a playful persona to conceal their academic abilities, while others stick to mainstream cultural standards and norms at school and embrace black cultural standards outside of school to achieve connectedness. Race, connectedness, and school environment influence black students’ motivation and academic performance. Cultural beliefs and same-ethnic peer connectedness are critical to positive learning experiences. High racial identity has been shown to boost the self-esteem of black students and their disposition toward post-secondary education (Hope et al., 2013).

The personal attitudes and feelings of the black students toward their racial group have a strong influence on their academic performance. Strong racial pride has a positive influence on the academic achievement of black students regardless of gender. The study by Butler-Barnes et al. (2012) also revealed that high racial group pride supports positive educational values, which evidences a strong link between race and academic achievement.

**Summary**

This literature review has successfully demonstrated that there exists a relationship between racial identity, self-concept, and motivation in enabling black students to pursue post-secondary education. For many decades, black students have lagged behind their peers (Whites, Hispanics, and Asians,) in academic achievement. Compared to other races the black students are at a higher risk of being less successful in school and have lower rates of joining post-secondary education. The key factors responsible for the disadvantage suffered by the black students in educational achievement include; discrimination, stereotyping, lack of adequate funds to finance their educational institutions, and lack of adequate support as they advance through high school. Two theories – racial identity theory and looking glass self-theory provided the framework for understanding the experiences of the black students in different school settings. In general, it was found that there was a positive correlation between racial identities, self-concept, motivation, and academic achievement in black students.

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