

## ABSTRACT

CALDWELL, TICOLO SHARDAI. The relationship among racial identity, self-esteem, and theological orientations in African American college students. (Under the direction of Dr. Pamela P. Martin).

To date, much of the research about U.S. college students does not explicate how important, personal characteristics such as racial identity or self-esteem relate to faith, examined as theology in this study. Given some empirical studies document that African Americans are more religious than other ethnic groups (Taylor, Chatters, & Levin, 2004; Taylor, Lincoln, & Chatters, 2005), little research informs the existing literature about the role of theological teachings among African Americans in emerging adulthood (i.e., college students). More specifically, African Americans in this developmental stage might incorporate theological teachings as they grapple with issues surrounding racial identity and self-esteem (Cross, 1991; Kroger, 2007; Tatum, 2003). The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the role of racial identity, self-esteem, and theology among African American college students. A sample of 320 African American college students was recruited from a historically Black university in North Carolina. The findings indicated that African American college students with lower self-esteem was tended to identify with all racial identity scales except for Pre-Encounter-Assimilation and Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive. In addition, African American college students high in Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement and Internalization-Afrocentricity racial identity scales were more likely to endorse social legacy and otherworldliness theology scales. Lastly, hierarchical regression results revealed that theology scales otherworldliness and social legacy play a role in explaining racial identity more than self-esteem. Implications for future research are also discussed.

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The relationship among racial identity, self-esteem, and theological orientations in African  
American college students

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my family, especially...

to my parents for their motivation;

to my sister for her sense of humor;

to my fiancé for his patience and understanding.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Ticola Shardai Caldwell is from Charlotte, NC. She graduated from West Charlotte High School in 2003. She attended North Carolina State University in Raleigh, NC and graduated in 2007 with a Bachelor of Arts, magna cum laude, in Applied Psychology. In 2007 she enrolled in the graduate program in Psychology in the Public Interest at North Carolina State University. She is a member of the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA) and the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA).

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The relationship among racial identity, self-esteem, and theological orientations in African  
American college students

Institutions of higher learning are not only places for acquiring education but in many cases the academic, emotional, and social experiences at colleges and universities shape individuals' beliefs about various areas of life, such as employment, finances, health, faith, romantic partnerships, etc. For example, Phinney, Dennis, and Osorio (2006) found that college students attend college to improve their self-confidence and assist their families financially. In addition, research demonstrates that college graduates earn more money over the course of a lifetime (Owens, Krim, Rawls, & Holbert-Quince, 2010) and tend to have better health outcomes (Ross & Mirowsky, 2010). To date, much of the research on college students does not explicate how important personal characteristics, such as racial identity and self-esteem, relate to faith<sup>1</sup>. Essentially, the different educational, personal, and social experiences while attending college may shape how individuals explore, interpret, and reconcile beliefs about racial identity, self-esteem, and faith, examined as theology in this study. Particularly, at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), African American<sup>2</sup> college students may differ from African American students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). Research asserts that HBCUs provide more support (Allen, 1992), better student-faculty ratios, and more financial aid (Kim, 2002). However, HBCUs also face challenges, such as limited access to economic resources (Kim, 2002). Differences in college settings may influence African American college students at HBCUs in various ways. Thus, important questions surface about the role of racial identity, self-esteem, and theology in shaping the development of individuals entering emerging adulthood.

Arnett (2007) defines emerging adulthood as individuals between the ages of 18-25. This developmental stage is characterized as a time of change, instability, and chance for new opportunities (Arnett, 2007). Authors, such as Kroger (2007) and Tatum (2003), have found that individuals in emerging adulthood grapple with issues surrounding racial identity, especially African Americans. Other work has focused on emerging adulthood in regards to self-esteem and religion in diverse populations, such as Caucasians, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asians. Research suggests that, although self-esteem tends to decrease in adolescence, it begins to improve in emerging adulthood (Galambos, Barker, & Krahn, 2006; Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999). Religion during emerging adulthood is depicted as a time for college students to examine and compare their personal beliefs in relation to their parents' and guardians' beliefs (Barry & Nelson, 2005). Much of the research has been conducted with diverse groups of emerging adults and do not exclusively focus on African American college students. Therefore, this study will investigate racial identity, self-esteem, and theology among African American college students attending an HBCU.

Presently, the research on racial identity and self-esteem has provided some insight of the link between these two variables, yet this relationship still remains inconclusive (Parham & Helms, 1985; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006; Stephan & Rosenfield, 1979). Further, few research studies have been conducted assessing the role of racial identity and religion (Butler-Barnes, Martin, Dixon, & Robinson, 2008; Cone, 1997; Sanchez & Carter, 2005, West & Glaude, 2003) or religion and self-esteem (Ball, Armistead, & Austin 2003; Colbert, Jefferson, Gallo, & Davis, 2009; Donahue & Benson, 1995; Krause, 1992, 2004; Markstrom, 1999) in the lives of African

American college students. The studies are inconclusive as to the exact relationship between racial identity and religion and religion and self-esteem. Additionally, research neglects to investigate the association among racial identity, self-esteem, and theology. Therefore, during the transition period of emerging adulthood, it is important to understand how multiple factors related to identity influence educational, social, and personal experiences of African American college students at HBCUs.

As mentioned previously, this study seeks to examine the relationship among racial identity, self-esteem, and theology among African American college students. The role of self-esteem and theology in explaining the diversity in racial identity will be assessed. First, a review of the racial identity literature will be presented. Secondly, the links between racial identity and self-esteem will be examined. Thirdly, the connections between racial identity and theology will be discussed. Fourth, the hypotheses and methods will be explicated. Finally, the results and discussions will be outlined.

## **Racial Identity**

### **Review of Racial Identity Literature**

Racial identity refers to the process African Americans undergo to explore, understand, and acknowledge their African American heritage (Butler-Barnes et al., 2008; Helms, 1990; Sanders-Thompson & Akbar, 2004). Racial identity is sometimes used interchangeably with ethnic identity. Ethnic identity is defined as “a feeling of belonging to one’s group, a clear understanding of the meaning of one’s membership, positive attitudes, toward the group, familiarity with its history and culture, and involvement in practices” (Phinney et al., 1994, p. 169). In other words, ethnic identity refers to cultural associations

(e.g., language, country of origin, etc.), whereas racial identity refers to physical appearance (Frable, 1997; Phinney, 1996; Worrell, 2007). Although some researchers may use racial and ethnic identity interchangeably, this study will focus solely on research pertaining to racial identity.

For many Americans, race is a part of everyday life, especially African Americans (Carter, 2005). For instance, race permeates many social contexts (e.g., classrooms, workplace, etc.) that might shape African American college students' perceptions about their racial identity. Specifically, racial identity theory attempts to explain the varying perspectives African Americans have regarding their racial group membership. Racial identity scholars assert that African Americans may have varying beliefs and attitudes regarding the meaning they place on their racial group membership (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Additionally, research reported that during emerging adulthood, African American college students are confronted with issues of identity and finding their place in American society (Parham, 1989). Parham (1989) argued that emerging adults may experience changes in racial identity during this developmental stage. For instance, a relatively recent study indicated that, during emerging adulthood, African American college students tend to have more positive racial identity attitudes than younger African American adolescents in the same sample (Worrell, 2008). However, the results of this cross-sectional study have a cohort effect due to the small sample size (personal communication with author, Worrell, 2/23/2011).

In this study, the Nigrescence theory will be used to describe racial identity among African American college students. Thus, the following section will review the Nigrescence

theory, the operationalization of the Racial Identity Attitudes Scale-Black, the revised Nigrescence theory, and lastly, the expanded Nigrescence theory, which will be utilized for this investigation.

### **Overview of the Early Nigrescence Theory**

Influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, Cross (1971) began to conceptualize and document divergent racial experiences among African Americans. The “Negro-to-Black Conversion Experience,” (Cross, 1971), later known as the Nigrescence theory, represented some of the early research focused on comprehending the complex attitudes and behaviors among African Americans. Early research on the Nigrescence model included five stages: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment. Each stage will be briefly described below.

*Pre-Encounter*, the first stage, is characterized as feeling shameful about being Black, trying to assimilate with White culture, and acting or behaving in ways that are degrading to other Blacks. In the second stage, *Encounter*, individuals experienced an unexpected racial event or a circumstance that forced them to reexamine preexisting beliefs and values about racial group membership (Cross, 1991; Sellers et al., 1998). This event may be either positive or negative, varying in intensity of racial content (Cross, 1991; Sellers et al., 1998).

Examples range from the assassination of an African American political figure to a simple conversation about race with a friend. In addition, the individual begins to embrace his/her racial group membership (i.e., cultural and heritage). Next, in the *Immersion-Emersion* stage individuals have embraced pro-Black and anti-White attitudes and have begun to participate in Black activities. If other Blacks are accepting of the individual, then one can move toward

the next stage. The fourth stage, *Internalization*, is described as an individual who is secure with one's Black identity, however not committed. Anti-White attitudes also decline and more pluralistic nonracist perspectives emerge. Ultimately, the individual resolves the differences between the old and new identity. The fifth and final stage, *Internalization-Commitment*, is characterized by an individual becoming involved in community activities and organizations that targets some of the challenges in African American communities. In some cases, individuals in this stage may develop a new identity but have no involvement or action in the Black Community. In summary, this early racial identity conceptualization postulated that the Pre-Encounter stage indicated self-hatred and poor psychological functioning, while the Internalization stage indicated self-acceptance or actualization and positive psychological well-being (Cross, 1971).

In 1981, Parham and Helms operationalized Cross' (1971) conceptualization of racial identity among African Americans. They operationalized and validated Cross' model, which lead to the development of the Racial Identity Attitudes Scale- Black (RIAS-B). This scale, a five-point attitudinal measure, was created initially to assess racial identity among African American college students. Interested in the role of race among African American college students' preference of a counselor, Parham and Helms (1981) found that African American college students with Pre-Encounter attitudes were more likely to favor White counselors, and students with Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment attitudes enlisted Black counselors in most cases. This finding is significant because, once a college student has experienced a racial encounter, he/she begins to prefer counselors of the same race. In conclusion, Parham and Helms' (1981) study was seminal in

contributing to the racial identity literature and providing a tool for measuring racial identity (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002).

The RIAS-B, as an assessment tool, was beneficial in advancing the understanding of racial identity and various psycho-educational outcomes among African American college students. For instance, research using the RIAS-B found higher levels of depression were linked to Pre-Encounter and Encounter attitudes, while Internalization attitudes were not associated with depression (Mumford, 1994). In another study using the RIAS-B, Brookins and colleagues (1996) investigated the association between racial identity and psychological feelings of closeness among African American college students. These authors found that more Internalized racial identity attitudes indicated stronger psychological closeness. In research examining achievement among African American male college students, Campbell and Fleming (2000) explored the relationship among racial identity, fear of success, and achievement behavior. In a sample of 141 male students, they found that fear of success was significantly linked to high Pre-Encounter and Encounter attitudes. In addition, high Pre-Encounter and Encounter attitudes contributed to poorer study habits, resulting in lower GPAs. Lastly, Hughes (2006) examined the relationship between career maturity and racial identity among African Americans athletes. The findings revealed a negative and significant relationship between career maturity and Pre-Encounter, Encounter, and Immersion-Emersion attitudes, as well as a positive and significant relationship between career maturity and Internalization attitudes. In short, these studies indicated that more internalized attitudes exhibit better psychological and academic outcomes for African American college students.

Further, it is important to underscore that racial identity in African American college students is a complex phenomenon and is influenced by multiple facets of collegiate life.

Although the RIAS-B has contributed to the literature on racial identity and African American college students, researchers have found some drawbacks related to construct validity and conceptualization. For instance, Ponterotto and Wise (1987) identified issues with the internal consistency of some RIAS-B subscales. The authors found moderately high intercorrelations indicating nonindependence and a lack of discreteness between subscales. In other words, the four subscales are very similar and may be measuring the same constructs (Vogt, 2005). Ponterotto and Wise (1987) suggested the scale be explored for alternative factor solutions and reexamine the overall psychometric properties. They conducted a study with 205 Black college students to investigate the construct validity of the RIAS-B. The results revealed strong evidence for Pre-Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization factors. However, the findings indicated minuscule support for the Encounter stage.

In addition to psychometric concerns, Akbar (1989) highlighted other concerns regarding conceptualization. First, the Nigrescence process is not conceptualized as a core component of the Black self-identity. Thus, Akbar (1989) argued that, according to Cross' (1971) model, the Nigrescence process is the result of environmental factors (e.g., oppression). Further, Akbar (1981) suggests that Nigrescence should be the core of Black self-identity because it is a naturally occurring phenomenon rather than a reactionary developmental process. Secondly, Akbar (1989) asserted that the role of spirituality should be considered in the Encounter stage. He contends that, in some cases, spiritual conversions are the origins for an Encounter experience, and not solely race. In other words, a change in

spiritual values may trigger a change in racial identity. Taken together, these critiques of the Nigrescence theory served as a catalyst for the emergence of the revised theory and new scales to capture the multidimensionality of racial identity.

### **Revised Nigrescence Theory, 1991**

To address the conceptual and psychometric concerns with the RIAS-B, Cross (1991) introduced a revised version of the Nigrescence theory. A number of factors contributed to the revision of the original Nigrescence theory. First, the original theory utilized several different data sources such as observations, self-analysis, and case studies. The data sources were beneficial in conceptualizing the Nigrescence theory; however, more rigorous methods are needed to fully understand racial identity. Second, the Nigrescence theory was created during the historical period of the Black Power and Civil Rights Movements. Since that time, societal norms have changed greatly for African Americans and need to be considered in relation to racial identity attitudes. The goal of the revised theory is to incorporate both historical and contemporary issues in Black identity attitudes. Third, the original model stressed the importance of self-hatred and disapproving attitudes regarding one's race. Empirical research indicated a diversity of perspectives within Black identity; therefore, race is not always linked to self-hatred and negative attitudes about one's self (Cross, 1991). Lastly, the 1971 model emphasized a complete change in one's identity. The current perspective focuses on change and continuity within one's identity (Cross, 1991).

Cross (1991) describes two important revisions. First, the Internalization and Internalization-Commitment stages were combined to create a new fourth stage called Internalization. Second, multiple attitudes were identified within each stage, except for

Encounter, to account for the diversity within racial identity attitudes. See Table 1 for examples for each racial identity attitude. The Pre-Encounter stage has two attitudes: Assimilation and Anti-Black attitudes. Assimilation attitudes are characterized by views that primarily focused upon American Protestant work ethic and individualism. African Americans who endorse these attitudes place little significance on race, and often times, they do not engage in traditional African American customs and practices. For example, an African American college student may decline to celebrate African American events, such as Kwanzaa or Black History Month. Pre-Encounter Anti-Black attitudes are divided into Miseducation and Racial Self-Hatred. Individuals who endorse Miseducation attitudes tend to accept negative stereotypes about Blacks and separate themselves from African American communities. For instance, an African American college student may hear a stereotype, such as “Black people don’t read,” and begin to treat other African American college students as if it is true. Similarly, individuals who ascribe to Racial Self-Hatred tend to have strong negative feelings concerning their racial group membership. Furthermore, individuals having these attitudes tend to limit their interactions with other African Americans and their participation in African American organizations. For example, an African American college student may only apply to predominantly White institutions in order to limit their interactions with other African Americans. Next, the Immersion-Emersion stage also has two attitudes: Anti-White and Intense Black Involvement. Individuals with Anti-White attitudes have a strong hate for Whites and White society. Cross (1991) explicated that these individuals have pent-up rage due to structural inequalities. For example, an African American college student may purposely choose to attend an exclusively all-Black church to avoid contact with White

Americans. Individuals with Intense Black Involvement attitudes are dedicated and obsessed with, in a cult-like fashion, African American culture practices. For example, an African American college student may secretly join an extremist group with the ultimate goal of African supremacy. The final stage, Internalization has three attitudes: Nationalist, Biculturalists, and Multiculturalists. Individuals having Nationalist attitudes tend to stress Afrocentric perspectives and engage in African American issues and culture. For example, an African American college student may only be concerned about police profiling in regards to African Americans, but not other minorities. For Biculturalist, they tend to place equal importance on being American and Black. They also engage in mainstream and Black issues. For instance, an African American female college student may only be concerned about racial and gender equality but not concerned about sexual orientation issues. Multiculturalists identify with three or more reference group orientations and also grant equal significance to multiple categories (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc.). For example, an African American college student is equally concerned about multiple issues. Therefore, the student may be a part of the Gay-Straight Alliance, a volunteer at the local Women's Center, and a member of the African American Cultural Center on campus. The revised Nigrescence theory provided an alternative perspective on the numerous attitudinal beliefs among African Americans. However, the theory still did not fully capture the mass diversity within African American identity. In addition, a current scale did not exist to measure the multidimensionality of racial identity.

### **Expanded Nigrescence Theory, 2001**

To examine the new conceptualization of racial identity, the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) was developed in 2001 (Vandiver et al., 2002). The expanded Nigrescence theory emerged out of the revised theory and included two essential changes. First, African Americans are assumed to have some level of all attitudes. Second, the fourth stage, Internalization, includes two additional identities. The descriptions for Black Nationalist and Biculturalist remain the same. On the CRIS, Black Nationalist is referred to as Afrocentricity. This perspective refers to a worldview that places African principles at the center of all thoughts, interactions, and behavior (Asante, 1991). Afrocentric principles include unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith (Karenga, 1965). See Table 2 for definitions of the seven principles. Additionally, Biculturalist is measured under Multiculturalist because the scale supports both Biculturalist and Multiculturalist items. In addition, Internalization-Multiculturalist was divided into racial and inclusive identities. Multiculturalist Racial attitudes refer to individuals that are proud of their racial group membership, but they have little interest in building coalitions with Whites. Multiculturalist Inclusive individuals proudly embrace African American communities and strive to build coalitions with all diverse cultural groups. The purpose of the multiple identities is to reflect the diversity within the Internalization stage.

### **Racial Identity and the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS)**

The majority of CRIS studies have focused on validating the scale (Vandiver, Phagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross, & Worrell, 2001; Worell, Vandiver, & Cross, 2004) and

measuring racial identity attitudes (Gardner-Kitt & Worrel, 2006; Worrell, 2008) with diverse age groups (e.g., children, adolescents, and adults) of African Americans. Reliability estimates for each scale range from .76 to .84 and are provided in Table 3. In addition, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted and supported the CRIS factor structures (Worrell et al., 2004). Anglin and Wade (2007) used the CRIS to investigate racial socialization, racial identity, and adjustment in 141 African American college students. The sample included 83 African American students from a PWI and 58 African American students from an HBCU. The authors found that Internalized Multicultural attitudes were positively related to college adjustment, while Pre-Encounter Miseducation attitudes were related to low college adjustment. Anglin and Wade (2007) did not test for differences in school type. Currently, a limited amount of research using the CRIS exists regarding racial identity and psycho-educational outcomes among African American college students.

In sum, racial identity literature has evolved over time. Emerging in the 1970s as a developmental stage theory, racial identity strives to understand how African Americans conceptualize and navigate issues of race in America. In addition, racial identity has been examined in relation to multiple concepts, especially self-esteem. Racial identity and self-esteem are often used to measure different aspects of identity (Cross, 1991). To date, the research on the relationship between racial identity and self-esteem in African American college students is equivocal (Parham & Helms, 1985; Rowley et al., 1998; Sellers et al., 2006; Stephan & Rosenfield, 1979). The following section will define self-esteem and examine the relationship between racial identity and self-esteem.

### **Self-esteem**

Throughout the life span, self-esteem develops and fluctuates (Robins & Trzeniewski, 2005). Self-esteem refers to a central evaluative component of the self-reflection, the extent to which individuals believe they are worthwhile and merit respect (Rosenberg, 1965). Two major types of self-esteem include global and specific self-esteem. Global self-esteem is a general evaluation of the self that reflects overall psychological well-being, whereas specific self-esteem is a precise component of the self that focuses on behavior outcomes. Examples of specific self-esteem represent academic self-esteem, collective self-esteem, sexual self-esteem, etc. (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Rosenberg, Schoenbach, Schooler, & Rosenberg, 1995). Although various types of self-esteem exist, global and collective self-esteem represent the types most frequently associated to racial identity (refer to Rosenberg et al., 1995 and Cast & Burke, 2002 regarding specific self-esteem).

Historically, researchers have made assumptions that African Americans have a fractured sense of self (Allport, 1937; Gaines & Reeds, 1994) because of societal conditions in the US in regards to race. This assumption was first addressed in Cross' (1971) initial conceptualization of racial identity, which included personal identity and reference group orientation. Personal identity (PI) refers to personality traits and psychological functioning. Reference group orientation (RGO) entails social membership or identity with groups (e.g., identification with a group based on race) (Cross, 1991). Thus, in Cross' 1971 model, African Americans with Pre-Encounter attitudes are more likely to have low psychological well-being. Cross (1991) found no consistent relationship between personal identity and reference group orientation. Therefore, the revised Nigrescence model clearly defined the

terms as two different entities. Further research indicated that personal identity studies examine individual universal traits of behavior, while reference group orientation research focuses on group identity with a special emphasis on race (Cross, 1991). For example, some African American college students can have a pro-White RGO and not necessarily be at risk for low self-esteem, or one with a Black RGO is not assumed to have high self-esteem. The only exception is if an African American college student hates being Black; then RGO and PI become coupled. For instance, if an African American college student develops low-self-esteem and attributes it to him/her being Black, then he/she will automatically dislike him/herself personally and his/her group membership because of race. Thus, racial identity is not always associated with low self-esteem in African American college students. This notion is also apparent in Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) work on collective self-esteem. They distinguish between personal and collective self-esteem in regards to race. In other words, the authors measure two parts of self-esteem: the importance of race in relation to the individual's self-esteem and the importance of race in relation to the racial group with which the individual identifies. Differentiating between the two types of self-esteem are crucial because how the individual identifies with his/her racial group dictates his/her interactions with other racial groups. For instance, Crocker and Major (1989) found that individuals are more likely to value individuals in the same racial groups than others outside the group. This has implications for racial identity attitudes. For example, an African American college student who values his/her own racial group members more than other racial groups is more likely to demonstrate Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement and Internalization-

Afrocentricity attitudes. Therefore, this study will assess how racial identity and self-esteem influence each other in African Americans.

### **Racial Identity and Self-esteem in African American College Students**

The findings are equivocal in regards to the exact relationship between self-esteem and racial identity. Parham and Helms (1985), using the RIAS-B, conducted a study with 166 African Americans from PWIs and found Pre-Encounter and Immersion-Emersion attitudes predicted lower self-esteem, while Encounter and Internalization attitudes predicted higher self-esteem. In addition, the study showed self-esteem fluctuated based on the racial identity attitude. In another study, Rowley et al. (1998) examined racial identity and self-esteem among high school and college students. Their results indicated a non-significant relationship existed between racial identity and self-esteem for high school and college students. The findings suggest that the Black experience is complex and may vary across age groups. Awad (2007), using the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS), found no relationship between racial identity and GPA, GRE, or self-esteem in a sample of 313 African American college students at an HBCU. Based on the results, Awad (2007) suggested that racial identity and self-esteem may not play a direct role on test performance. Negga, Applewhite, and Livingston (2007) investigated the role that stress plays in school using the CRIS racial composition, self-esteem, and social support in African American college students. This study compared the differences between 165 African American students at a PWI and 344 African American students at a HBCU on three variables. The results found that higher self-esteem, sense of control, and social support related to less stress at the HBCU. In addition, self-esteem was negatively associated with total stress (i.e., academic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and

environmental) for African Americans attending PWI. This study did not test for differences between institution type. Although previous research has focused on the association between racial identity and self-esteem in African American college students, these variables warrant more investigation. There are still vague conclusions about how racial identity and self-esteem influence African American college students, particularly during the critical time period of emerging adulthood. Thus, the aim of this study is to assess the role of racial identity and self-esteem among African American college students.

### **Theological Orientations**

Religion is a significant part of the daily experiences for many African Americans (Mattis, 2000; Mattis & Jagers, 2001; Taylor et al., 2004). For example, studies focusing on African American college students found religion and spirituality to be connected to their self-identity (Constantine, Lewis, Conner, & Sanchez, 2003; Spencer, Fegley, & Harpalani, 2003). In another study, Johnson and colleagues (2003) found a link between academic success and religious beliefs among African American college students. Knowledge of religious activities can give insight in comprehending how African Americans make meaning out of their life experiences (Lincoln & Mamyia, 1990). Multiple scholars have contributed to the understanding of religious orientations (Allport & Ross, 1967; Berkel, Armstrong, & Cokley, 2004). Allport and Ross (1967) highlighted two types of religious orientations: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic individuals benefit from the social and personal rewards of religion, such as social status and comfort. Individuals with intrinsic orientations are fully immersed in their religious beliefs, which are reflected in their daily actions. Berkel, Armstrong, and Cokley (2004) examined the differences between religiosity and spirituality

in 171 African American college students. They found significant associations between the religiosity (i.e., religious services and affiliations) and spirituality (i.e., spiritual beliefs and values) variables, indicating the multidimensionality between the variables. In other words, both variables overlap in various aspects. In addition, no significant differences were found between males and females in the study. Berkel et al. (2004) concluded that researchers need to understand the impact of religious orientations on psychological well-being in African American college students.

Various studies have found a link between African American college students' engagement in religious activities and religious orientations among African American college students. For instance, Constantine et al. (2000) found that African American college students consume more religious content and request spiritual advice more than White students. In another study, Mattis (1997) found that African American college students tended to score higher on measures assessing religion than European American college students. In addition, Johnson and Matre (1991) found that African American college students attend more religious services than White college students. Earnshaw (2000) found that college students utilized religion to help answer questions regarding the meaning of life. One study has provided evidence for the relationship between racial identity and religious orientations. Sanchez and Carter (2005) explored the associations between racial identity and religious orientations in African American college students. The results from this study found connections between race, religion, and identity with significant relationships between racial identity and religious orientations. Although the existing literature on religious behavior among African American college students informs researchers about religious activities (e.g.,

how often attend church and prayer life), more research is warranted to investigate how theology influences their racial identity.

### **Theological Orientations Research**

Theological orientations underscore the diverse perspectives communicated in churches. Presently, the area of theological orientations has been overlooked and understudied, especially in relation to African American college students' racial identity attitudes. Additionally, theological orientations involve messages that promote social justice, inspire hope and resilience, and provide interpretation of Biblical principles (Butler-Barnes, Martin, Dixon & Robinson, 2008; & Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Further, theological orientations emphasize a personal relationship with God and how individuals engage in society (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Martin 2001; Pargarment & Maton, 2000).

### **Theological Orientations and Racial Identity**

To date, a limited amount of research on theological orientations and racial identity exists among African American college students. Martin et al. (under review) reported three particular areas of theological orientation: Biblical principles, social legacy, and otherworldliness. Biblical principles refer to universal truths expressed in the Bible and the belief that all humanity is created in God's image. Historically, Mattis et al. (2003) assert that African Americans use Biblical principles as descriptions of how to navigate and live in challenging environments. Social legacy refers to the application of social justice messages by African Americans in their communities. Social legacy highlights the role of the Black church's involvement in three important time periods: Enslavement, racial segregation, and the Civil Rights Movement. Otherworldliness focuses on individual preparation to enter

heaven. This scale underscores the idea that some clergy minimize societal stressors, such as inequality and racism, and focus on entrance into heaven (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

In one of the few studies to examine theological orientations, Butler-Barnes et al. (2008) investigated the relationship between theological orientations and racial identity in African American churches. The results indicate a positive and significant relationship between theological orientation and racial identity. The findings from this study also found a negative and significant association between otherworldliness and multicultural perspectives about race. As one of the first studies to examine theological orientations, this research begins to move the religion literature beyond traditional indices of religious behavior such as church attendance, prayer, and intrinsic/extrinsic religiosity.

### **The Present Study**

Previous research provided some evidence for the association between racial identity and self-esteem (Parham & Helms, 1985; Rowley et al., 1998; Sellers et al., 2006; Stephan & Rosenfield, 1979) and self-esteem and religion (Ball et al., 2003; Colbert et al., 2009; Donahue & Benson, 1995; Krause, 1992, 2004; Markstrom, 1999). In addition, support for the relationship between racial identity and theology has been found (Butler-Barnes et al., 2008). However, to date, research has not explored the link between racial identity, self-esteem, and theological orientations. The aim of this study is to explore the relationship among racial identity, self-esteem, and theological orientations in African Americans college students with a specific focus on examining the role of self-esteem and theological orientations in explaining racial identity.

## **Covariates**

Multiple demographic factors may influence self-esteem and theological orientations in predicting racial identity. Therefore, this study will control for gender, age, and socioeconomic status.

**Gender.** The first covariate is gender. Chavous (2008) cited that African American males and females define race very differently. This finding is corroborated in Sanchez and Carter's (2005) study with college students. The authors found that African American males scored higher on the Internalization stage than females. Thus, for the purpose of this study gender will be used as a covariate.

**Age.** The second covariate is age. Yip, Seaton and Sellers (2006) examined racial identity across the lifespan and found that individuals in each age group (i.e., adolescents, college students and adults) endorsed racial identity attitudes across the spectrum. In addition, Yip et al. (2006) found that overall older adults tended to identify with Internalization attitudes more than younger groups, who tended to identify with less mature statuses such as Pre-Encounter. Worrell (2008) found that adolescents scored higher on Pre-Encounter scales than young adults, who scored higher on the Internalization scale. In addition, adults reported higher Assimilation scores than young adults. These studies denote the complexity of age and racial identity. Therefore, age will be evaluated as a covariate.

**Socioeconomic Status.** The final covariate is socioeconomic status (SES). Carter (1988) investigated the relationship between SES and racial identity. SES was assessed using multiple variables such as parental occupation status, parental education, perceived group social status, etc. He found that SES varied, but did not predict racial identity in African

American college students. To confirm this finding, SES will be included as a covariate. This study will measure SES based on a self-reported 4-point scale: working class, middle class, upper middle, and wealthy.

## **Research Questions and Hypothesis**

### **Racial Identity and Self-Esteem**

RQ1: Is there a correlation between racial identity and self-esteem?

H1: Racial identity will be associated with self-esteem. Research on racial identity and self-esteem has been inconclusive over the years. Stephan and Rosenfield (1979) found a significant correlation, while Rosenberg (1979) found no significant relationship between self-esteem and racial identity. However, Cross (1991) noted that different racial identity attitudes may evoke different perspectives about self-esteem. For instance, Pre-Encounter attitudes are usually considered unhealthy attitudes, therefore associated with lower self-esteem. Therefore, racial identity will be both positively and negatively associated with self-esteem. Pre-Encounter and Immersion-Emersion scales will be negatively associated with self-esteem and Internalization scales will be positively associated with self-esteem.

### **Racial Identity and Theological Orientations**

RQ2: Is there a correlation between racial identity and theological orientations?

H2: Racial identity will be both positively and negatively related to theological orientations. Specifically, all racial identity scales will be positively associated with theological orientation-Biblical principles. Pre-Encounter scales, Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White, will separately be negatively associated with the Social legacy theological orientation. Social legacy will be positively related to Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement,

Internalization-Afrocentricity and Multiculturalist Inclusive. Based on prior studies (Butler-Barnes et al., 2008; Sanchez & Carter, 2005), African American college students who report higher levels of Internalization- Afrocentricity will be more likely to also endorse Social legacy. Lastly, Immersion-Emerson-Black Involvement and Internatlization-Afrocentricity will separately be negatively related to otherworldliness. Pre-Encounter, Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White, and Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive will be positively related to otherworldliness. Based on previous research (Butler-Barnes et al., 2008), African American college students who score higher on Pre-Encounter subscales will be more likely to score lower on social legacy and otherworldliness.

### **Racial Identity, Self-Esteem and Theological Orientations**

RQ3: Will theological orientations account for more variance explained in predicting racial identity than the covariates (i.e., gender, age, SES) and self-esteem?

#### **Pre-Encounter-Assimilation**

H3a: After controlling in step one for gender, age and socioeconomic status, self-esteem will predict Pre-Encounter-Assimilation racial identity in step two. Self-esteem will account for a significant percent of the variance above and beyond the variance in step one. Biblical principle and otherworldliness theological orientations, entered in the third step, will predict Pre-Encounter-Assimilation racial identity. Biblical principle and otherworldliness will account for an additional percent of the variance above and beyond self-esteem.

#### **Pre-Encounter-Miseducation**

H3b: After controlling in step one for gender, age and socioeconomic status, self-esteem will predict Pre-Encounter-Miseducation racial identity in step two. Self-esteem will

account for a significant percent of the variance above and beyond the variance in step one. Biblical principle and otherworldliness theological orientations, entered in the third step, will predict Pre-Encounter-Miseducation racial identity. Biblical principle and otherworldliness will account for an additional percent of the variance above and beyond self-esteem.

### **Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred**

H3c: After controlling in step one for gender, age and socioeconomic status, self-esteem will predict Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred racial identity in step two. Self-esteem will account for a significant percent of the variance above and beyond the variance in step one. Biblical principle and otherworldliness theological orientations, entered in the third step, will predict Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred racial identity. Biblical principle and otherworldliness will account for an additional percent of the variance above and beyond self-esteem.

### **Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White**

H3d: After controlling in step one for gender, age and socioeconomic status, self-esteem will predict Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White racial identity in step two. Self-esteem will account for a significant percent of the variance above and beyond the variance in step one. Biblical principle and otherworldliness theological orientations, entered in the third step, will predict Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White racial identity. Biblical principle and otherworldliness will account for an additional percent of the variance above and beyond self-esteem.

### **Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement**

H3e: After controlling in step one for gender, age and socioeconomic status, self-esteem will predict Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement racial identity in step

two. Self-esteem will account for a significant percent of the variance above and beyond the variance in step one. Biblical principle and Social legacy theological orientations, entered in the third step, will predict Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement racial identity. Biblical principle and Social Legacy will account for an additional percent of the variance above and beyond self-esteem.

### **Internalization-Afrocentricity**

H3f: After controlling in step one for gender, age and socioeconomic status, self-esteem will predict Internalization-Afrocentricity racial identity in step two. Self-esteem will account for a significant percent of the variance above and beyond the variance in step one. Biblical principle and Social legacy theological orientations, entered in the third step, will predict Internalization-Afrocentricity racial identity. Biblical principle and Social legacy will account for an additional percent of the variance above and beyond self-esteem.

### **Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive**

H3g: After controlling in step one for gender, age and socioeconomic status, self-esteem will predict Internalization-Multiculturalist racial identity in step two. Self-esteem will account for a significant percent of the variance above and beyond the variance in step one. Biblical principle, Social legacy, and otherworldliness theological orientations, entered in the third step, will predict Internalization-Multiculturalist racial identity. Biblical principle, Social legacy and otherworldliness will account for an additional percent of the variance above and beyond self-esteem.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

A convenience sample of 339 self-identified African American undergraduate students attending a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) in North Carolina participated in the study. This study focused on emerging adulthood ages 18-25. Therefore, a total of 12 African American college students that did not meet the criteria were removed from the sample. Also, 7 additional students were omitted due to missing data. A total of 320 students were used for this study. The mean age of participants was 19 years old. The sample was 45% male and 54% female. Forty-six percent were freshman, 11% were sophomores, 25% were juniors, 13% were seniors and 3% were students who have been at the university for five or more years. The data were collected in various departments such as psychology, education, computer science, mathematics, and nursing. The respondents received extra credit in their courses for their participation in the study.

### **Procedure**

Informed consent was given to each participant and read aloud. Next, the participants were asked to complete the confidential questionnaire during their regularly scheduled class time. The questionnaire consisted of the Cross Racial Identity Scale (Vandiver et al., 2002), Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale, and the African American Protestant Church Scale (Martin et al., under-review) and a demographic assessment.

### **Measures**

**Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS).** The CRIS is a six-factor structure questionnaire based on 2001 expanded Nigrescence theory (Vandiver, Cross, Fhagen-Smith, Worrell,

Swim, & Caldwell, 2000). The scales are based on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Please refer to sample items for each subscale found in Table 2. There is no overall CRIS score and each scale is assessed individually. The CRIS reliability estimates range from .65 to .90 (Simmons, Worrell, & Berry, 2008). The reliability estimates for the current study range from .26 to .52.

**African American Protestant Church Scale (AAPCH).** The African American Protestant Church Scale (Martin et al., under-review) is an 18-item questionnaire that measures three dimensions of theological orientations ( $\alpha = .77$ ). These orientations include: Biblical principles, Social legacy, and otherworldliness. Using a 4-point Likert scale, the scale is arranged along a continuum that ranges from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*). Biblical principles ( $\alpha = .82$ ) refer to universal truths expressed in the Bible and the belief that all humanity is created in God's image (e.g., "My church teaches me how to develop a closer relationship with God/Christ."). This subscale consists of seven items. Social Legacy ( $\alpha = .69$ ) refers to the expression of social justice and cultural messages by African American Protestant faith communities (e.g., "My church teaches us to have pride in Black/African American heritage."). This subscale consists of five items. Otherworldliness ( $\alpha = .75$ ) focuses on individual preparation to enter heaven (e.g., "The sermons of the pastor/minister of my church tend to focus on the afterlife or getting into Heaven."). This subscale includes six items. The reliability estimates for the current study range from .41 to .42.

**Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES).** Self-esteem ( $\alpha = .79$ ) was assessed using the 10-item Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Participants rate items on a 4-point

Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*). Higher scores indicate a positive self-esteem. Sample question are: "I feel I do not have much to be proud of" or "I feel that I have a good number of qualities." The reliability estimates for the current study is .51.

### **Analysis Strategies**

A power analysis was conducted using G\*Power 3 statistical software (Erdfelder, Faul & Buchner, 1996). The analysis reveals that for a moderate effect size ( $f^2 = .15$ ), significance level of .05, and a power of .95, a total sample size of  $n = 138$  is needed. The current sample size of 320 provides adequate power to examine racial identity, self-esteem and theological orientations in African American college students. In addition, test of normality, regression diagnostics and descriptive statistics will be conducted.

To answer the first two research questions, a Pearson product-moment correlation will be conducted. This statistical procedure is used to assess the direction and degree of a relationship among racial identity, theological orientations, self-esteem and covariates. To address the last question, a series of hierarchical regressions will be conducted to test the hypothesized relationships. Based on a correlation matrix, each hierarchical regression, predictor variables will be added to the model in a specific order determined in advance by the researcher. The results will indicate how much each variable contributes to the overall model (Keith, 2006). Gender, age, and socioeconomic status will be entered as covariates in step one. Step two will include self-esteem and the final step will add theological orientations.

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics for all variables were examined, including mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, minimum and maximum. For a summary of the descriptive statistics see Table 3.

**Research Question 1: Is there a correlation between racial identity and self-esteem?** A correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between racial identity and self-esteem; see Table 4. Five out of the seven racial identity scales were significantly correlated to self-esteem. First, Pre-Encounter-Miseducation was negatively correlated to self-esteem. For African American college students, higher attitudes in Pre-Encounter-Miseducation indicate lower levels of self-esteem. Second, Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred attitudes were negatively related to self-esteem. Higher attitudes in Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred denote lower levels of self-esteem. Third, Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White was negatively correlated to self-esteem. Higher attitudes in Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White imply lower levels of self-esteem. Fourth, Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement was negatively related to self-esteem. Higher attitudes in Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement indicate lower levels of self-esteem. Lastly, Internalization-Afrocentricity was negatively correlated to self-esteem. Higher attitudes in Internalization-Afrocentricity suggest lower levels of self-esteem. No other racial identity attitudes were significantly related to self-esteem.

**Research Question 2: Is there a correlation between racial identity and theological orientations?** In order to determine the relationship between racial identity and

theological orientations a correlation was conducted; see Table 4. There were no significant correlations for racial identity attitudes and Biblical principles. Racial identity attitudes, Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement and Internalization-Afrocentricity were both positively correlated to Social legacy. In addition, Pre-Encounter-Assimilation, Pre-Encounter-Miseducation, Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White, Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement, and Internalization-Afrocentricity were all positively related to Otherworldliness.

**Research Question 3: Will theological orientations account for more variance explained in predicting racial identity than the covariates (i.e., gender, age, SES) and self-esteem?** Before a series of hierarchical regressions were conducted to assess the relationship among racial identity, self-esteem and theological orientations were correlated; see Table 4. According to guidelines provided by Vogt (2005), only significant relationships between independent variables and dependent variables were used to inform further analysis. Therefore, the following hierarchical regressions only tested significant relationships among covariates, self-esteem and theological orientations in predicting racial identity.

The first hierarchical regression predicted Pre-Encounter-Assimilation racial identity as the dependent variable. In the first step, covariates: gender, age and SES were entered. In the second step, self-esteem was entered. In the third step, otherworldliness was entered. The first model was not significant,  $F(3, 287) = .74, p = .53$ , and explained .8% of the variance in Pre-Encounter-Assimilation. None of the covariates were significantly associated with Pre-Encounter-Assimilation (See Table 5). The second model was not significant,  $F(4, 287) = 1.05, p = .38$ , and explained 2% of the variance in Pre-Encounter-Assimilation. Neither

covariates nor self-esteem were significantly associated with Pre-Encounter-Assimilation; see Table 5. The third model was not significant,  $F(5, 287) = 1.89, p = .20$ , and explained 3% of the variance in Pre-Encounter-Assimilation. Neither covariates nor self-esteem were significantly associated with Pre-Encounter-Assimilation. However, otherworldliness was positively related,  $p = .02$ , to Pre-Encounter-Assimilation.

The second hierarchical regression predicted Pre-Encounter-Miseducation racial identity as the dependent variable. In the first step, covariates: gender, age and SES were entered. In the second step, self-esteem was entered. In the third step, otherworldliness was entered. The first model was not significant,  $F(3, 289) = 2.43, p = .07$ , and explained 3% of the variance in Pre-Encounter-Miseducation. The covariates age and SES were not significantly associated with Pre-Encounter-Miseducation. However, gender was negatively associated with Pre-Encounter-Miseducation. Females tend to have lower Pre-encounter-Miseducation attitudes than males (The second model was significant,  $F(4, 289) = 2.97, p < .05$ , and explained 4% of the variance in Pre-Encounter-Miseducation. In addition, lower self-esteem indicates higher Pre-Encounter-Miseducation attitudes. The third model was significant,  $F(5, 289) = 4.78, p < .05$ , and explained 8% of the variance in Pre-Encounter-Miseducation. In addition, self-esteem was no longer significant when otherworldliness was added in step 3. Otherworldliness was positively related,  $p < .001$ , to Pre-Encounter-Miseducation. Table 6 presents the findings on Pre-Encounter-Miseducation.

The third hierarchical regression predicted Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred racial identity as the dependent variable. In the first step, covariates: gender, age and SES were entered. In the second step, self-esteem was entered. No theological orientations scales were related to

Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred. The first model was not significant,  $F(3, 296) = .83, p = .48$ , and explained .8% of the variance in Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred. None of the covariates were significantly associated with Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred; see Table 7. The second model was significant,  $F(4, 296) = 8.27, p < .001$ , and explained 10% of the variance in Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred. None of the covariates were significantly associated with Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred; see Table 7. However, self-esteem was negatively associated,  $p < .001$ , to Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred; see Table 7.

The fourth hierarchical regression predicted Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White racial identity as the dependent variable. Table 8 illustrates the findings for Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White. The first model was significant,  $F(3, 287) = 6.86, p < .001$ , and explained 7% of the variance in Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White. The covariates age and SES were not significantly associated with Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White. However, gender was negatively associated with Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White. Females tend to have lower Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White attitudes than males. The second model was significant,  $F(4, 287) = 13.07, p < .001$ , and explained 16% of the variance in Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White. In addition, lower self-esteem indicates higher Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White attitudes. The third model was significant,  $F(5, 287) = 11.10, p < .001$ , and explained 16% of the variance in Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White. The covariates age and SES were not significantly associated with Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White. However, gender and self-esteem were negatively associated with Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White. Females tend to have lower Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White attitudes than males. In addition, self-esteem

was negatively associated,  $p < .001$ , to Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White. Otherworldliness was not associated with Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White attitudes.

The fifth hierarchical regression predicted Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement racial identity as the dependent variable. The first model was not significant,  $F(3, 283) = 2.07, p = .11$ , and explained 2% of the variance in Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement. The covariates age and SES were not significantly associated with Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement. However, gender was negatively associated,  $p < .05$ , with Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement. Females tend to have lower Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement attitudes than males. See Table 9 presents the results for Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement. The second model was significant,  $F(4, 283) = 5.75, p < .001$ , and explained 8% of the variance in Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement. However, gender,  $p < .05$ , and self-esteem,  $p < .001$ , were negatively associated with Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement. Females tend to have lower Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement attitudes than males. In addition, lower self-esteem indicates higher Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement attitudes. The third model was significant,  $F(6, 283) = 7.94, p < .001$ , and explained 15% of the variance in Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement. The covariates age and SES were not significantly associated with Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement. However, gender,  $p < .05$ , and self-esteem,  $p < .05$ , was negatively associated with Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement. Females tend to have lower Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement attitudes than males. In addition, otherworldliness,  $p <$

.001 and social legacy,  $p < .05$  was positively related, to Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement.

The sixth hierarchical regression predicted Internalization-Afrocentricity racial identity as the dependent variable. The first model was not significant,  $F(3, 283) = 2.35, p = .07$ , and explained 3% of the variance in Internalization-Afrocentricity. The covariates age and SES were not significantly associated with Internalization-Afrocentricity. However, gender was negatively associated,  $p < .05$ , with Internalization-Afrocentricity. Females tend to have lower Internalization-Afrocentricity attitudes than males (refer to Table 10). The second model was significant,  $F(4, 283) = 2.69, p < .05$ , and explained 4% of the variance in Internalization-Afrocentricity. However, gender,  $p < .05$ , was negatively associated with Internalization-Afrocentricity. Females tend to have lower Internalization-Afrocentricity attitudes than males. In addition, self-esteem was not associated with Internalization-Afrocentricity. The third model was significant,  $F(6, 283) = 4.60, p < .001$ , and explained 9% of the variance in Internalization-Afrocentricity. None of the covariates were significantly associated with Internalization-Afrocentricity. Otherworldliness,  $p < .05$  and social legacy,  $p < .05$  was positively related to Internalization-Afrocentricity.

The seventh and final hierarchical regression predicted Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive racial identity as the dependent variable. In the first step, covariates: gender, age and SES were entered. In the second step, self-esteem was entered. No theological orientations scales were related to Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive, therefore there was not third step. The first model not significant,  $F(3, 296) = 3.45, p = .02$ , and explained 3% of the variance in Internalization-Multiculturalists Inclusive. The

covariates age and SES were not significantly associated with Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive; see Table 11. However, gender,  $p < .05$ , was positively associated with Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive. Females tend to have higher Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive attitudes than males. The second model was significant,  $F(4, 296) = 3.24, p < .001$ , and explained 4% of the variance in Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive. However, gender,  $p < .05$ , was positively associated with Internalization-Multiculturalists Inclusive. Females tend to have higher Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive attitudes than males. Self-esteem was not associated with Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive; see Table 11.

## **Discussion**

The current study examined racial identity, self-esteem, and theological orientations in African American college students. Three research questions were outlined: (1) Is there a correlation between racial identity and self-esteem?; (2) Is there a correlation between racial identity and theological orientations?; and (3) Will theological orientations account for more variance explained in predicting racial identity than the covariates (i.e., gender, age, SES, and self-esteem)? Overall, there was partial support for each research question. The following section will summarize the main findings for each research question. Second, limitations of the study will be discussed, and finally, directions for future research will be highlighted.

### **Racial Identity and Self-esteem**

The first research question assessed the relationship between racial identity and self-esteem. The researcher hypothesized that self-esteem would be significantly and negatively related to all Pre-Encounter scales and Immersion-Emersion scales. These scales include Pre-

Encounter-Assimilation, Miseducation, Self-Hatred and Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White, and Intense Black Involvement. In general, there was support; self-esteem was negatively correlated with Pre-Encounter-Miseducation, Self-Hatred, Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White, and Intense Black Involvement. Contrary to the hypothesis, Internalization-Afrocentricity was also negatively related to self-esteem. African American college students who scored high in Pre-Encounter-Miseducation and Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred, Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White and Intense Black Involvement, and Internalization-Afrocentricity reported lower self-esteem. According to Cross (1971), Pre-Encounter scales and Immersion-Emersion scales are considered to be unhealthy identity statuses because they are not accurate depictions of the African American self. Based on the results, African American college students with Pre-Encounter-Miseducation and Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred attitudes may accept inaccurate societal messages about African Americans by internalizing negative stereotypes about their racial group. The negative viewpoints of African Americans are internalized into a person's self concept, which leads to self-hating attitudes and behaviors. For instance, an African American college student may believe the negative stereotype that African Americans are not proficient with standardized test and may, therefore, not even attempt to pass the test. Findings indicated that Immersion-Emersion and Internalization-Afrocentricity attitudes might also be unhealthy. It may be that African American college students with these attitudes may struggle with accurate perceptions of themselves because their current attitudes represent extreme behavior related to race. Individuals with Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White attitudes endorse intense hateful beliefs about Whites due to their perceptions of how Whites negatively treat African Americans. Similarly, African

American college students with Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement and Internalization-Afrocentricity attitudes are intensely active or overwhelmed with Black activities. However, the student may desire to find balance between these attitudes but are unable to do so. These findings were partially consistent with the research of Parham and Helms (1985) that found self-esteem to be significantly related to Pre-Encounter and Immersion-Emersion stages in a study of 166 African American college students. However, these researchers used the RIAS-B, and this study was published before the multiple attitudes were conceptualized within Pre-Encounter and Internalization. Other research assessed racial identity and self-esteem using the CRIS in a sample of 310 African American college females and found a negative and significant relationship between Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred and self-esteem (Jones, Cross & DeFour, 2007).

All other relationships were non-significant. The findings revealed that Pre-Encounter-Assimilation and Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive were not related to self-esteem. Individuals with Pre-Encounter-Assimilation attitudes are only concerned about conforming to mainstream American standards; thus, race is not a concern. Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive individuals equally support multiple aspects of their identity (e.g., gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.), and race is not more important than any other identity; therefore, Internalization- Multiculturalist Inclusive individuals have no association with race. This finding was consistent with Jones et al.'s (2007) research that indicated that African American college females with these attitudes separate racial identity and self-esteem. In sum, self-esteem is related to some aspects of racial identity depending the attitudinal belief. These findings may explain why previous work on racial identity and self-

esteem is uncertain (Rosenberg, 1979; Stephan & Rosenfield, 1979). Researchers may be measuring different racial identity attitudes and producing diverse findings related to self-esteem.

### **Racial Identity and Theological Orientations**

The second research question addressed the relationship between racial identity and theological orientations. I hypothesized that all racial identity scales would be positively related to theological orientations. Social legacy would be positively related to Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement and Internalization-Afrocentricity. Otherworldliness would be negatively related to Immersion-Emersion-Black Involvement and Internalization-Afrocentricity. From the results, Social legacy was positively related to both Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement and Internalization-Afrocentricity. Since both scales focus on Afrocentric issues, Social legacy provides an avenue for addressing social justice issues related to the African American community. Sanchez and Carter (2005) and Butler-Barnes et al. (2008) also reported identical results indicating that African Americans involved in Black events and activities are more likely to hold Social legacy values. For instance, participation in Afrocentric events is positively related to an African American college students desire to attend a National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) meeting.

Otherworldliness was hypothesized to be negatively related to Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement and Internalization-Afrocentricity; furthermore, Pre-Encounter scales, Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White and Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive were hypothesized to be positively related. The hypothesis was partially supported.

Otherworldliness was positively related to Pre-Encounter-Assimilation, Miseducation, Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White and Intense Black Involvement, and Internalization-Afrocentricity. Therefore, this conclusion suggests that African American college students who have high attitudes in Pre-Encounter-Assimilation and Miseducation, Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White and Intense Black Involvement, and Internalization-Afrocentricity are more likely to be concerned about their entrance into heaven. The Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement and Internalization-Afrocentricity findings support the work of Calhoun-Brown (1998). According to Calhoun-Brown (1998), otherworldliness has been depicted as discouraging efforts to improve the Black community. However, her research found the opposite; otherworldliness can facilitate certain parts of racial empowerment and are related to separatist orientations (i.e., Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement and Internalization-Afrocentricity attitudes). In other words, even though otherworldliness is focused on preparation for getting into heaven, the desire to get into heaven may provoke African Americans to at least consider or participate in aspects related to advancing their race.

It was also hypothesized that Biblical principles would be positively related to all racial identity scales. There was no support for this hypothesis. Racial identity was not related to Biblical principles. African American college students may not relate information presented in the Bible in terms of race. For example, college students may only focus on the struggles of Biblical characters in terms of their issues related to faith and not their struggles related to race.

Lastly, otherworldliness was not related to Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred or Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive. Otherworldliness may not be significantly associated with Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred and Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive attitudes because African American college students with these attitudes may not reflect or participate in faith practices. Fowler and Dell (2004) contend that individuals experience different stages of faith development and begin to question their faith. In some cases, the stages lead to a total disregard for faith. Therefore, it may be that African American college students with Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred and Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive attitudes have questioned their faith and decided that preparation into heaven or otherworldliness attitudes are not applicable to them at the current time. In conclusion, racial identity is associated with different aspects of theological orientations.

### **Racial Identity, Self-esteem and Theological Orientations**

The final research question examined relationship among covariates, self-esteem, and theological orientations in predicting racial identity. It was hypothesized that theological orientations would explain the variance above and beyond in predicting racial identity. This hypothesis was confirmed in two of the seven models. Gender, self-esteem, and otherworldliness are important predictors in explaining Pre-Encounter-Miseducation racial identity. Particularly for males, Pre-Encounter-Miseducation indicated lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of otherworldliness when compared to females. This finding might reflect how negative stereotypes about African American males can be internalized to create a negative sense of self and push the student to focus on preparation into heaven. African American college males may believe that, once they get into heaven, negative stereotypes

and other stressors related to race will dissipate. Therefore, African American males may use their faith as a coping mechanism to deal with their perceived social position in society. These findings are in line with prior work by Hunter and Davis (1994) that found African American males struggle to define their personal identity. The males stated that they experience pressure to meet society's image of man, as well as pressure to meet the standards they have set for themselves. Lastly, the study found that African American males use their faith to achieve their goals (Hunter & Davis, 1994). Gender, self-esteem, otherworldliness, and social legacy played major roles in explaining Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement racial identity. This finding suggests that African Americans college students are able to balance Social legacy and otherworldliness attitudes. In other words, students are able to prioritize and focus on social justice issues in their community but also prepare for entrance into heaven. This finding is contrary to Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) Dialectical Tension Model. The authors suggested that Black churches function on a continuum, where they are either focused on preparation into heaven or current social issues happening on earth. In other words, Black churches can only focus on getting into heaven or solving social justice issues. In addition, Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) argued that Black churches are constantly struggling with which end of the continuum to actively function. However, for this sample, African American college students are able to address societal problems and still prepare for heaven. Some of the inconsistency may be attributed to difference in age. For Lincoln and Mamiya (1990), this study interviewed clergy, mainly older male adults, while African American college students in the emerging adulthood phase hold an alternative view.

Gender was significant predictor in most of the racial identity models. Males tended to score higher in Pre-Encounter-Miseducation, Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White and Intense Black Involvement, and Internalization-Afrocentricity attitudes and females scored higher in Internalization- Multiculturalist Inclusive. Chavous (2008) argued that females and males may conceptualize race differently; in turn, this has implications on their performance in higher education settings. Specifically, African American females perform better at PWIs, while African American males may have a harder time adjusting and graduating due to negative experiences related to race at PWIs (Chavous, 2008; Fleming, 1984). These findings may be in due to differences in school culture. Research indicated that African American males perform better at HBCUs because these institutions tend to be more accepting and supportive of African American males (Davis, 1995). This notion is supported in this sample of African American college students. This finding may also be related to the way in which African Americans boys and girls are socialized about race based on their gender. Research on gender and racial socialization is inconclusive. McHale, Crouter, Kim, Burton, Davis Dotterer et al. (2006) explicated that boys report more messages about racial socialization, while Brown, Linver, and Evans (2010) found that girls are more likely to receive racial socialization messages. Although, the findings are equivocal, these findings still highlight the notion that males and females approach race differently depending on racial socialization. Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White was the only model where self-esteem explained more variance than otherworldliness. Perhaps African American college students value entering into heaven, but their intense hate for Whites and current structural inequalities have a stronger influence. Overall, these findings underscore the important role religion can play in

understanding how African Americans make sense of race and how it influences their self-esteem.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study had several limitations. First, this is a cross-sectional study. The complex relationship between racial identity, self-esteem and theology cannot be fully explained with cross-sectional data, longitudinal studies are needed to understand the relationship among the variables over time. In addition, forthcoming work should examine the association between racial identity, self-esteem and theological orientations in different developmental stages (e.g., childhood, old age, etc.) longitudinally. Second, this study only examined a specific group of African American college students at a southern HBCU. Therefore, these findings may not be generalizable to other African Americans in different geographic locations or different types of institutions of higher education such as private HBCUs or PWIs. Hence, future studies should examine the relationship among racial identity, self-esteem, and theology in African American college students at PWIs and African American college students in different geographic locations.

This research has extended the literature on racial identity, self-esteem, and theological orientations. However, additional research needs to be conducted. First, since this study is the first to assess the relationship among racial identity, self-esteem, and theology in African American college students, replication studies should be conducted. Second, future research should use diverse research methods. A mixed methods approach could be employed with African American college students to better understand the relationship between racial identity, self-esteem, and theology. Third, future analyses should continue the

validation process of both the Cross Racial Identity Scale and African American Protestant Church Scale to establish reliable and valid measures. Lastly, not all African American college students ascribed to religious activities. Prior research conducted by Mattis, Eubanks, Zapata, Grayman, Belkin, Mithcell et al. (2004) found that African American males did not attend religious services for the following reasons: lack of motivation, differences in ideologies, and unethical misdoings of religious institutions. For African American college students that do not participate in faith practices, it is possible that they may also identify with the reasons listed above. Therefore, future research should explore the differences in racial identity, self-esteem, and theology in unchurched African American emerging adults.

The current study was an examination of racial identity, self-esteem, and theological orientations in African American college students. The research has contributed to the literature in numerous ways. First, it extended the scope of research assessing African Americans in emerging adulthood. Second, this study contributed to the ongoing conversation regarding the relationship between racial identity and self-esteem. Third, this thesis underscored the important role theology can have on understanding racial identity. Lastly, there are implications for emerging adults. African American college students are already in a state of exploration. This study emphasizes the importance of understanding that African American college students are not only trying to comprehend various parts of their identity, such as racial identity, self-esteem, and theological orientations but also grasping how these aspects of identity interaction and relate to each other.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> According to Andrews (2002) and West and Glaude (2003), the terms theology and religion are defined using similar characteristics. Therefore, the terms are used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> The terms African American and Black are used interchangeably.

Table 1

*Examples of Racial Identity Attitudes*

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**Pre-Encounter Assimilation**

An African American college student may decline to celebrate African-centered events such as Kwanzaa or Black History Month.

**Pre-Encounter Miseducation**

An African American college student may hear a stereotype such as “Black people don’t read” and begin to treat other African American college students as if it is true.

**Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred**

An African American college student may only apply to predominantly White institutions in order to limit their interactions with other African Americans.

**Immersion-Emersion Anti-White**

An African American college student may purposely choose to attend an exclusively all Black church to avoid contact with White Americans.

**Immersion-Emersion Intense Black Involvement**

An African American college student may secretly join an extremist group with the ultimate goal of African supremacy

**Internalization Afrocentricity**

An African American college student may only be concerned about police profiling in regards to African Americans, but not other minorities.

**Internalization- Biculturalist**

An African American female college student may only be concerned about racial and gender equality, but no concerned about sexual orientation issues.

**Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive**

An African American college student is equally concerned about multiple issues. Therefore, the student may be a part of the Gay-Straight Alliance, a volunteer at the local Women’s Center and a member of the African American Cultural Center on campus.

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Table 2

*7 Principles that guide the Afrocentric perspective*

Principles	Definitions
Unity	To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.
Self-Determination	To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.
Collective Work and Responsibility	To build and maintain our community together and make our brothers' and sisters' problems our problems and to solve them together.
Cooperative Economics	To build and maintain our stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.
Purpose	To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.
Creativity	To do always as much as we can in the way that we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.
Faith	To believe with all our hearts in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

Table 3

*Sample Items from the Cross Racial Identity Scale*


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Pre-Encounter Assimilation  $\alpha = .76$

I am not so much a member of a racial group, as I am an American

Pre-Encounter Miseducation  $\alpha = .82$

Blacks place more emphasis on having a good time than on hard work

Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred  $\alpha = .79$

Privately, I sometimes have negative feelings about being Black

Immersion-Emersion Anti-White  $\alpha = .80$

I have a strong feeling of hatred and disdain for all White people.

Immersion-Emersion Intense Black Involvement  $\alpha = .80$

Black people must stick together even when we do not get along.

Internalization Afrocentricity  $\alpha = .84$

I see and think about things from an Afrocentric perspective.

Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive  $\alpha = .82$

I believe it is important to have both a Black identity and a multicultural perspective, which is inclusive of everyone (e.g., Asians, Latinos, gays & lesbians, Jews, Whites, etc.).

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Table 4. Mean, Standard Deviation (SD), Skew, Standard Error of Skew, Kurtosis, Standard Error of Kurtosis, Minimum and Maximum. (N = 320)

	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Skew	<i>SE of Skew</i>	Kurt.	<i>SE of Kurt.</i>	Min	Max
Gender	320	1.55	.50	-.19	.14	-1.98	.27	1	2
Age	320	19.55	1.44	-.91	.14	.57	.27	18	25
SES	314	2.97	.70	-.12	.14	.15	.27	1	5
Pre-Encounter									
Assimilation	315	17.43	7.01	.27	.14	-.57	.27	4	35
Miseducation	315	19.52	6.55	-.08	.14	-.16	.27	5	35
Self-Hatred	309	9.25	4.82	1.40	.14	1.73	.28	4	29
Immersion-Emersion									
Anti-White	313	8.85	5.08	1.34	.14	.87	.28	4	27
Black Involvement	310	26.85	8.64	.48	.14	-.62	.28	10	49
Internalization									
Afrocentricity	313	15.91	5.87	-.04	.14	-.58	.28	3	31
Multicultural	309	24.80	6.68	-.54	.14	.05	.28	4	35
Self-Esteem	310	35.37	4.47	-1.07	.14	.52	.28	20	40
Theological Orientations									
Biblical principles	301	3.61	.44	-2.57	.14	11.37	.28	1	4
Social legacy	296	2.93	.63	-.57	.14	.44	.28	1	4
Otherworldliness	298	2.38	.58	.20	.14	.28	.28	1	4



Table 6. *Hierarchical Regression predicting Racial Identity-Pre-Encounter-Assimilation (n =287).*

		Racial Identity- Pre-Encounter-Assimilation	
Variables		$\beta$	(SE)
Block 1			
Gender		-.08	(.83)
Age		.00	(.28)
SES		-.05	(.59)
Block 2			
Gender		-.08	(.82)
Age		.00	(.28)
SES		-.05	(.59)
Self-Esteem		-.08	(.09)
Block 3			
Gender		-.07	(.82)
Age		-.00	(.28)
SES		-.04	(.58)
Self-Esteem		-.06	(.91)
Otherworldliness		.14	(.70)*
		R <sup>2</sup>	
	Block 1	.00	
	Block 2	.02	
	Block 3	.03	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 7. *Hierarchical Regression predicting Racial Identity-Pre-Encounter-Miseducation (n = 289).*

		Racial Identity- Pre-Encounter-Miseducation	
Variables		$\beta$	(SE)
Block 1			
Gender		-.15	(.77)
Age		.03	(.26)
SES		-.07	(.54)
Block 2			
Gender		-.15	(.76)
Age		.04	(.26)
SES		-.06	(.54)
Self-Esteem		-.12	(.08)*
Block 3			
Gender		-.14	(.75)*
Age		.03	(.25)
SES		-.06	(.53)
Self-Esteem		-.09	(.08)
Otherworldliness		.20	(.64)*
		R <sup>2</sup>	
	Block 1	.03	
	Block 2	.04*	
	Block 3	.08**	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 8. *Hierarchical Regression predicting Racial Identity-Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred (n = 296).*

		Racial Identity- Pre-Encounter-Self-Hatred	
Variables		$\beta$	(SE)
Block 1			
Gender		-.04	(.56)
Age		-.08	(.20)
SES		.01	(.40)
Block 2			
Gender		-.02	(.55)
Age		-.06	(.19)
SES		.03	(.38)
Self-Esteem		-.31	(.06)**
		$R^2$	
	Block 1	.01	
	Block 2	.10*	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 9. *Hierarchical Regression predicting Racial Identity-Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White (n = 287).*

		Racial Identity- Immersion-Emersion-Anti-White	
Variables		$\beta$	(SE)
Block 1			
Gender		-.21	(.59)**
Age		-.11	(.20)
SES		.07	(.42)
Block 2			
Gender		-.21	(.56)**
Age		-.10	(.19)
SES		.08	(.40)
Self-Esteem		-.30	(.06)
Block 3			
Gender		-.21	(.56)**
Age		-.10	(.19)
SES		.08	(.40)
Self-Esteem		-.28	(.06)**
Otherworldliness		.09	(.48)
		R <sup>2</sup>	
	Block 1	.07**	
	Block 2	.16**	
	Block 3	.16**	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 10. *Hierarchical Regression predicting Racial Identity-Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement (n = 283).*

		Racial Identity- Immersion-Emersion-Intense Black Involvement	
Variables		$\beta$	(SE)
Block 1			
Gender		-.13	(1.04)*
Age		-.03	(.35)
SES		-.05	(.73)
Block 2			
Gender		-.13	(1.01)*
Age		-.02	(.34)
SES		-.05	(.72)
Self-Esteem		-.23	(.11)**
Block 3			
Gender		-.12	(.98)*
Age		-.03	(.33)
SES		-.05	(.69)
Self-Esteem		-.18	(.11)*
Otherworldliness		.23	(.84)**
Social Legacy		.13	(.76)*
		R <sup>2</sup>	
Block 1		.02	
Block 2		.07**	
Block 3		.15**	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 11. *Hierarchical Regression predicting Racial Identity-Internalization-Afrocentricity (n = 283).*

		Racial Identity- Internalization-Afrocentricity	
Variables		$\beta$	(SE)
Block 1			
Gender		-.12	(.71)*
Age		-.07	(.24)
SES		-.07	(.50)
Block 2			
Gender		-.12	(.71)*
Age		-.07	(.24)
SES		-.06	(.50)
Self-Esteem		-.11	(.08)
Block 3			
Gender		-.11	(.69)
Age		-.08	(.23)
SES		-.07	(.49)
Self-Esteem		-.07	(.08)
Otherworldliness		.14	(.59)*
Social Legacy		.18	(.54)*
		$R^2$	
Block 1		.03	
Block 2		.04*	
Block 3		.09**	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 12. *Hierarchical Regression predicting Racial Identity-Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive (n = 296).*

		Racial Identity- Internalization-Multiculturalist Inclusive	
Variables		$\beta$	(SE)
Block 1			
Gender		.16	(.79)*
Age		.07	(.27)
SES		.04	(.55)
Block 2			
Gender		.15	(.79)*
Age		.06	(.27)
SES		.03	(.55)
Self-Esteem		.09	(.09)
		$R^2$	
	Block 1	.03*	
	Block 2	.04*	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .