

Exploring the Educational Outcomes of African American College Students: Direct and  
Interactive Roles of Academic and Racial Identity Beliefs

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PREVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

A large body of research has focused on factors associated with the academic success (i.e. college adjustment, high GPA's, graduation, and retention) of African American students (Davis, 1994; Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, & Mugenda, 2000). In particular, students' academic beliefs have emerged as an important predictor of academic performance for college students (Awad, 2007; Cokley 2002). Also, studies have suggested that racial identity beliefs are important in understanding the educational outcomes of African American students (Caldwell, & Obasi, 2010; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Marryshow & Boykin, 1992). Although research has demonstrated the independent association of both academic and racial identity beliefs, few studies have examined the interactive role of these factors on the educational outcomes of African American students. With this in mind, the current study examined the association between racial identity beliefs (centrality, private, and public regard), academic beliefs (e.g., perceptions of academic ability), and students' educational outcomes (GPA; educational expectations). One-hundred seventy African American students ( $M= 20.33$ ;  $SD=3.56$ ) attending two Universities in the Southeastern region of the United States participated in this investigation.

Findings from the current study indicated that centrality, private regard, and public regard were not associated with educational outcomes. However, students' perception of their academic ability were found to be associated with GPA ( $\beta=.25$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and expectations of graduating college ( $\beta=.20$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Additionally, public regard

( $\beta=.19, p<.05$ ) moderated the association between academic beliefs and educational expectations, such that, for youth with greater public regard, more positive academic perceptions were associated with greater educational expectations (e.g., likelihood of completing college). Finally, a 3-way interaction between centrality, private regard, and perceptions of academic ability was found to be associated with students' expectations of graduating college ( $\beta=-.56, p<.01$ ). In particular, for African American students with greater racial centrality and lower private regard beliefs, increases in perceptions of academic ability was associated with higher expectations of graduating from college. Implications for the role of academic and race-related beliefs in promoting the academic success of African American college students are discussed.

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PREVIEW

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Research has examined various individual and contextual factors associated with the academic success of African American students (i.e. college adjustment, high GPA's, graduation, and retention) (D'Augelli, & Hershberger, 1993; Davis, 1994; Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, & Mugenda, 2000). In Particular, a large body of research has examined the relationship between academic beliefs, racial identity beliefs, and educational outcomes among African American adolescent populations (Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin, & Cogburn, 2008; Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2011; Smalls, White, Chavous, & Sellers, 2007; Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk- Cone, Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, & Zimmerman, 2003; Saunders, Davis, Williams, & Williams, 2004). However, research examining the associations among these factors within the college population is an equally important area to examine. Research has indicated that when compared to high school, college can be a stressful period in which students often report decreased perceptions of social support, increased feelings of loneliness, and less academic-related confidence (Larose & Boivin, 1998; Hurtado, Han, Sáenz, Espinosa, Cabrera, & Cerna, 2007). For African American students, several studies have suggested that these factors are usually exacerbated and can typically result in less positive educational outcomes (Chavous, 2000; Love, 2008; Neville, Heppner, Ji, & Thye, 2004; Sedlacek, 1987). With respect to this research, the examination of why more negative

college experiences and less positive educational outcomes are characteristic of students within this context is important.

Additionally, scholars have asserted the importance of understanding African American students' race-related beliefs (Davis, Aronson, & Salinas, 2006; Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998; Spencer, Noll, Stolzhus, & Harpalani, 2001). Specifically, research has suggested that students' perceptions of their racial group, including personal views as well as beliefs regarding other African Americans, may have a significant impact on their educational trajectories (Caldwell, & Obasi, 2010; Cokley, 2003; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Marryshow & Boykin, 1992; Nasim, Roberts, Harrell, & Young, 2005). Moreover, efforts have centered on the role of race-related beliefs in understanding educational outcomes among African American college students (Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2011; Lott, 2008). In particular, research has suggested that African American students who hold less positive race-related beliefs (i.e. Black people are not as smart as White people) are more likely to report having less confidence in their academic ability (Cokley, 2003). Further, students who report having more positive race-related beliefs have been found to have more positive view towards their academic ability and more positive educational outcomes (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002).

While research in this area has illustrated the importance of both racial identity and academic beliefs for students' educational outcomes, research has not fully examined how these beliefs work in concert. Taking this into consideration, the current study will explore the direct relationships between academic and racial identity beliefs on educational outcome while further examining how racial identity beliefs interact with

academic beliefs to impact the educational outcomes and expectations of African American.

### **1.1 Theoretical Framework**

Although several theories have been proposed to explain how self-beliefs impact educational outcomes (Phinney, 1990; Bandura, 1997; Graham, 1994), the Expectancy Value Theory of Achievement Motivation (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) is particularly relevant to understanding this association. This theory expounds upon previous theories which have illustrated a connection between students' achievement related behaviors (i.e. striving for success) and their achievement motives and expectancies for success (Atkinson, 1957; Lewin, 1938; Tolman, 1932). In particular, it acknowledges psychosocial influences which impact students' choices, persistence, performance, and also the development of their expectancies and values. Furthermore, this theory proposes that a direct relationship exists between students' expectancies and values and their achievement choices, persistence, and performance. Moreover, it emphasizes the influence of social cognitive beliefs, which are likely to influence students' expectancies and values.

The Expectancy Value Theory of Achievement Motivation highlights the importance of students' achievement values (e.g. intrinsic value, utility value, attainment value, and cost) to their educational performance and achievement related choices. However, with respect to the current study, theoretical support is primarily drawn from the emphasis which this theory places on sociocultural influences which are posited to impact students' expectancies. Expectancy has been defined as a student's beliefs about how well they will do on an upcoming task (Atkinson, 1957). According to this theory,