The Relationship Between Psychosocial Development and Racial Identity of College Students of Color

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This nationwide study was conducted to examine the relationship between psychosocial development and racial identity of 339 Black American, Asian American, and Latinx American traditional-aged undergraduate college students. Note that the broader racial category Black American was used when describing this study’s sample rather than the term African American, a term which describes ethnicity that would be inaccurate since both African American and Caribbean American students were included in the sample. The findings suggest that both race and racial identity are clearly related to the combined tasks of psychosocial development. Implications for practice are explored.

Student affairs professionals are primarily responsible for the out-of-class education and development of college students (Miller & Winston, 1991). To the degree that their practice is grounded in developmental theories and concepts, these professionals are often effective in meeting the needs of a diverse student body (Rodgers, 1991). A variety of student development theories have been offered as a means of understanding students’ intellectual, personal, and social growth (Knefelkamp, Widick, & Parker, 1978; Rodgers, 1980). These theories have been categorized into a number of families, namely: psychosocial, cognitive, typology, and person-environment (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Knefelkamp et al., 1978; Rodgers, 1980). Issues of social identity (e.g., ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation) have been considered less frequently when examining how students change and develop during their college years. Although some scholars have urged the incorporation of ethnic, racial, and other cultural influences into student development research and practice (Jones, 1990; McEwen & Roper, 1994; Miller & Winston, 1990; Wright, 1987), limited research has been conducted in this area. Where such studies exist, they tend to focus on African American students or, to a lesser degree, international students (see for example, Branch-Simpson, 1984; Cheatham, Slaney, & Coleman, 1990; Gibson, 1995; Itzkowitz & Petrie, 1986; Jordan-Cox, 1987; Sheehan, 1995; Taub & McEwen, 1991). The few studies that focus on students of color other than African American students have been dissertations with limited circulation (e.g., Testa, 1994; Utterback, 1992).

Since the early 1970s, a number of racial identity development models that share similar conceptualizations of how growth and development occur have been proposed (Atkinson, Morton, & Sue, 1979; Cross, 1971, Helms, 1984; Jackson & Hardiman, 1983; Myers et al., 1991; Phinney, 1996; Root, 1990; Sue & Sue, 1971). By definition, racial identity models examine one’s sense of belonging to a particular racial group and the impact that sense of belonging has on one’s thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behavior (Rotheram & Phinney, 1987). More recent conceptualizations of racial identity development (Helms & Piper, 1994) have suggested:

1. Racial identity development is applicable to all racial groups including Whites;
2. Racial identity involves how one views and understand one’s own racial group as well as members of other racial groups;
3. Racial identity development reflects a cognitive worldview ranging from less mature (simplistic, inaccurate, and externally defined) to more mature (complex, accurate, and internally derived).

Helms (1990) suggested that the movement from a

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from a less mature worldview to a more mature one is segmented not by stages, but rather by statuses. *Statuses* implies that a person may possess multiple worldviews associated with feelings, attitudes, and behaviors, but that one worldview dominates. A fundamental assumption of racial identity development models is that movement from less mature to more mature statuses is associated with more positive interactions and a greater degree of personal adjustment (Helms).

Having a clear understanding of race and racial identity, and their impact on the experiences and worldview of college students of color, is vital to providing developmentally appropriate and meaningful support and services. As stated previously, almost no information is available on the developmental issues and needs of Asian American, Latino American, and Native American college students, and limited information is available concerning African American students, which can hinder efforts to provide such vital services. The purpose of this study was to enhance understanding of the developmental needs and issues of college students of color and the impact of race and racial identity on their development. Specifically, this study was conducted to determine the relationship between psychosocial development and racial identity of undergraduate, traditional-aged African American, Asian American, and Latino American college students. Two research questions were investigated:

1. Is racial identity predictive of psychosocial development of college students of color?
2. What differences, if any, in psychosocial development and racial identity exist between the three racial groups?

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Black American, Asian American, and Latino American traditional-aged (17 to 24) undergraduate college students enrolled in 44 colleges and universities participated in the study. Of 583 surveys returned, 43 were judged unusable due to: (a) extensive omissions, (b) age ineligibility (younger than 17 or older than 24), (c) response-bias scale concerns (25 students answered three or more response-bias scale items in the keyed direction), or (d) ineligible race, ethnicity, or foreign-student status (i.e., 9 Native American, 4 White, and 3 foreign students responded). Hence, 539 student responses were deemed usable.

Of the 539 usable participants, 349 (65%) were women and one participant did not identify gender. The racial classification of the participants were as follows: 115 (21%) were Asian American, 309 (57%) were Black American, and 115 (21%) were Latino American. The mean age of the respondents was 19.85 years. Full-time students comprised the overwhelming majority (526; 98%) of the participants. Ninety-three (17%) of the participants were seniors, 101 (19%) were juniors, 121 (22%) were sophomores, 153 (28%) were freshmen, and 71 (13%) did not respond to this question. Approximately 27% (148) of the participants were natural science or engineering majors; 36% (194) were social science and humanities majors; education majors were 7% (38); 12% (65) were business majors; “other” and “undecided” comprised 17% (89) of the respondents; and .1% (5) did not respond to this question.

**Instruments**

The following instruments were used in this study: (a) the Student Development Task and Lifestyle Inventory (SDTLI) (Winston & Miller, 1987), (b) the Racial Identity Attitudes Scale-B (RIAS-B) (Parham & Helms, 1981), (c) the Visible Racial and Ethnic Identity Scale (VREI) (Helms & Carter, 1986), and (d) a personal data form constructed for this study.

The SDTLI (Winston & Miller, 1987), designed to measure aspects of Chickering’s (1969) theory of student development, was selected to measure patterns of psychosocial development. Substantially different from its predecessors, the 140-item SDTLI is a major revision of SDTLI-2. The SDTLI consists of three developmental task areas—Establishing and Clarifying Purpose Task, Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships Task, and Developing Academic Autonomy Task—and three
scales: Intimacy, Salubrious Lifestyle, and Response Bias. Two of the tasks have additional subtasks. The Establishing and Clarifying Purpose Task is divided into five subtasks: Educational Involvement, Career Planning, Lifestyle Planning, Life Management, and Cultural Participation. The Mature Interpersonal Relationships Task is divided into three subtasks: Peer Relationships, Tolerance, and Emotional Autonomy.

Winston (1990) presented internal consistency reliability estimates for the tasks of the SDTLI on the basis of a sample of 1,200 undergraduate students. Reported estimates ranged from .45 to .90 all tasks, and scales were .70 or higher suggesting, according to Winston, that the tasks and scales are sufficiently homogeneous for research with groups of students. Henning-Stout (1992) reported that the validity of the SDTLI is also well established. However, Winston did report that caution should be exercised in using some of the subtasks because of relatively low alpha coefficients for specific subtasks (i.e., Cultural Participation, Tolerance, and Emotional Autonomy) and found the more reliable measures to be the total task scores. Hence, Winston suggested that the total task scores be used.

The RIAS-B (Parham & Helms, 1981) was designed to assess attitudes associated with African American identity development and was initially based in the Cross’s (1978) four-stage model (Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion, and Internalization) of psychological Nigrescence (defined as the process of becoming Black) and has since been extensively revised and expanded. The instrument consists of 50 items to which participants respond using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Helms (1990) reported internal consistency reliability coefficients for the four scales from .51 to .80 (n = 175). Importantly, Helms recommended using the scores on all four scales to describe an individual’s racial identity attitude profile rather than to assign that individual to a single stage based on highest score. Construct, content, and criterion validity studies generally have been supportive of the RIAS-B (Helms & Parham, in press).

The VREI (Helms & Carter, 1986) was designed to assess attitudes associated with racial or ethnic identity development of Asian American, Latino American and Native American individuals. The scale is based on the Helms and Carter four-stage model of visible racial-ethnic identity (Conformity, Dissonance, Resistance, and Awareness), which was adapted from the Atkinson, Morton, and Sue (1979) Minority Identity Development (MID) five-stage model. The scale consists of 43 items to which participants respond using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Although this instrument was developed over 10 years ago and is one of the few racial identity instruments available for use with Asian American, Latino American, and Native American individuals, it has not yet been widely used in research. For the current study, the internal consistency reliability coefficients for the four scales from .87 to .95 (n = 240).

For this study, the researcher used the RIAS-B to explore racial identity development of Black American students and the VREI for Asian American and Latino American students. Although both racial identity instruments identify four statuses, the statuses are labeled differently. Nonetheless, the description of the process within both models is similar. Both Preencounter and Conformity are associated with positive feelings for the dominant race and negative feelings toward one’s own race. Encounter and Dissonance both reflect confusion and conflict brought on by experiences that challenge the attitudes held in the previous status. Immersion–Emergence and Resistance are characterized by positive feelings toward one’s own racial group, which are advanced by immersion in one’s race through books, movies, friends, and activities. During this period, some negative feelings toward the dominant group often emerge. And finally, both Internalization and Awareness involve the absence of negative feelings and attitudes as a result of resolution of the confusion and conflict from previous statuses. The person at this level is able to function within the dominant society without sacrificing racial pride and heritage.
Psycho-Development and Racial Identity

The personal data form was used to gather participants’ demographic data (e.g., age, gender, racial group, family’s socioeconomic status) and academic status (e.g., year in school, grade point average, full- or part-time). The personal data form was constructed by the author for this study.

**Procedures**

Participants were initially solicited via the use of electronic mail (E-mail), primarily through student affairs electronic listservers. A request for student affairs practitioners to assist in the collection of data on the psychosocial development and social attitudes of college students of color was posted on a variety of electronic listservers in the student affairs field (e.g., residence hall directors listservers, various multicultural affairs listservers, a first-year program listserver). Interested student affairs practitioners were asked to contact the author for additional information. After receiving additional information, also via E-mail, practitioners who agreed to serve as site coordinators for their campus were asked to identify a small number of college students of color (identified as Asian American, Black American, Latino American, and Native American) willing to participate in the study.

Packets containing a cover letter, detailed instructions (including a return date), a statement to be read to the participants, instruments, and a return envelope were mailed to the site coordinators. Site coordinators were asked to select a convenient time (for both site coordinator and students) to meet with a group of students (preferably 10 to 15 students) and coordinate the data collection. Upon the completion of the data collection, site coordinators were asked to return all completed and unused materials.

**RESULTS**

The means and standard deviations of the psychosocial development tasks for this study are: Establishing and Clarifying Purpose (43.06, SD 11.56), Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships (19.73, SD 4.95), and Developing Academic Autonomy (4.77, SD 2.73). The means reflect the means of the norm sample as reported by Winston and Miller (1987). Table 1 contains the means and standard deviations scale values of each racial group from the statuses of racial identity. However, in the actual analysis, the scores for racial identity were converted to z scores to account for differences in the racial identity scales for Black American students and for non-Black students of color.

A multivariate analysis of covariance was performed on the tasks of psychosocial development: Establishing and Clarifying Purpose, Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, and Developing Academic Autonomy. The four covariates included the four statuses of racial identity, referred to as statuses 1 through 4. The one grouping variable was race, with three levels: Black American, Asian American, and Latino.

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**TABLE 1.**

Scores on Four Statuses of Racial Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Statuses of Racial Identity</th>
<th>Asian American $(N = 115)$ $M$ (SD)</th>
<th>Black American $(N = 309)$ $M$ (SD)</th>
<th>Latino/a American $(N = 115)$ $M$ (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status 1</td>
<td>12.31 (4.69)</td>
<td>24.45 (8.09)</td>
<td>10.89 (4.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status 2</td>
<td>38.59 (9.34)</td>
<td>11.38 (4.10)</td>
<td>34.82 (12.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status 3</td>
<td>18.11 (5.53)</td>
<td>19.16 (6.97)</td>
<td>16.93 (6.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status 4</td>
<td>39.08 (6.16)</td>
<td>47.61 (12.96)</td>
<td>36.57 (11.33)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 2.
Univariate Tests of Racial Identity and Psychosocial Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>$F$, (DF)</th>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PUR</td>
<td>3.50 (4, 532)*</td>
<td>Status 1</td>
<td>-.69</td>
<td>-3.56**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Status 2</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Status 3</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Status 4</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>2.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIR</td>
<td>6.23 (4,532)**</td>
<td>Status 1</td>
<td>-.76</td>
<td>-3.94**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Status 2</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Status 3</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Status 4</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>2.92**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>2.87 (4, 532)*</td>
<td>Status 1</td>
<td>-.52</td>
<td>-2.65*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Status 2</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Status 3</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Status 4</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>3.23**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

American. Although data was collected from Native American students, there were too few respondents to include in data analysis.

SPSS MANOVA was used for the analysis on a total $N = 539$. With the use of Wilks’s criterion, racial identity was significantly related to the combined tasks of psychosocial development, approximate $F(12, 1402.54) = 3.24$, $p < 0.01$, indicating an association between the construct of psychosocial development and the development of racial identity. After adjusting for racial identity, race was also significantly related to the combined tasks of psychosocial development, approximate $F(6, 1060) = 2.56$, $p = 0.02$ indicating that the psychosocial development varied by race.

Univariate tests were used to further investigate the association between racial identity and the tasks of psychosocial development. Racial identity was significantly associated with Establishing and Clarifying Purpose, $F(4, 532) = 3.50$, $p = 0.01$; Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, $F(4, 532) = 6.23$, $p < 0.01$; and Developing Academic Autonomy, $F(4, 532) = 2.87$, $p = 0.02$. These results indicated that each task of psychosocial development was clearly related to racial identity.

The univariate analysis indicated that Statuses 1 and 4 of racial identity were related to the three tasks of psychosocial development. The first status, characterized by strong positive feelings regarding the dominant race and negative (conscious or unconscious) feelings towards one’s own race, was negatively related to each of the tasks; however, the fourth status, characterized by the realization that the dominant race and one’s own race have both positive and negative aspects, were positively related to each of the tasks. In the regression equations with Establishing and Clarifying Purpose, Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, and Developing Academic Autonomy, these results indicated that as scores in Status 1 decreased and scores in Status 4 increased, development in each...
of the tasks of psychosocial development increased (see Table 2).

To determine whether step-down analysis was appropriate, pooled within-cell correlations among dependent variables were examined. Pooled within-cell correlations provide the degree to which the dependent variables are correlated, adjusting for the covariate variables. If the correlations are in excess of .30, step-down analysis is appropriate, when investigating the relationships between the race and the tasks of psychosocial development. Pooled within-cell correlations among the dependent variables—the psychosocial development tasks—are presented in Table 3.

To examine the pure relationship between race and psychosocial development it was necessary to control for racial identity. The relationship between race and psychosocial development, after adjusting for racial identity, was investigated in univariate and step-down analysis in which Establishing and Clarifying Purpose was assigned highest priority (priority was established by empirical degree of relationship), Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships second priority (so that adjustment was made for Establishing and Clarifying Purpose and racial identity), and Developing Academic Autonomy third priority (so that adjustment was made for Establishing and Clarifying Purpose, Developing

Mature Interpersonal Relationships, and Racial Identity). Results of this analysis are summarized in Table 4.

After adjusting for differences on racial identity, race had a significant relationship with the combined tasks of psychosocial development. The step-down tests demonstrated that Establishing and Clarifying Purpose best distinguishes between the three racial groups, step-down $F(2, 532) = 4.86, p < 0.01$. Greater development was found among Black American students and Latino American students than Asian American students (adjusted means 44.24, 42.18, and 40.53 respectively) on this task. Step-down tests demonstrated no significant differences between the Black American, Asian American, and Latino American students on Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships nor Developing Academic Autonomy after controlling for differences on racial identity.

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between psychosocial development and racial identity of Black American, Asian American, and Latino American college students. Specifically, this study focused on two primary questions:

1. Is racial identity status predictive of psycho-

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**TABLE 3.**

Pooled Within-Cells Correlations Among Three Dependent Variables After Controlling for Racial Identity (Standard Deviations on the Diagonals)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Establishing and Clarifying Purpose</th>
<th>Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships</th>
<th>Developing Academic Autonomy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing and Clarifying Purpose</td>
<td>11.40</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Academic Autonomy</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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TABLE 4.
Tests of Racial Identity and Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Univariate $F$</th>
<th>$DF$</th>
<th>Step-down $F$</th>
<th>$DF$</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race Identity</td>
<td>PUR</td>
<td>3.50 $^a$</td>
<td>4, 532</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>4, 532</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MIR</td>
<td>6.23 $^a$</td>
<td>4, 532</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>4, 531</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>2.87 $^a$</td>
<td>4, 532</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>4, 530</td>
<td>.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>PUR</td>
<td>4.86 $^a$</td>
<td>2, 532</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>2, 532</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MIR</td>
<td>4.62 $^a$</td>
<td>2, 532</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2, 531</td>
<td>.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>2, 532</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>2, 530</td>
<td>.883</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ Analysis would achieve significance at the .05 level in an univariate test.

social development of college students of color?

2. What differences, if any, in psychosocial development exist between the three racial groups selected for this study?

Analysis of the data revealed that the construct of racial identity was significantly related to the combined tasks of psychosocial development. Furthermore, significant relationships were found between racial identity development and the individual tasks of Establishing and Clarifying Purpose, Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, and Academic Autonomy. The analysis indicated that as scores progressed in the statuses of racial identity development, they also increased on each of the tasks of psychosocial development. In other words, as students moved from Status 1 to Status 4, they demonstrated increased psychosocial development. The results do not imply a causal relationship. The results do not indicate that development in racial identity causes development in psychosocial development or vice versa. Instead, the results demonstrate that racial identity and psychosocial development are clearly related. This has important implications for practitioners working with students of color. This finding seems to suggest that racial identity and psychosocial development are equally important and concurrent developmental concerns for students of color. Students of color may be required to devote additional energy to the resolution of racial identity development issues while progressing through the tasks of psychosocial development. The energy they commit to the development of their racial identity may, at times, hinder their ability to focus on psychosocial development. Therefore, additional attention to racial identity is critical when attempting to facilitate the psychosocial development of students of color. This finding may, in fact, help explain why some traditional developmental interventions are not always successful with students of color. Focusing on psychosocial development to the exclusion of racial identity realities may make such interventions seem less relevant and meaningful.

Additionally, a significant relationship was found between race and the combined tasks of psychosocial development. However, further investigation indicated Establishing and Clarifying Purpose was most pivotal in understanding that relationship. On this task, Black American and Latino American students scored higher than Asian American students. This finding means that Black and Latino American students, in this study, were further along in the development of
their academic career or life goals and plans, or perhaps further along in the necessary integration of academic, vocational or recreational activities, than were Asian American students. Perhaps obviously, this study again indicates that racial differences, even among students of color, must be viewed as essential. With regards to this specific study, the findings involving Asian American students warrant special note. Asian American students scored significantly lower on this task than did the Black American and Latino American students and the reported norm sample (Winston & Miller, 1987). This finding could be of particular interest to practitioners because it appears to contradict the stereotype of Asian Americans as the “model minority” needing little to no assistance in areas of academic, career, or life-planning skills. Many researchers have criticized the model minority stereotype because it does not take into account important social and historical information and daily realities of the diverse Asian American community (Lee & Zane, 1998). Another interpretation of these results could be that Asian Americans’ experiences and skills in academic, career, and life planning are culturally influenced. Some research has described Asian Americans as being more dependent in their decision-making style, less autonomous, and more deferent to authority, especially their parents (Lee & Zane, 1998; Leong, 1985). Other studies have identified social anxiety and discomfort as a possible factor affecting the career aspirations of Asian Americans. Understanding potential cultural influences and realities is important to ensure that Asian American students are not viewed as deficient in particular areas of development. Regardless of why Asian American students may score differently on this task, the results of this study indicate that Asian American students may benefit from programs that address the skills associated with educational involvement, career and lifestyle planning, life management, and cultural participation. How these programs are advertised and presented will determine whether or not they will be attended or viewed as relevant or meaningful by Asian American students.

As with all empirical research, this study does have some limitations, which are based primarily in sampling concerns. The sample for this study was obtained primarily by identifying site coordinators who contacted groups of Black American, Asian American, Native American, and Latino American students on various campuses across the country. Although this method did not emphasize random sampling, the size of the sample (N = 539) as well as having participants from all over the country may help to minimize the effect of that limitation. Finally, more extensive efforts must be made to collect data on Native American students as their needs have not been effectively incorporated into this or other studies.

Implications

This study has provided an empirically documented profile of group similarities and differences in the psychosocial development for students of color. The results of this study encourage student affairs practitioners to carefully design and implement programs that are specifically sensitive to the differences between students of color. The results indicated that Asian American students scored lower than Black American and Latino American students on the Establishing and Clarifying Purpose Task. Establishing and Clarifying Purpose is composed of the following subtasks: Educational Involvement, Career Planning, Lifestyle Planning, Life Management, and Cultural Participation. Thus, programs targeted toward assisting students in the development of these areas should reflect consideration for Asian American student differences on this task. This means that student affairs professionals may need to seek out Asian students to ensure proper attention to this developmental task. Practitioners may especially want to focus on individual interactions like advisement and career counseling sessions to pass on important information and skills for this developmental task.

Student affairs professionals need to also take the coexisting relationship between racial identity development and psychosocial development into account when working with students of color. Student affairs practitioners must not
make assumptions about the students’ level of psychosocial development without first considering their racial identity and how they perceive themselves as racial beings. And when psychosocial development is targeted for interventions, the unique concerns of students of color need to be incorporated into such interventions. Without such considerations, the personal support or programmatic efforts targeted towards students of color may miss their mark because they may not be focused on the most pressing concerns.

Another vital consideration that comes out of the results of this research is the importance of looking at differences between students of color. To meet their needs as developing individuals, both in terms of racial identity and psychosocial development, the unique history, cultural values, and perspectives of the different racial groups must be addressed. Different types of workshops, personal approaches, mentoring, and advising or counseling efforts may be required in any interventions targeted towards students of color. Only through extensive reading and interactions with various cultural groups will student affairs practitioners be prepared to incorporate important and unique cultural understandings into their interactions with and interventions towards various students of color groups. Campus-wide discussions about these concerns should occur among student affairs professionals so individual and group interactions are meaningful and productive. Brainstorming and piloting new types of programs and interventions would be the goal for such dialogues.

Finally, the results of this study highlighted the importance of considering both race and racial identity as important factors in understanding the development of students of color. Although some scholars have cautioned not to over interpret the significance of race, factors such as racial identity may be more helpful in understanding the experiences and perspectives of people of color. These results indicate the value in examining the importance of both race and racial identity in creating interventions for students of color.

To effectively meet the developmental needs of students of color, student affairs professionals need to be creative in their programmatic and intervention efforts. Expanding their repertoire, consulting with cultural experts, and increasing their sensitivity to cultural nuances between racial groups are all necessary to enhance their effectiveness. Pope and Reynolds (1997) described these and similar tasks as multicultural competence. Further, they suggested that as college campuses become increasingly diverse, multicultural competence has become a requisite core competency area for ethical and efficacious practice (Pope & Reynolds). For many campuses this means additional training and skill building for student affairs practitioners. An example of a creative approach would be to develop a series of focus groups with students of color to assess their psychosocial development and willingness to participate in a variety of interventions targeted toward their self-understanding and skill development. Campuses should not just rely on the same old interventions; they may need to use training or outreach models from other disciplines like community psychology or social work that may more regularly target interventions toward people of color.

The paucity of research into the experiences and development of Asian American, African American, Latino American, and Native American students underscores the importance of continuing this line of research. The results of this study are not definitive, and further research is needed; however, the implications of this study indicate that the practitioner ought to assume that psychosocial development may be influenced by an individual’s identity and environment. Thus, practitioners should be sensitive to possible group differences when applying student development theories to students of color. Within-group differences do exist and not all students of color necessarily have the same experiences, attitudes, and beliefs as White students. Many research questions have been raised by the results of this study as well as the lack of available data on the students of color. More information is needed to understand why Asian American students score lower on Establishing and
Psychosocial Development and Racial Identity

Clarifying Purpose. Further investigation that more clearly distinguishes between statuses two and three of racial identity is important to enhance our understanding of racial identity. Examining the racial identity of all students is important to better understand psychosocial development. Over the past 20 years extensive research has been done on the developmental issues and needs of White students. The student affairs profession must expand the research agenda to incorporate the study of the development of students of color to create an optimal environment for understanding their needs and concerns.

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REFERENCES


