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# Racial Identity: Toward an Integrated Developmental Psychological Perspective

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This article outlines current knowledge and lines of research regarding racial identity and, in particular, African American racial identity. A developmental psychological framework is proposed as a means of integrating and synthesizing 2 lines of racial identity research that have emerged within the existing literature: (a) the developmental line of research and (b) the adjustment outcome line of research. The proposed integration of the current racial identity research will emphasize the interdependency of developmental mechanisms, outcome processes, and identity trajectories among minority individuals, and highlight the significance of those identities for individuals across their life spans. Potential benefits of integrating these 2 lines of research within a developmental psychological framework are discussed regarding both scientific theory and practice-related applications.

One developmental construct that has elicited a great deal of attention within social science literatures is that of racial identity. Consistent with the historical and current emphasis placed on race within U.S. society, racial identity has been nominated as a significant and influential factor for human development (Cross, 1971; Gandy, 2001; Hargrow, 2001; Helms, 1990; Kando, 1977; Neville & Lilly, 2000; Parham & Helms, 1985). Over the past 30 years, numerous scholars representing a wide range of disciplines have described, measured, and explained various aspects of racial identity (e.g., Cross, 1971, 1991, 1994; Helms, 1990, 1995; Hughes, 2003; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Parham, 1989; Parham & Helms, 1985; Shelton & Sellers, 2000; Spencer, 1982; Sellers, 1993; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998; Steele, 1997; Stevenson, 1995; Thomas, 1971). Underpinning ex-

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plorations of racial identity is the notion that race and racial distinctions are important for understanding development and behavior. As purely biological definitions of race that describe genetic variations between clusters of people have been replaced by more contemporary views, race can be said to represent a social construction that classifies individuals into distinct and meaningful groups that are inseparable from historical and sociopolitical contexts (Sellers et al., 1998; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). It is from this view that the concept of racial identity has referred to the psychosocial classification of one's self within a particular racial group (e.g., Helms, 1990). By definition, racial identity refers to "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (Helms, 1990, p. 3). Typically ascribed to individuals belonging to historically marginalized racial groups, this process of self-identification is also thought to be influenced by several factors, including individuals' emotional status (Cross, 1971), sociopolitical norms (Helms, 1995), and the degree to which individuals internalize social prejudices and racism (Jones, 1997; Kohatsu & Richardson, 1996).

Concepts closely related to racial identity, such as racial socialization, cultural identity, and ethnic identity, often have been used interchangeably within this identity literature (Carter, 1996; Helms, 1990; Stevenson, 1997). Some scholars have contended that racial identity is a construct inherently distinct from ethnic or cultural identity, however, whereas ethnic or cultural identification may be covert and may vary over time, race, for the most part, remains overt and constant (Casas, 1984; Pope-Davis, Liu, Ledesma-Jones, & Nevitt, 2000). So as to not blur differences among related terms, we focus here specifically on the concept of racial identity and racial identity research.

Much of the existing research on racial identity has specifically focused on African American or Black identity. Collectively, this research highlights the importance of individuals' levels of racial awareness or salience, attitudes and experiences related to racial socialization processes, and other key characteristics associated with individuals' negotiation of their racial identity within society. By and large, researchers in this area have been concerned with describing underlying patterns of interactions between individuals and their environments, without framing their work as illuminating either developmental process or adjustment outcomes. When evaluating this body of literature through a developmental psychological lens, however, much of the existing knowledge appears disjointed—as though racial identity research has, in fact, branched into two distinct lines. One line (referred to in this article as the *developmental line*) describes the biological, psychological, and social factors promoting the development of specific racial identities. Alternatively, a second line (referred to in this article as the *adjustment outcome line*) describes relations between aspects of racial identities and specific adjustment outcomes, including dimensions of individual- and social-level behaviors. Taken together, these two research lines do not inherently represent competing ex-

planations regarding racial identity. Integrating the different foci addressed in each line may, however, make the implications of racial identity and related research clearer. Moreover, synthesizing the contributions of both research lines within an integrated developmental psychological framework may better inform scientific understanding of the significance of racial identity and broaden current approaches for incorporating this construct in theoretical conceptualizations, research, and practice-related settings.

## AIMS OF THE CURRENT ARTICLE

As just outlined, racial identity research falls primarily into one of two distinct lines: (a) research that focuses on factors contributing to the development of particular racial identities or (b) research that focuses on adjustment outcomes associated with particular racial identities. Separately, empirical investigations within these two lines of research have either identified factors associated with the development of specific racial identities or described associations between particular racial identities and a range of adjustment outcomes. Independently studying the developmental contributions to racial identity or the unique adjustment patterns associated with specific identities has clearly contributed to our understanding of human development, and advances have been made in existing knowledge.

What is less clear, however, is what might be gained if these two paths are integrated to form a more comprehensive understanding of process-related identity formation and change. Moreover, integrating literatures outlining the development of racial identity with literatures documenting the relations between racial identity and key adjustment outcomes within a single framework may provide a more compelling understanding of the significance of racial identity for individuals' lives. Such a task could be undertaken through a developmental psychological approach, which is sensitive to the interdependence of numerous individual and contextual factors for the meaningful explanation of developmental phenomena. Specifically, linking the two predominant lines of research and theory within existing racial identity literatures through a developmental psychological approach may promote additional fruitful research inquiry, as well as effective application of emerging analytical strategies. For example, the integration of these two lines of research may further the description and explanation of more complex relations among key constructs (e.g., reciprocal influences between racial identity and adjustment, common and unique contextual influences for both constructs).

To date, a systematic application of a developmental psychological approach to the evaluation of racial identity research has not been undertaken. Accordingly, we have four aims. First, we review existing literature on racial identity, and African American racial identity in particular, through a developmental psychological lens to differentiate between the distinct viewpoints represented in the literature (i.e.,

the development of racial identity versus the function of racial identity). Second, we bring together these distinct viewpoints within the racial identity literature by offering an integrative developmental framework. Third, we evaluate the utility of such integration for providing a more inclusive and methodologically enhanced framework for racial identity studies than is currently available. Finally, we discuss plausible theoretical and practical implications suggested and permitted by such integration.

## TWO LINES OF RACIAL IDENTITY RESEARCH

### The Developmental Line: Models and Mechanisms of Development

Mapping the psychosocial determinants of racial identities has been a central aim of racial identity theorists for the past three decades (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). Scholars working within the developmental line of research have attempted to outline the significance of racial identity for human development and have characterized racial identity as the result of complex interactions among a broad range of biological, psychological, and social factors (Kando, 1977). Also, as noted earlier, although descriptive models of racial identity development have been established for several racial groups, the greatest emphasis of this line of research has focused on African American or Black identity. Conceptually, the predominant models of Black racial identity development operationalize normative developmental processes by drawing connections between dynamic sociocontextual factors and the establishment of an affirmative racial identity. For example, early investigations of Black identity conceptualized its development as critical for survival within an oppressive, predominately White society (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2000; Thomas, 1971). Consistent with Eriksonian conceptualizations of identity development, Black identity development has been viewed as a progression through incrementally more advanced stages (French et al., 2000). Specifically, Thomas's (1971) pioneering work on *negromachy* (or having a confused Black identity because of a dependency on White society) sketched a directional progression that Black individuals undergo to establish a healthy and adaptive Black identity. This progression ranged from an initial phase of verbally belittling White people toward a more transformative phase of respecting and serving Black communities and institutions.

On the basis of this initial work (and the most often cited model of Black identity development) is Cross's (1971) *nigrescence* (or "becoming Black") theory. In its preliminary version, this theory describes the process through which an individual affirms a Black identity by progressing through increasingly more

complex stages, ranging from anti-Black to pro-Black attitudes and beliefs (Cross, 1971, 1978; Parham & Helms, 1985; Shelton & Sellers, 2000). In this model, *Pre-Encounter* depicts the first stage of Black identity and is characterized as an idealization of White society and values with a simultaneous depreciation of Black society and values. The second stage, *Encounter*, is initiated by a catalytic event that overtly incites concern with race in American society. As a result of this event, racism becomes more salient, and individuals are prompted to examine race-related aspects of their identity more closely. During the third stage, *Immersion*, Black individuals hold White society and interests to be antithetical to Black society and interests and subsequently immerse themselves entirely into a Black identity. The fourth stage, *Internalization*, describes individuals who have adaptively embraced their Black identity in a manner comfortable for them. In the fifth and final stage of the nigrescence model, *Internalization–Commitment*, identification with a racial group and the processes underlying that identification is enlarged into greater recognition of broader issues of humanity and is characterized by an engagement in political and social activism for a broad range of civil rights issues.

Although the core stage-based structure of this developmental model of Black racial identity continues to be used by many researchers, over time researchers have elaborated a spectrum of race-related identities. Specifically, Cross (1991, 1995) has revised his original model by highlighting the existence of significant dimensionality within the categorical stages of Black identity development. This revision has added a more complex perspective to how individuals connect to the larger social identity of being Black (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Also, nigrescence theory continues to be revised and developed as efforts are made to document empirically its validity.

Expanding on Cross's model, yet moving away from stage-like conceptualizations of development, Parham and Helms (1985) and Helms (1984, 1986, 1990) have suggested that a more dynamic delineation of racial identity development could be based on the notion of statuses. Helms theorized that the stages of Black racial identity development (as conceptualized by Cross's nigrescence model) inherently consist of different levels (i.e., statuses) of attitudes and beliefs regarding race. Specifically, Helms (1984) suggested that levels of race consciousness and transcendence may be expressed differently within each of the progressive stages of Black identity development, as dictated by the unique social interactions and experiences of individuals (Helms, 1990). Thus, the status-related manner in which individuals interpret racial stimuli informs their worldviews regarding their sense of Black identity (Neville & Lilly, 2000). In addition, Parham (1989) suggested the importance of recognizing cyclical processes inherent in racial identity development that occur across the life span. Patterns of racial identity development appear to be linked with key developmental tasks associated with specific stages of the life

span (e.g., identity formation during adolescence). Additionally, individual characteristics such as the salience of race and the amount of perceived prejudice and discrimination are acknowledged as being helpful in understanding the significance of individuals' racial identity during key transitions in their lives (Jones, 1997; Sellers et al., 1998).

Common among these theories of racial identity development is a shared recognition of complex racial socialization processes (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hughes, 2003, Stevenson, 1995). By exploring the diversity that is inherent in these processes, researchers are able to hypothesize developmental mechanisms that probabilistically promote racial identity development. For example, literature exploring racial socialization processes has pointed to familial institutions (e.g., McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Peters, 1985; Stevenson, 1997; Thomas & Speight, 1999), academic and social contexts (e.g., Pope, 1998; Shelton & Sellers, 2000), peer networks (e.g., Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Plummer, 1995; Sanders Thompson, 1994), and media effects (Gandy, 2001) as being critical domains guiding how individuals come to identify themselves racially.

This literature has largely highlighted positive relations between messages regarding race and ethnicity and expressions of racial identity, particularly among African American individuals (Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004; Demo & Hughes, 1990). Mapping this broad range of influential factors through multiple levels of analysis allows researchers to identify key processes associated with the development of diverse racial identities. Thus, as the scope of this line of research continues to broaden, increased sensitivity to (a) the multiple antecedents and (b) the dynamic processes by which antecedents are probabilistically associated with resulting identities will lead to more complex explanations regarding specific pathways in racial identity development.

### Limitations of the Developmental Line of Racial Identity Research

Although most of the existing developmental models generally imply that racial identity functions to promote an adaptive psychosocial connection with a larger group in a race-conscious and, in various ways, racially polarized society, there is currently little delineation of specific processes leading to adjustment outcomes in this line of research. Empirical testing of developmental models of racial identity has been largely exploratory, and much of the available research has been primarily descriptive in nature. Due to this limitation, several critical questions remain unanswered. For example, to what extent do existing developmental theories represent stage theories, wherein mastery of each stage is a requisite for progressing to the next (e.g., Erikson's theory of psychosocial development)? Furthermore, do certain racial identity outcomes represent "developmental de-

lays,” or does every racial identity outcome represent an adaptation to a particular context, with no justification for some outcomes being seen as more “advanced” than others? Also, are differences in racial identity development processes or outcomes systematically related to differences in mental health statuses or other salient developmental outcomes? Another unaddressed question asks, do individuals who have experienced different developmental progressions in achieving their racial identities need specialized approaches to supportive interventions? From a developmental psychological perspective, answers to these types of questions are necessary because they capture the individual significance of developmental processes that influence the formation of specific racial identities. Attending to the individual-level consequences that accrue to the distinct racial identity developmental pathways across the life span will allow scholars working in this line of research to expand current understanding of the developmental significance of racial identity.

### The Adjustment Outcome Line: Correlates and Outcomes

The other substantive line of research characterizes associations between racial identities and key adjustment outcomes for individuals. Scholars have launched numerous investigations focusing on relations between racial identity and consequential adjustment outcomes (e.g., Carter & Helms, 1990; Helms, 1990; Parham & Helms, 1985; Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998; Taub & McEwen, 1992). Recognizing the importance of racial identity for individual- and social-level functioning and adjustment, these researchers aim to (a) determine whether racial identity is predictive of particular adjustment outcomes and (b) describe differences in such outcomes that may exist between individuals who embrace different racial identities (e.g., Stevenson, 1997; Taub & McEwen, 1992). For investigators working within this line of research, racial identity represents a salient construct capable of influencing patterns of adjustment in minority individuals’ lives.

To operationalize the construct of Black racial identity, several inventories designed to empirically measure individuals’ identity-related attitudes and beliefs have been developed (Helms, 1990). Frequently used inventories include the Developmental Inventory of Black Consciousness (Milliones, 1980), the Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (Parham & Helms, 1981), the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997), and the Cross Racial Identity Scale (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2001). For the most part, these inventories have been developed in accordance with prominent models of racial identity development, such as nigrescence (Brookins, Anywabwile, & Nacoste, 1996; Helms, 1990). As a result, researchers are able to draw clear associations between attitudes associated with specific developmental



periods (e.g., Pre- Encounter or Internalization) and key adjustment outcomes (Neville & Lilly, 2000). Thus, these inventories have offered useful heuristics for investigating adjustment outcomes within psychological, academic, and social domains.

Empirical studies conducted in this line of research indicate that specific levels of Black racial identity are linked to a range of key psychological adjustment outcomes (Carter, 1991; Helms & Carter, 1990; Pope, 1998; Taub & McEwen, 1992). For example, several studies have demonstrated that more salient and internalized Black identities are positively associated with factors such as self-esteem and positive self-image (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Parham and Helms, 1985), perceptions of ethnic fit (Chavous, 2000), moral reasoning and development (Moreland & Leach, 2001), and perceptions of autonomy (Taub & McEwen, 1992). The relationship between racial identity and academic functioning has also received considerable attention in empirical studies (e.g., Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1991; Sellers et al., 1998). The central issue of this notable and often controversial area of research has been to determine whether particular levels of racial identity are systematically associated with indices of academic performance.

To some degree, research in this area has generated opposing views concerning the extent to which Black racial identity promotes academic success or encompasses significant challenges. For example, several researchers contend that for some individuals the salience of Black identity may be associated with a decrease in identification with educational achievement, and therefore results in lower academic functioning (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Steele & Aronson, 1995). In contrast, other researchers have concluded that adaptive Black identities are associated with positive academic achievement (Sellers et al., 1998). Taken together, studies in this domain suggest that Black identities may have multiple and varying influences on indices of academic functioning. Continued research delineating the circumstances under which academic outcomes are most influenced by racial identities will better clarify this important issue.

Another domain deemed relevant to racial identity is social adjustment. Given the implications of race and racial identity within our society, understanding how the salience of race to individuals promotes or inhibits particular types and qualities of social interactions is important. For example, studies in this area have demonstrated significant relations between racial identities and levels of pro-social behaviors (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Stevenson, 1997; Winston & Miller, 1987), familial relationships (Johnson, Shireman, & Watson, 1987), organizational involvement (Chavous, 2000), and mature interpersonal relationships (Pope, 1998; Taub & McEwen, 1992). Overwhelmingly, the results of these investigations show that adaptive social outcomes are associated with more internalized racial identities (e.g., Jackson & Neville, 1998; Wilson & Constantine, 1999). Illuminating the

relations between racial identities and social adjustment outcomes for individuals clearly guides current understanding of the significance and importance of how individuals experience their social realities. By attending to such information, scholars can delineate meaningful connections between specific stages of racial identities and a wide range of adaptive psychosocial experiences and outcomes (Carter, DeSole, Sicalides, Glass, & Tyler, 1997).

Contextual circumstances that facilitate, or pose challenges to, individuals' adjustment have also been associated with racial identities. Stemming from the notion that some individuals are able to manifest positive outcomes despite adversity (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000), the construct of resilience has clear implications for investigating relations between racial identities and adjustment outcomes (Barbarin, 1993). Specifically, several researchers have contended that an internalized racial identity can buffer negative environmental influences and promote positive adjustment (e.g., Bowman & Howard, 1985; Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991; Peters, 1985). Furthermore, empirical research has examined a variety of ways in which racial and ethnic socialization processes can moderate individuals' adjustment outcomes with respect to their racial identities. For instance, as previously noted, competing literatures illustrate that some individuals maintaining Black identities demonstrate positive academic functioning, whereas others endure increasing challenges within this domain. Some light has been cast on those conflicting findings, however, by researchers identifying critical levels of familial and peer interactions that appear to moderate the academic performance of African American students (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Thus, sensitivity to the construct of resilience within racial identity research facilitates understanding of how various types and dimensions of racial identities may moderate risk or protective factors embedded within key developmental processes related to the construction, maintenance, or evolution of specific racial identities (Miller, 1999).

### Limitations of the Adjustment Outcome Line of Racial Identity Research

Thus far, the adjustment outcome line of racial identity research has offered insight into the significance of racial identities for individuals and how they are linked with indices of psychological, academic, and social adjustment. However, A singular focus on describing the adjustment correlates of racial identity variables draws attention away from the underlying developmental factors and processes that contribute to its construction, maintenance, or revision over time. Scholars have suggested that using racial identity labels to categorize individuals obscures the complexities underlying context-specific differences in the significance of these identities for individuals (Fisher, Jackson, & Villarruel, 1998). Alternatively, characterizing underlying antecedents of different racial identities

may link key developmental processes with specific outcomes for individuals. Furthermore, using racial identity attitude measures in cross-sectional designs does not provide a comprehensive picture of racial identity because the majority of identity inventories only reveal a snapshot of how people identify themselves racially at any given time.

Because of the lack of attention to factors contributing to the development of various racial identities, critical empirical questions have not been addressed within this line of research. For example, are genetic, epigenetic, and phenotypic factors that are likely to contribute to the development of racial identities systematically related to patterns of adjustment outcomes? Can differences in skin tones and hair textures contribute to diverse developmental pathways and create unique adjustment experiences for individuals who share a racial identity? Also, what can be made of associations between adjustment and racial identity for individuals who develop and maintain more than one racial identity? From a developmental psychological perspective, exploration of these types of inquiries are central to a comprehensive understanding of the developmental significance of racial identity. Thus, failure to address developmental aspects of racial identity results in only a partial, and possibly misleading, picture of how racial identities unfold across the life course and how they are linked with individuals' psychological adjustment and well-being.

## INTEGRATING THE RACIAL IDENTITY RESEARCH LITERATURES

Bringing the developmental and adjustment outcome lines of racial identity research together under an integrated developmental psychological framework may reorganize significantly how racial identity is conceptualized and broaden current understanding of the significance of this construct within the lives of minority individuals. Although both lines of research have described aspects of racial identity separately, to date neither has comprehensively characterized the implications of this construct for development across the life span. Specifically, existing developmental models inform our understanding of racial identity, particularly with regard to the diverse factors that contribute to its growth and change over time (see Figure 1, *Development model*), but they offer little insight into relations between racial identity trajectories and specific dimensions of adjustment for individuals. Similarly, the adjustment outcome research literature informs our understanding of the relations between a wide range of adjustment outcomes and various racial identities (see Figure 1, *Adjustment outcome model*) yet offers little insight into underlying developmental factors and processes that promote specific racial identities and how relations between racial identities and adjustment variables change with time. Through systematic integration of key

*Development model*



*Adjustment outcome model*



FIGURE 1 Characterizations of current models within racial identity research.

concepts, however, the shortcomings of each line of research can be supplemented by the strengths of the other. As a result of linking these two research foci within a developmental psychological framework, a more continuous, relational, and comprehensive understanding of the meaning of racial identity may emerge. Drawn together, both lines of racial identity research can describe and explain racial identity with a broader complexity than that which more narrow formulations have traditionally accommodated.

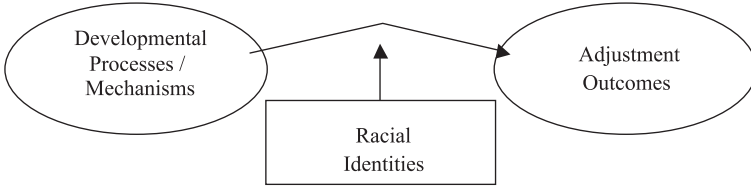
### Implications for Theory

In line with contemporary theories in developmental psychology, a synthesis of interrelated and multidimensional components of racial identity has critical implications for unveiling the process-oriented and person-in-context significance of this construct for individuals (Bergman, 2001; Magnusson & Stattin, 1998). Stated differently, characterizing racial identity as a developmental construct may improve how current theories specify the role of this construct in individuals' lives. Specifically, reconsidering the range of developmental levels that individuals could potentially manifest with respect to their racial identity allows researchers to make incrementally more personalized and accurate inferences regarding adjustment outcomes (Holmbeck, Greenley, & Franks, 2003). In addition, viewing racial identity as a developmental construct allows scholars to identify and explore how various levels of racial identity may moderate adjustment outcomes (see Figure 2, *Moderation model*). In addition, racial identity may be conceptualized as a media-

tor of relations between key psychosocial factors (e.g., peer networks, family relationships) and specific adjustment outcomes (see Figure 2, *Mediation model*).

Furthermore, as an alternative to moderation and mediation models, the proposed synthesis permits the exploration of reciprocal influences that exist between developmental experiences and adjustment outcomes (see Figure 3, *Reciprocal in-*

*Moderation model*



*Mediation model*

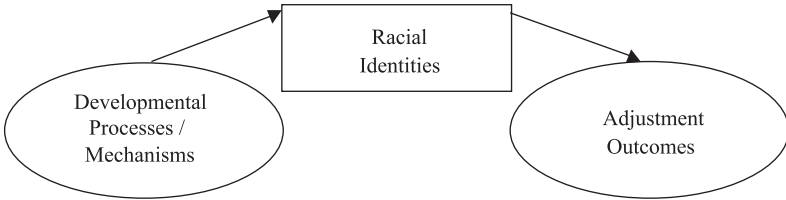


FIGURE 2 Characterizations of moderation and mediation models of racial identity research.

*Reciprocal influence model*

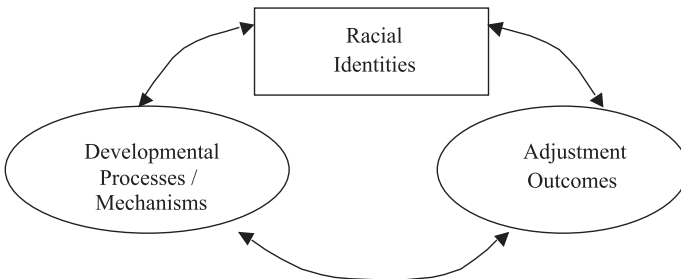


FIGURE 3 Characterizations of a reciprocal influence model of racial identity research.

*fluence model*). Specifically, integrating existing developmental and adjustment outcome literatures enables researchers to chart how key developmental experiences may contribute initially to the construction of racial identities, yet on the basis of associated patterns of adjustment, these experiences may in turn generate unique developmental experiences, critical to ongoing identity development processes. Capturing this cyclical process may be particularly useful for researchers investigating patterns of within-group heterogeneity with respect to diverse expressions of racial identity. Adding these dimensions to current conceptualizations of racial identity may enhance our ability to understand how dynamic developmental processes generate heterogeneity in the expression of racial identities and patterns of adjustment outcomes among specific populations.

*A prototypical example.* Existing research on racial identity has demonstrated the need to recognize broader sets of experiences that may mediate the role of racial identity in key adjustment domains for subgroups of individuals. A prototypical example of the benefits to existing theory of synthesizing developmental and adjustment outcome lines of research is inherent within the phenomenon of *stereotype threat* (e.g., Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Researchers investigating stereotype threat have demonstrated how racial identity and salience can be viewed as components of larger developmental experiences that can mediate behavioral outcomes. Specifically, findings in this area suggest that for some African American students who identify with academic success, optimal performance in this domain may be undermined by a perceived threat of negative stereotyping, perpetrated by others (Steele, 1997). In contrast, the requisite feature that fuels stereotype threat—identifying with academic success—enables African American students who identify to a lesser degree with academic success to escape such perceived threat and thereby perform as they typically would. Therefore, characterizing racial identity and salience within a broader range of developmental experiences (i.e., academic histories and expectancies) provides a more complex understanding of processes that lead to specific adjustment outcomes (e.g., academic performance).

Furthermore, by integrating a life-span developmental perspective with racial identity research (e.g., Parham, 1989), distinct developmental trajectories that are associated with specific racial identity types may be uncovered. Moreover, identifying key developmental patterns and adjustment outcomes that are probabilistically associated with racial identity development enables researchers participating in both research lines to engage in meaningful discourse regarding racial identity typologies (Bergman, 2000). As a result, diverse contextual features may be revealed that support (a) many racial identity-related developmental processes leading to similar adjustment outcomes (i.e., equifinality) and (b) common racial-identity-related developmental processes leading to distinct adjustment out-

comes (i.e., multifinality; Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1996). Hence, mapping a spectrum of racial identities that relate to a broad range of developmental experiences may highlight the dynamic and interrelated features of the pertinent human ecology (e.g., key biological, social, familial influences) and improve current description and understanding of heterogeneity in individuals' behavior (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 1998; Bergman, 2000; Elder, 1998; Magnusson & Bergman, 1990; Magnusson & Stattin, 1998).

In addition, a restructuring of the conceptualization of racial identity has implications for other identity-related constructs such as ethnic and cultural identity. Although separate literatures exist for these psychosocial constructs (for reviews of ethnic identity, see Phinney, 1990, 1996; Rotheram & Phinney, 1987; for reviews of cultural identity, see Felix-Ortiz, Newcomb, & Myers, 1994; Kent & Bhui, 2003; Lewis, 2000), there is strong evidence that the differences between these dimensions of identity are eclipsed by similar socialization processes that (a) contribute to the development of racial, ethnic, and cultural identities and (b) influence behavioral outcomes (Hughes, 2003; Hughes & Chen, 1999; Johnson, 2001; Phinney, 1990; Phinney & Chavira, 1995). Similar to racial identity inventories, existing developmental models tapping indices of ethnic and cultural identity (Phinney, 1990, 1992) and universal minority identity (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1989) reflect the broader social significance or collective salience of ethnic or cultural differences, prejudice, and discrimination (Jones, 1997). Therefore, identifying comprehensive and pertinent identity-related typologies, whether by race, ethnicity, or culture, requires an understanding of both the major underlying patterns of development and the related adjustment outcomes associated with specific types of identities. Therefore, an integration of developmental and adjustment outcomes as argued for in this article may also be relevant for literature focused on aspects of ethnic and cultural identities.

This commonality or conceptual overlap between notions of racial, ethnic, and cultural identity further suggests that an integration of developmental and adjustment outcome perspectives perhaps can step beyond explorations of solely African American or Black identities but may also be a fruitful avenue to pursue with regard to racial/ethnic identities traditionally underexplored (e.g., North American indigenous and racially or ethnically mixed individuals). Given the range of social contexts in which members of diverse racial and ethnic groups develop, the role of racial/ethnic identity variables as mediators and moderators of broader ongoing developmental processes may function differently among these various groups. There may be specific contextual factors (e.g., community values, levels of access to sociopolitical resources) that are differentially related to the construction of individuals' racial identities among youth from different racial/ethnic groups that should be considered when working within these populations. Similarly, alternative racial identity resolutions may exist for youth

within a racial/ethnic group beyond the singular categories traditionally considered. For example, an increasing number of individuals have identified themselves recently as being members of biracial or multiracial populations (Bowles, 1993; Buckley & Carter, 2004). Researchers should not assume that similar identity patterns to those presented by monoracial populations would emerge within bi- or multiracial populations (Spencer et al, 2000). Therefore, future research is needed to explore (a) the inherent range of possible identities and their predictors and (b) the putative direction of relations between these identities and key adjustment outcomes. This type of process-oriented research will expand current understanding of how racial identity and other race-related constructs are associated with general and racial/ethnic-specific aspects of adjustment among key populations. Presumably, broader theoretical frameworks for investigating the diversity of identities between and within such groups would lead to a more inclusive, synthesized, and compelling research literature, as well as greater availability of tailored prevention and intervention efforts.

### Implications for Research and Practice-Related Application

There are several potentially significant implications for practice-related applications based on an integrated racial identity literature. Potentially, the most prominent practice-related domain that the proposed integration might inform is that of mental health counseling. It has been recognized within counseling literatures that the extent to which counselors are effective toward promoting adaptive outcomes for clients is moderated by their ability to recognize underlying factors contributing to maladjustment (Vinson & Neimeyer, 2000). Furthermore, for counselors working with racially diverse populations, understanding how clients identify themselves racially in addition to the various psychosocial influences that have led to and maintain that sense of identity is critical for effective counseling (Brown, Parham, & Yonker, 1996; Vinson & Neimeyer, 2000). Characterized within developmental pathways, racial identities can be viewed as interactive and emergent constructs and therefore can be targeted as plausible intervention foci (Kwan, 2001). Within this context, accurate delineation of where clients begin psychologically and what they intend to achieve during the course of counseling needs to be informed coequally by developmental and adjustment outcome factors that counselors and clients identify together. This may require that counselors gain knowledge and understanding of particular models of racial identity development and behavioral correlates of those identities, as well as a general comprehension of how key factors can produce challenges to adaptive development for individuals. Doing so may allow counselors to engage individuals more fully on a client-centered level in which the significance of racial identity can be characterized as it pertains to the clients' own mental health issues.



*Emerging examples of applied research.* Emerging examples in which the integrated developmental psychological framework proposed in this article can provide guidance involve treatment and prevention programs seeking to improve physical and mental health outcomes for individuals of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural identities. Over the past decade, a number of physical and mental health disparities have been documented among specific racial and ethnic minority groups. Given these health disparities, strategies directed at effectively treating members of these communities are critical (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). For example, despite findings that rates of diabetes, syphilis, and gonorrhea and of poor mental health are disproportionately higher among specific subgroups of African Americans compared with similar groups of Whites, an emerging literature has illustrated significantly lower levels of availability, access, and use of health services among African American communities, as well as among other racial and ethnic minority communities (CDC, 2004a, 2004b). A potential shortcoming of existing health services may be that they fail to tap into identity-relevant ideologies of health for many minority individuals. For example, the help-seeking and treatment engagement behaviors required to access care may be dystonic with individuals' or groups' race-related social identities. In support of this idea, applying a mixed methods approach, Lambert (2004) found that groups of minority individuals possessed incrementally more negative attitudes toward seeking psychological services than their White counterparts and that these attitudes were embedded within the identity-related worldviews possessed by individuals from these groups.

To address these shortcomings, future research directed at reducing barriers to health resources and establishing more effective treatment and prevention strategies should be done in collaboration with minority individuals living within their communities (Edberg, Wong, Woo, & Doong, 2003; Neighbors, Braithwaite, & Thompson, 1995; Washington, Napoles-Springer, Forte, Alexander, & Perez-Stable, 2002). To this end, efforts to identify and investigate racially/ethnically-specific factors that engage clients in accordance with the attitudes and values they possess and increase minority individuals' amenability to treatment may be effective access-enhancement strategies. Substance use treatment programs incorporating cultural sensitivity and motivational components, for example, have demonstrated the ability to reduce risk for negative adjustment outcomes among minority clients (Longshore & Grills, 2000; Resnicow, Soler, Ahluwalia, Butler, & Braithwaite, 2000; Tubman, Wagner, Gil, & Pate, 2002). In this way, as health disparities continue to emerge, the need to design better treatment programs to reduce them will persist, becoming a focus for research using integrated models of racial identity development.

Although it is futile for health care providers to focus on changing clients' past formative developmental experiences, using an integrated framework of racial identity may enable health professionals to assist clients in renegotiating the

significance of past experiences toward promoting more positive health outcomes. To be successful at such endeavors, health care providers may also need to encourage the broader involvement of family or peer-group members because they have been shown to influence significantly individuals' racial socialization process (Thomas & Speight, 1999). This type of strategy exemplifies the need for researchers and practitioners to recognize the reciprocal functions of racial identity for individuals across various developmental contexts. As a result, practitioners might have better success recasting the manner in which individuals interpret their own developmental experiences and redirecting their adjustment outcomes across the life span (e.g., Figure 3). In view of these considerations, the developmental psychological integration outlined in this article can provide direction for improving existing theoretical frameworks, research programs, and practice-related efforts by providing a broader and more revealing lens by which to view individuals and their development over time.

## CONCLUSION

Critical to the continued benefits associated with racial identity research are integrated explorations of the developmental and adjustment outcome aspects of this construct. Contemporary perspectives in developmental psychology have generated plausible strategies for investigating and integrating existing lines of racial identity research in an inclusive and relational manner. Through such an integrated framework, the racial identity literature is capable of describing and explaining factors that contribute to the development, maintenance, and revision of racial identities, as well as the significance of those identities for the adaptive functioning of individuals across a wide range of domains, in a variety of contexts. Thus, this integrated approach for research may provide more compelling insight into the construct of racial identity by revealing the interdependency of development mechanisms, outcome processes, and identity trajectories among minority individuals. In addition, framing racial identity research within a developmental psychological perspective allows researchers to advance methodologies capable of addressing more complex scientific questions than have traditionally been available. Framing racial identity as a developmental variable (Holmbeck et al., 2003) will also provide practitioners with a knowledge base for identifying promising points and procedures for interventions to promote adaptive adjustment that are effective with racial minority individuals. Thus, both in theory and in practical application, an integrated racial identity perspective has the potential to link the traditional foci of racial identity literatures, which will enhance our understanding of the significance of this construct within minority individuals' lives.

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