

# Perceived Racial Discrimination and Racial Identity Profiles Among African American Adolescents

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The present study examined the relation between multiple types of racial discrimination and psychological well-being across racial identity profiles. A sample of 322 African American adolescents completed measures of racial identity, racial discrimination, self-esteem and depressive symptoms. Cluster analyses were conducted to create previously identified racial identity profiles and 3 were evident: Buffering/Defensive, Alienated, and Idealized. The racial identity profiles moderated the relation between perceptions of racial discrimination and psychological well-being such that perceptions of racial discrimination were linked to higher levels of depressive symptoms for Alienated youth but not for Buffering/Defensive or Idealized youth. The implications for the racial discrimination literature among African American adolescents are discussed.

*Keywords:* racial discrimination, racial identity, African Americans/Blacks, adolescents, well-being

The stress paradigm articulated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) was utilized to examine the moderating capacity of racial identity in the relationship between perceptions of racial discrimination and psychological well-being among African Americans in the developmental stage of adolescence. Racial discrimination, which consists of dominant group members' actions that have a differential and negative effect on subordinate racial/ethnic groups (Feagin & Eckberg, 1980), is considered a stressor that has deleterious effects on the physical and mental health of minorities (Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). Yet, several researchers have suggested that racial identity moderates the effects of racial discrimination on the psychological well-being of African Americans (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998). *Racial identity* is defined as the significance and meaning that individuals ascribe to being a member of their racial group (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Adolescence is a critical period for studying these processes because it is when youth are actively exploring and seeking out information related to being a member of their racial/ethnic group (Phinney, 1989). Minority youth also contend with racial discrimination, an environmental stressor, which places them at risk for negative psychosocial outcomes such as increased depressive symptoms (Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006). Though the development of a racial identity is considered normative, racial

identity may also serve a protection function for perceptions of racial discrimination among adolescents of color. The primary question concerns the relationship between racial identity and psychological well-being outcomes (self-esteem and depressive symptoms) as influenced by perceptions of racial discrimination. Specifically, it is anticipated that the relationship between perceptions of racial discrimination and psychological well-being will be contingent on specific racial identity beliefs. Racial identity was operationalized as racial identity profiles, which are combinations of racial identity dimensions, and specific profiles are expected to moderate the relationship between perceptions of racial discrimination and psychological well-being among African American youth.

## Racial Discrimination

Garcia Coll and colleagues (1996) proposed that racial discrimination was a normative and pervasive experience for youth of color. Previous research has indicated that 91% of preadolescent African Americans reported experiencing at least one discriminatory experience in their lifetime (Gibbons, Gerrard, Cleveland, Wills, & Brody, 2004). Further, 92% of rural African American youth had perceived discriminatory treatment in the previous year (Brody et al., 2006), and 77% of African American adolescents reported experiencing at least one discriminatory incident in the past 3 months (Prelow, Danoff-Burg, Swenson, & Pulgiano, 2004). Racial discrimination has also been proposed to increase the likelihood of negative developmental outcomes for youth of color (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). Previous research has indicated that perceptions of racial discrimination were negatively linked to decreased achievement motivation (Eccles, Wong, & Peck, 2006) and positively linked to increased distress (Scott, 2004) among African American youth. Longitudinal research has suggested that perceptions of racial discrimination were linked to subsequent increased depressive symptoms and increased conduct problems for African American youth (Brody et al., 2006; Greene et al.,

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2006). Thus, previous research has suggested that perceptions of racial discrimination are pervasive and negatively linked to a variety of outcomes among African American youth.

Yet, prior research has utilized one-dimensional measures of racial discrimination, which are inconsistent with multidimensional hypotheses of four types of racial discrimination. *Individual racism* consists of personal and degrading actions experienced by minorities, which promote an inferiority belief (Jones, 1997). *Cultural racism* occurs when the beliefs and practices of the dominant group are regarded as superior to those of subordinate groups (Jones, 1997). *Institutionalized racism* constitutes differential access to societal goods, services, and opportunities, which results in racial inequities for minority group members (Jones, 1997). *Collective racism* occurs when dominant group members work to restrict or deny minority group members their basic rights and privileges (Essed, 1991). Despite the complexity of racial discrimination, minority adolescents may be able to distinguish the four types of racial discrimination. One explanation concerns the normative cognitive changes that occur for all youth during the adolescent period. Formal reasoning, which is the ability to think abstractly, solidifies during this period (Keating, 2004), which may result in an increased cognitive ability for African American adolescents to perceive the four types of racial discrimination. Prior work indicated that perceptions of institutional discrimination were linked to lower self-esteem among African American adolescents (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000). Perceptions of individual discrimination committed by peers and teachers were also linked to lower self-esteem and increased depressive symptoms among African American youth (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). However, further research is necessary to examine the relationship between the multiple types of racial discrimination and psychological well-being among minority adolescents.

### Racial Identity and Racial Discrimination

In the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI), Sellers and colleagues (1998) proposed that racial identity is a multidimensional construct comprised of four dimensions. Three of these dimensions, racial centrality, private regard, and public regard, may be especially relevant as moderators of racial discrimination. *Racial centrality* refers to the extent to which a person considers his or her race to be an important aspect of his or her self-concept (Sellers et al., 1998). *Private regard* is the degree to which individuals feel positively or negatively about being African American, whereas *public regard* is an evaluation of how other groups view African Americans (Sellers et al., 1998). The multidimensional approach is preferred because it does not assume optimal identities, but affords the opportunity to examine the complexity of African American racial identity.

Cross and colleagues (1998) suggested that the identity associated with membership in one's racial/ethnic group should moderate the relation between perceptions of racial discrimination, mental health, and psychological well-being. One reason why racial identity may be an appropriate moderator for perceived racial discrimination concerns identity development, which is a normative process. Phinney's (1989) model of racial/ethnic identity development proposed that youth progress from an unawareness of race to an understanding of the role that race will have in their lives during the adolescent period. Yet, previous theoretical work sug-

gests that young children are very cognizant of their racial group membership and the salience of race in American society (Spencer, 2005, 2006). Thus, the process of identity development may not necessarily begin in adolescence but the solidification of racial identity may be heightened and more complex during the adolescent period because adolescents have attained the ability to think abstractly (Keating, 2004). Consequently, the changes that occur in racial identity may influence the degree to which racial identity buffers adolescent perceptions of racial discrimination. For example, low public regard levels, which is the belief that society views African Americans negatively, buffered perceptions of racial discrimination on depressive symptoms and psychological well-being among African American adolescents (Sellers, Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006). Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin, and Coghurn (2008) reported that perceptions of peer discrimination were linked to school importance for African American boys and girls who did not consider race to be an important aspect of their self-concept (low racial centrality levels). Yet, the relationship between perceptions of classroom discrimination and grade point average was attenuated for girls and boys who considered race important to their self-concept (high racial centrality levels) (Chavous et al., 2008). Despite the findings that racial centrality and public regard moderate perceptions of racial discrimination, more information might be gleaned if combinations of the racial identity variables were examined as potential moderators for perceived racial discrimination.

### The Current Study

The present study builds on previous research by using the person approach to examine racial identity as a moderator for perceptions of racial discrimination among African American youth. The person approach examines variable combinations, or patterns of variables as they naturally occur, and their relation to specific outcomes (Magnusson, 1998). This approach is advantageous because it affords examination of how different racial identity variables interact among African American youth. Using this approach, Chavous et al. (2003) used a cluster analyses on the racial centrality, private regard, and public regard variables among a sample of African American adolescents, and identified four racial identity groups. The Buffering/Defensive group believed race was important to their identity (high racial centrality levels), felt positive about being African American (high private regard levels), and believed others viewed African Americans negatively (low public regard levels). The Alienated group considered race unimportant (low racial centrality levels), felt less positive about being African American (low private regard levels), and believed others viewed African Americans negatively (low public regard levels). The Idealized group believed race was important (high racial centrality levels), felt positive about being African American (high private regard levels), and believed that others viewed African Americans positively (high public regard levels). The Low Connectedness/High Affinity group did not think race was important (low racial centrality levels), felt positive about being African American (high private regard levels), and believed that others viewed African Americans negatively (low public regard levels). Chavous et al. (2003) reported that Buffering/Defensive, Idealized and Low Connectedness/High Affinity youth had more positive school attitudes than Alienated youth and that Alienated youth

were least likely to enroll in college. Thus, the Alienated profile appeared to be at risk for diminished educational outcomes.

One of the major contributions of the present study is the replication of previously identified racial identity profiles (i.e., Chavous et al., 2003). It is anticipated that all four profile groups will be replicated in the present study. Another contribution to theoretical research will be made with an empirical assessment of the four types of racial discrimination and their relationship to psychological well-being (self-esteem and depressive symptoms) among African American youth. It is expected that all four types of racial discrimination will be linked to lower self-esteem and increased depressive symptoms among African American adolescents (Fisher et al., 2000; Wong et al., 2003). Another contribution of the present study is the assessment of racial identity profiles as moderators for perceptions of racial discrimination, whereas previous empirical work has focused exclusively on racial identity dimensions (i.e., Chavous et al., 2008; Sellers et al., 2006). Previous research has suggested that high racial centrality levels moderated perceptions of racial discrimination, whereas low racial centrality levels did not (Chavous et al., 2008). Thus, it is hypothesized that perceived racial discrimination will not be linked to psychological well-being for Buffering/Defensive and Idealized youth given their characteristic high racial centrality levels. Yet, it is anticipated that perceived racial discrimination will be linked to Alienated and Low Connectedness/High Affinity youth's psychological well-being because they have low racial centrality levels.

## Method

### Participants

The participants in this study were 322 urban African American adolescents ranging in age from 13 to 18 years ( $M$  age 16). The sample was composed of 151 male (47%) and 171 female (53%) high school students. The participants reported that their parent/guardian (usually the mother) was either married/cohabiting (54%), separated/divorced/widowed (23%), or single/never married (23%). The participants also reported the following educational levels for their parent/guardian: less than a high school diploma (8%), high school diploma (44%), one year of college or an associate's degree (27%), a bachelor's degree (12%), or a graduate degree (6%).

### Procedure

The participants were recruited from high schools in a large, Northeastern city. Approval was obtained from the school district and 51 public high schools were targeted for recruitment. The 8 schools were selected on the basis of the principals' willingness to participate in the study. Four of the schools were located in low-income areas, encompassing 50% of the sample and 4 of the schools were located in middle-income areas of the city, encompassing the other half of the sample. The principals identified specific classrooms where participants could be recruited, and these were visited by the researcher and assistants to explain the study and distribute parental consent forms. Participation in the study was granted only if parental consent forms were returned, and the response rate ranged from 30% to 60% per classroom with an average response rate of 45%. The administrations occurred in

small groups in the school libraries. Prior to the administration of the questionnaire, the participants signed assent forms, which explained the study. The participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that the results from their questionnaire would remain confidential. The interview time ranged from 30 to 60 min and on completion, the participants were debriefed and allowed to ask questions. All of the administrators were African American female college students.

### Measures

*Demographic information.* All adolescents completed questions requesting information about their gender, age, parental marital status, and parental education level.

*MIBI-S.* A shortened version of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI-S; Martin, Wout, Nguyen, Sellers & Gonzalez, 2008) was utilized to assess racial centrality, private regard and public regard. Martin et al. used confirmatory factor analyses to create a shorter version of the MIBI, and their results indicated that the MIBI-S was more reliable and provided a better fit than the original MIBI. The scale consists of items with responses ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The reliability scores reflect the current sample for this particular measure and all others. The racial centrality subscale ( $\alpha = .60$ ) has four items and assesses the degree to which being African American is central to the respondents' definition of themselves. A sample item includes "In general, being Black is an important part of my self-image," and higher scores are indicative of race being an important aspect of the respondents' self-concept. The private regard subscale ( $\alpha = .67$ ) has three items and measures the extent to which respondents feel positive about being African American. A sample item includes "I feel good about Black people," and higher scores represent more positive feelings toward African Americans. The public regard subscale ( $\alpha = .69$ ) has four items and measures the respondents' belief of how others view African Americans. A sample item includes "Overall, others consider Blacks to be good," and higher scores represent the belief that others view African Americans positively.

*IRRS.* The Index of Race-Related Stress (IRRS; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996) is designed to assess perceived experiences of racial discrimination among African Americans. The scale assesses lifetime prevalence with responses ranging from 0 (*this has never happened to me*) to 4 (*event happened and I was extremely upset*). Among samples of African American adolescents, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses have indicated three factors on the IRRS: individual, cultural, and collective/institutional racism (Seaton, 2003, 2006). The individual racism subscale ( $\alpha = .87$ ) contains 10 items and assesses the perception that dominant group members engage in behaviors that feel denigrating to minority group members. A sample item includes "White people have treated you as if you were stupid and needed things explained to you slowly or several times." The cultural racism subscale ( $\alpha = .83$ ) contains 9 items and assesses the perception that the cultural history and practices of the dominant group are considered superior to those of other groups. A sample item includes "You seldom hear or read anything good about Black people on radio, TV, newspapers, or in history books." As a result of previous factor analyses, collective and institutional racism were assessed jointly. The collective/institutional racism subscale ( $\alpha = .84$ ) contains 13

items and assesses the perception that dominant group members' negative attitudes are embedded in social institutions such as the educational system. A sample item includes "You think you did not receive a school award you deserved because you are Black." To distinguish discriminatory experiences and negative reactions, the responses were coded as 0 if event never happened or 1 if event happened regardless of response. Counts were computed so that scores indicate the number of incidents perceived by the participants.

*Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale.* The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1989) is an assessment of self-acceptance. The 10-item Likert scale ( $\alpha = .85$ ) consists of rating items with responses ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). A sample item includes "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself."

*CES-D.* The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression (CES-D; Radloff, 1977) scale assesses the frequency of depressive symptoms experienced within the past week. The Likert scale ( $\alpha = .74$ ) consists of 20 items with responses ranging from 0 (*rarely*) to 3 (*most or all of the time*). A sample item includes "I did not feel like eating, my appetite was poor," and higher scores are indicative of higher depressive symptoms.

## Results

The ranges, means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables are presented in Table 1. The average for depressive symptoms suggests that some youth may be at risk for clinical depression given the suggested range from 12 to 24 (Roberts, Lewinsohn, & Seeley, 1991). Cluster analysis is an objective methodology for quantifying the structural characteristics of an observation set (Hair & Black, 2000). Hierarchical cluster analyses were utilized to identify homogenous racial identity profiles among the racial centrality, private regard, and public regard variables. The agglomeration algorithm consisted of Ward's method with squared Euclidean distance to identify clusters on the basis of shape, level, and dispersion. The agglomeration schedule was examined to identify the fusion coefficient that would indicate the maximum number of distinct cluster groups. A large decrease in the value of the fusion coefficient occurs when similar clusters are joined, so the prior number represents the solution with the most distinct clusters. Based on these criteria, it was determined that a three-

cluster solution provided the best fit to the data. *K* means cluster analyses, which require a priori decisions about the number of clusters, were conducted as a validation technique. The average agreement between cluster memberships for the two methods was 88%, supporting propositions regarding cluster analyses (Hair & Black, 2000). Thus, the three cluster solution appears to be reliable for the present sample.

All of the identified clusters were theoretically consistent with previous research (Chavous et al., 2003) though only three of the previously identified four clusters were apparent. The first cluster ( $n = 113$ ; 35%) was labeled Buffering/Defensive. This group believed race was central to their identity (high racial centrality), felt positively about being African American (high private regard levels), and believed that others held more negative beliefs about African Americans (low public regard levels). The second cluster ( $n = 78$ ; 24%) was labeled Alienated; did not believe race was central to their identity (low racial centrality), felt less positive about being African American (low private regard), and believed that others held negative beliefs about African Americans (low public regard). Cluster three ( $n = 131$ ; 41%) was labeled Idealized, believed race was central to their identity (high racial centrality), felt positive about being African American (high private regard), and believed others held positive beliefs about African Americans (high public regard). An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if the groups differed from each other on racial centrality,  $F(2, 321) = 75.09, p < .01$ ; private regard,  $F(2, 321) = 201.83, p < .01$ ; and public regard,  $F(2, 321) = 226.04, p < .01$ . Tukey's post hoc tests indicated that the Buffering/Defensive group had higher levels of racial centrality ( $M = 5.52, SD = .76$ ) than the Idealized group ( $M = 5.24, SD = .81$ ) and the Alienated group ( $M = 4.13, SD = .86$ ). The Buffering/Defensive group ( $M = 6.65, SD = .51$ ) did not differ from the Idealized group ( $M = 6.58, SD = .54$ ) on private regard, but both had higher levels than the Alienated group ( $M = 4.84, SD = 1.01$ ). Last, the Buffering/Defensive group ( $M = 3.32, SD = .79$ ) had lower levels of public regard than the Idealized group ( $M = 5.28, SD = .69$ ) and the Alienated group ( $M = 3.85, SD = .75$ ).

An ANOVA was also conducted to assess if the three profiles differed on the racial discrimination and outcome variables. The results were not significant for individual racism,  $F(2, 321) = 2.94, p > .05$ ; cultural racism,  $F(2, 321) = 3.27, p > .05$ ; and

Table 1  
Correlations, Ranges, Means, and Standard Deviations of the Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Racial centrality	—							
Private regard	.51**	—						
Public regard	.01	.23**	—					
Individual racism	.20**	.04	-.13*	—				
Cultural racism	.17**	.09	-.14*	.46**	—			
Collective/institutional racism	.09	-.04	.11	.57**	.37**	—		
Self-esteem	.21**	.37**	.10	-.05	.03	-.19**	—	
Depressive symptoms	-.16**	-.25**	-.10	.18**	.07	.28**	-.59**	—
Variable range	1-7	1-7	1-7	0-10	0-9	0-13	1-4	0-60
<i>M</i>	5.06	6.17	4.25	6.20	6.80	3.70	3.40	14.90
<i>SD</i>	0.97	1.00	1.20	2.90	2.14	3.50	.54	9.90

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

collective/institutional racism,  $F(2, 321) = .661, p > .05$ . Yet, the results were significant for self-esteem,  $F(2, 321) = 15.1, p < .01$ ; and depressive symptoms,  $F(2, 321) = 9.6, p < .01$ . The Buffering/Defensive group ( $M = 3.48, SD = .51$ ) did not differ from the Idealized group ( $M = 3.46, SD = .50$ ), but both had higher self-esteem levels than the Alienated group ( $M = 3.11, SD = .53$ ). In addition, the Buffering/Defensive group ( $M = 13.34, SD = 9.37$ ) did not differ from the Idealized group ( $M = 13.97, SD = 9.63$ ) but both had lower levels of depressive symptoms than the Alienated group ( $M = 19.13, SD = 9.98$ ).

Multiple-regression analyses were conducted to assess whether the relation between perceived racial discrimination and the psychological well-being indicators (self-esteem and depressive symptoms) varied across the racial identity profiles. Demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age, school characteristics, parental marital status, and parental education) were controlled before regressing self-esteem and depressive symptoms on the racial identity profiles and the racial discrimination variables. Because prior research has suggested that the Alienated group may be at-risk for diminished outcomes (Chavous et al., 2003), this group was used as the reference group. All main effects and centered two-way interactions were assessed for self-esteem and depressive symptoms simultaneously.

The results indicated that perceptions of collective/institutional racism were negatively linked to lower self-esteem such that more perceptions of collective/institutional racism were associated with lower self-esteem among African American youth. In addition, increased perceptions of individual racism and collective/institutional racism were linked to increased depressive symptoms. Significant interactions were evident for the Buffering/Defensive and Idealized profiles regarding perceptions of individual racism. The Aiken and West (1991) procedure was used to graph the significant interactions with the following intervals: one standard deviation below the mean, the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean. The results indicated that higher levels of individual racism were significantly related to higher depressive symptoms for Alienated youth, but unrelated to depressive symptoms for Buffering/Defensive (see Figure 1) and Idealized youth (see Figure 2). Additional analyses suggested that school characteristics were positively linked to self-esteem such that students attending middle-income schools had higher self-esteem than their counterparts in lower income schools, and that adolescent females had higher levels of depressive symptoms than adolescent males (see Table 2).

## Discussion

The results of the present study are consistent with previous research identifying racial identity profiles among African American adolescents using the person approach (Magnusson, 1998). Three profiles were replicated using cluster analytic techniques for the racial centrality, private regard, and public regard variables (i.e., Buffering/Defensive, Alienated and Idealized groups). However, the Low Connectedness/High Affinity group was not replicated and this group does not consider race to be important (low racial centrality levels), feels positive about being African American (high private regard levels), and believes that others view African Americans negatively (low public regard levels). One explanation for the absence of this group concerns racial identity

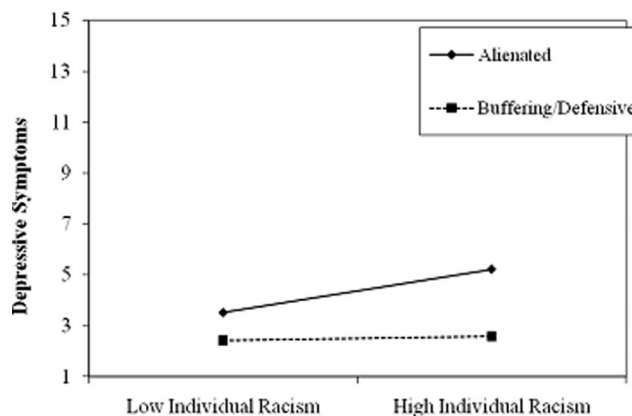


Figure 1. The relationship between individual racism and depressive symptoms across the Alienated and Buffering/Defensive profiles.

development. Though theoretical works suggests that racial identity development consists of a linear progression from unawareness of race to an acceptance of the role that race in the lives of minority youth (Phinney, 1989), empirical research suggests that racial identity development is not exclusively linear among African American youth (Seaton, Scottham & Sellers, 2006). For example, some trajectories were linear whereas some trajectories were nonlinear (Seaton et al., 2006). Though the racial identity profiles are not based on the constructs that comprise racial identity development (i.e., exploration and commitment), it is possible that the unique developmental trajectories have implications for the profile variables (i.e., racial centrality, private regard, and public regard). As such, the presence of the Low Connectedness/High Affinity group may depend on the linear and/or nonlinear developmental trajectories evidenced by African American youth. Another explanation for the missing profile is the social history of a racial/ethnic group in a specific context. Chavous and colleagues (2003) utilized a sample from the Midwestern region of the country, whereas the current sample was from an urban, Northeastern city. It is possible that the profiles may be related to groups' social histories in specific regions given that prior research suggests the salience and meaning of Asian American ethnic identity varies for Asian Americans in California compared to Asian Americans in the Midwest (Umana-Taylor & Shin, 2007). Thus, the characteristics of the missing profile may be unique to the history of African Americans in the Midwest as opposed to the history of African Americans in the Northeast. Yet, the fact that three of the four profiles were replicated with diverse sample characteristics (i.e., parental marital status and education) suggests that they may be common among African American youth.

The present findings indicate that racial discrimination is a unique stressor associated with diminished psychological well-being that is consistent with prior research (Fisher et al., 2000). Specifically, perceptions of collective/institutional racism are linked to decreased self-esteem and increased depressive symptoms, and perceptions of individual racism are linked to increased depressive symptoms. Perceptions of cultural racism may not be linked to self-esteem and depressive symptoms because African American youth may not be affected by them. The present results suggest that African American youth perceive incidents of cultural

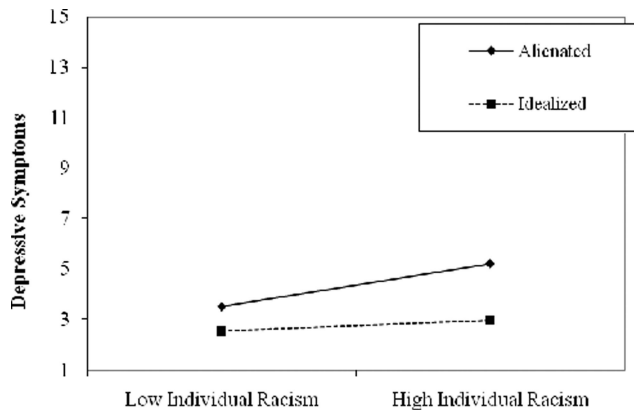


Figure 2. The relationship between individual racism and depressive symptoms across the Alienated and Idealized profiles.

racism, but these might not affect them as much as perceived individual and collective/institutional racism. Prior research has found associations with variations of individual (peer) and institutional (classroom) discrimination among African American youth, suggesting that these two types may be the most salient (Fisher et al., 2000; Wong et al., 2003). Yet, a distinction between the perception of racial discrimination and the degree to which one is bothered by the perception may be necessary for cultural racism. Future research should disentangle these relationships for the multiple types of racial discrimination among African American youth.

The stress paradigm posits that moderators influence and alter the relation between stress and psychological well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The results suggest that adolescent views of their racial group membership moderate perceptions of racial dis-

crimination. The psychological well-being of Buffering/Defensive youth is protected from perceptions of racial discrimination. One explanation concerns the characteristic makeup of this profile, namely the high racial centrality and low public regard levels. Previous research has suggested that believing that race was important (high racial centrality levels) moderated perceived classroom discrimination on grade point average (Chavous et al., 2008). Similarly, the belief that others viewed African Americans negatively (low public regard levels) moderated perceptions of racial discrimination on depressive symptoms among African American adolescents (Sellers et al., 2006). As previous findings have demonstrated the importance of these two dimensions, the current study suggests that a combination of low public regard and high racial centrality buffer perceptions of racial discrimination. The Idealized profile also moderates adolescent perceptions of racial discrimination, which is what was predicted. Though it appears that Idealized youth might be at risk because their high public regard levels are inconsistent with experiences of racial discrimination, moderation may occur because of their high private regard levels. Previous research has suggested that a positive group connection to other African Americans (high private regard levels) did not buffer perceptions of racial discrimination among African American youth (Wong et al., 2003). Yet, moderation may occur when a positive group connection is coupled with the belief that race is important regardless of how youth believe the broader society perceives African Americans as a whole (public regard levels). Thus, Idealized youth may be protected from perceptions of individual racism because of their positive group connection and the importance attached to race. These findings emphasize the need to consider the racial identity variables holistically given the disparate findings on high racial centrality levels, high private regard levels, and low public regard levels in relation to adolescent perceptions of racial discrimination. Though prior work suggested

Table 2  
Racial Discrimination as a Predictor Across the Racial Identity Profiles

Predictors	Self-esteem		Depressive symptoms	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
Sex	.03	.07	3.96**	1.15
Age	-.04	.03	0.29	0.51
School characteristics	.18**	.07	-2.39	1.21
Parental marital status	.00	.02	-0.15	0.32
Parental education	-.00	.02	0.35	0.42
Buffering/Defensive profile <sup>a</sup>	.39**	.09	-5.79**	1.52
Idealized profile <sup>b</sup>	.47**	.09	-6.25**	1.49
Individual racism	-.01	.03	1.07*	0.45
Cultural racism	.07	.03	-0.18	0.58
Collective/institutional racism	-.06*	.02	0.96*	0.41
Buffering/Defensive $\times$ Individual Racism	.04	.03	-1.43*	0.61
Idealized $\times$ Individual Racism	.04	.03	-1.21*	0.60
Buffering/Defensive $\times$ Cultural Racism	-.11	.05	1.00	0.81
Idealized $\times$ Cultural Racism	-.05	.04	-0.29	0.71
Buffering/Defensive $\times$ Collective/Institutional Racism	.05	.03	-0.11	0.53
Idealized $\times$ Collective/Institutional Racism	.01	.03	-0.04	0.49
Total R <sup>2</sup>	.22**		0.25**	

Note. Separate analyses were run for the racial discrimination variables given a concern for multicollinearity; the results were consistent with the model presented.

<sup>a</sup> 0 = Alienated; 1 = Buffering/Defensive. <sup>b</sup> 0 = Alienated; 1 = Idealized.

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

that Buffering/Defensive youth have the most desirable educational outcomes (Chavous et al., 2003), the Idealized profile may also be optimal in the context of perceived racial discrimination.

The results are mixed regarding the hypothesis that perceptions of racial discrimination would be linked to diminished psychological well-being for Alienated youth. Perceptions of racial discrimination are linked to increased depressive symptoms among Alienated youth as expected. It is possible that Alienated youth are unprotected because of their low racial centrality levels, which have not been shown to moderate perceptions of peer discrimination among African American adolescents (Chavous et al., 2008). Though perceptions of racial discrimination are consistent with Alienated youth's low public regard levels, they also feel less positive about being African American. Alienated youth possibly lack the protective capacity of high racial centrality levels and high private regard levels, which may result in their mental health being at risk in the context of perceived racial discrimination. Though Alienated youth's mental health is linked to perceived racial discrimination, their self-esteem is not. Alienated youth's self-esteem may already be compromised given that they have the lowest levels of self-esteem compared to the other profiles. As such, perceptions of racial discrimination might not affect their self-esteem for this reason. Yet, this finding suggests the need to examine diverse outcomes with racial identity profiles as moderators despite the emphasis on educational outcomes and depressive symptoms. For example, smoking behavior might be an important outcome because previous research indicates perceptions of racial discrimination were linked to smoking among African American girls (Guthrie, Young, Williams, Boyd, & Kintner, 2002).

One finding that echoes previous research is that Alienated youth may be more at risk for subsequent problems compared to the other racial identity profiles. Alienated youth comprise 20% to 25% of the sample in previous (Chavous et al., 2003) and current research. This is especially problematic given that Alienated youth have lower self-esteem and higher levels of depressive symptoms, and had the least positive school attitudes compared to the other profiles (Chavous et al., 2003). Thus, African American youth with an Alienated profile may be at risk for diminished developmental outcomes. Additional research is necessary to understand the origins of this profile, and to assess which subgroups of African American youth are more likely to be Alienated.

A few limitations should be noted when considering the results of the present study. The sample is cross-sectional, and thus cannot determine causal relationships between racial discrimination and psychological well-being. To assess causality, longitudinal research is needed. Another limitation concerns the measure of perceived racial discrimination, which assesses lifetime prevalence of discriminatory experiences. Precise measures of perceived racial discrimination might aid in understanding smaller time periods (i.e., daily, weekly, monthly, or annually) or afford immediate assessment of the impact of discriminatory events. Other methodologies such as diary techniques capture momentary experiences allowing for more precise measurement of perceived racial discrimination. Another issue with measurement concerns the notion that a distinction between awareness and experience with racially discriminatory incidents may be necessary. Harrell (2000) proposed that vicarious racism, or awareness of racially discriminatory experiences that occur to family members and friends, should be considered when examining perceptions of racial discrimina-

tion. This distinction may be important for adolescent populations due to varying levels of cognitive abilities and social needs during different adolescent stages. Last, the current research utilized a convenience sample and the results may be generalized to African American youth in urban settings.

The present study contributes to existing racial identity and racial discrimination literature among African American adolescents. Replication of the racial identity profiles suggests that these may be common among African American youth. Yet, existence of the profiles suggests that African American youth are not monolithic regarding their views on race. A multidimensional approach indicates that not all types of racial discrimination are linked to diminished well-being, suggesting that some may be more harmful than others. Empirical support is also provided for the notion that the racial identity profiles moderate the relation between specific types of racial discrimination and psychological well-being such that some youth seem to be more vulnerable to perceived racial discrimination than others. Though the results indicate that racial discrimination is a stressor for African American youth, not all African American youth appear to be equally affected.

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