

Thinking About Race: The Salience of Racial and Ethnic Identity in College  
and the Climate for Diversity

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### **Abstract**

While racial identity salience in college is important to identity development, cognition, and achievement, more research is needed to understand it in contemporary and diverse college contexts. Using a combination of identity development models as its framework and the Diverse Learning Environment (DLE) survey piloted at 14 two-year and four-year institutions, this study identifies the pre-college and institutional factors that contribute to a heightened salience of racial and ethnic identity, and the relationship of this salience to students' pre-college socialization, general college experiences, and experiences with the campus climate for diversity. After controlling for pre-college socialization and racial differences, results show that race identity was more salient among students that experience discrimination/bias, but also among students who had in-depth conversations outside of class on issues of racial/ethnic diversity, took courses as part of an inclusive curriculum, and participated in co-curricular diversity initiatives.

## Introduction

Many believe that the 2008 election of President Barack Obama ushered the nation into a postracial era in which racial identity is no longer an important component of an individual's overall identity, nor is it relevant to conversations about problems in society (see Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011). However, the sheer number of recent race-related incidents on college campuses demonstrates that race is still salient in students' lives, and is also still at the heart of many conflicts. If one of the key purposes of higher education is to prepare students for engagement in a diverse democracy (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, 2007), how might educators make sense of the salience of racial identity in college?

The "salience" of a social identity (e.g. race, gender, sexuality) refers to the level of importance that an individual places on that identity, and it is a significant and recurring component in the identity development theories of diverse populations (Cross, 1995; Kim, 2001). Having a high salience of racial and ethnic identity is necessary in order to move through the stages of various racial identity development models (Cross, 1995; Kim, 2001). This movement is critical because the more advanced stages of these models indicate a well-established core identity which is associated with an array of positive outcomes including increased self-esteem (Oyserman, Harrison, & Bybee, 2001), moral reasoning (Moreland & Leach, 2001), institutional commitment (Dovidio, Gaertner, Niemann, & Snider, 2001), intercultural maturity (King & Baxter-Magolda, 2005), and academic achievement (Ortiz & Santos, 2009).

Very little research has been conducted on racial identity salience as an outcome; hence, the purpose of this study is to explore the pre-college factors and college experiences associated with a heightened salience of racial identity for college students. In light of the recent racial conflicts on college campuses that indicate race is on the forefront of students' minds, this study

paves the way to understanding the relationship between the salience of racial identity and student perceptions of campus climate. This is an important connection to make given previous research that shows Students of Color have more negative perceptions of campus climate than White students (Hurtado, 1992; Rankin & Reason, 2005). At the same time, studies have not definitively shown the link between racial identity salience and a elements of the climate for diversity on a campus.

### **Relevant Theory and Concepts**

#### **Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981), one of the most cited theories in social psychology, poses that individuals' behaviors are influenced by their different social identity group memberships. In striving to achieve a positive identity, individuals categorize themselves into social identity groups and make favorable comparisons between their ingroup and outgroup members. If group members feel that their ingroup is negatively perceived by society, they will either find ways to achieve a positive distinction regarding this identity or they will disassociate from it. The theory also suggests that there is an important distinction between social and personal identities, and that context plays a significant role in creating the collective psychological processes that are part of a social identity.

In their Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, Jones and McEwen (2000) built upon the idea of distinguishing social and personal identities (which they refer to as the "core sense of self"), concluding that the more salient a social identity is to an individual, the more integral that identity becomes to the sense of self. Additional research (Hurtado, Gurin, & Peng, 1994) supports the idea that social identities that have become disparaged or politicized by social movements are the ones that are most psychologically powerful, most easily accessible, and most

thought about. These identities tend to be salient across situations and serve as social scripts that guide behaviors and perceptions.

Recent developments to Social Identity Theory include work by Cameron (2004) which poses that social identity can be represented in terms of three dimensions: centrality, ingroup affect, and ingroup ties. In this representation, cognitive centrality is defined as the amount of time one spends thinking about being a member of the social identity group and most closely resembles the concept of salience that will be utilized in this study. Cameron's study importantly begins to disentangle the various conceptualizations and statistical measurements of social identity as a construct. Another development, the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Dovidio, et al., 2001) presents a process of re-categorization where cooperative interaction between ingroup and outgroup members helps to create a new superordinate identity with which positive cross-group interactions can be held. An important caveat, however, is that racial minority groups need to maintain a salient subgroup identity in order to make the superordinate identity strong and stable, but Whites prefer to discount the subgroup identity, which often manifests as a colorblind perspective on many issues.

### **Racial Identity Development Models**

The foundational theories of identity development (Erickson, 1968; Marcia, 1966) from the 1960's have been criticized for not being fully applicable to diverse populations (McEwen, Roper, Bryant, & Langa, 1990). They do, however, serve as a foundation for the more inclusive identity development models that have since been created, including Cross' (1995) model of Nigrescence, Kim's (2001) Asian American Identity Development Theory, Sue and Sue's (1990) Racial/Cultural Identity Development model, and Hardiman's (2001) White Identity Development Theory. These models all involve developmental stages, whereas the racial identity

of Latinos (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001) and Multiracial individuals (Renn, 2004; Wijeyesinghe, 2001) has been examined in terms of nonlinear orientations and factors that contribute to their identity. Regardless of their structure, the racial identity development models of all groups tend to involve similar developmental tasks (Adams, 2001) and reach a point by which individuals have developed both a certain level of awareness about themselves and an understanding of other racial groups (Sue & Sue, 1990).

While the stage models of racial identity development are not strictly linear since it is possible for individuals to move back and forth between stages over the course of a lifetime, there is a natural progression to them. Most models begin with a lack of awareness of racial identity and the existence of internalized racism. In the *pre-encounter* stage of the Nigrescence model, individuals have a low-salience attitude toward being Black and tend to prefer a Eurocentric cultural frame of reference (Cross, 1995). This is similar to the stage of *White identification* for Asian Americans where they adopt White societal values to avoid feeling different from their peers (Kim, 2001), and the *naivete* stage for White individuals where they have no social consciousness of race (Hardiman, 2001). Remaining in this stage is problematic because Taub and McEwen (1992) found that psychological development might be delayed for students with more mainstream group identification, which makes it harder to accomplish academic goals.

Movement away from the early stages of lacking awareness requires race to become salient. When it does, individuals enter a period of confusion where they question the dominant race paradigm and explore their own racial identity. The beginning of this period is referred to as *resistance and immersion* (Sue & Sue, 1990), *resistance* (Hardiman, 2001), *immersion-emersion* (Cross, 1995), and *awakening to social political consciousness* (Kim, 2001). The dissonance

caused by racial identity salience during this period requires individuals to reconstruct social knowledge and promotes cognitive development (Torres & Baxter-Magolda, 2004). That is, a critical consciousness of existing social structures and an awareness of privilege and oppression or inequality often accompany racial identity salience.

According to King and Baxter-Magolda (2005), by the time individuals reach the complex final stage in any of the racial identity development models, they have integrated intercultural maturity into a sense of self. Intercultural maturity is composed of three dimensions (cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal) and involves understanding, accepting, and being able to positively interact with diverse others. This stage of positive integration into society can be called *internalization* (Cross, 1995; Hardiman, 2001), *incorporation* (Kim, 2001), or *integrative awareness* (Sue & Sue, 1990), but in all models it is a result of a similar journey that requires racial identity salience. For instance, racial identity salience is necessary for White individuals to move through the stages because becoming increasingly conscious of Whiteness is what helps them understand privilege and oppression and eventually develop an anti-racist White identity (Helms, 1995).

Two of the racial groups whose more recent models move away from progressive stages are the Latina/o group and the Multiracial group. For Latina/os, Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) identified six identity orientations. Though there is no order, the orientation *undifferentiated* implies a colorblind attitude where individuals reject their own cultural values in favor of accepting the dominant norms of society, which resembles the beginning stages of the other models. Similarly, the orientation *Latino-integrated* refers to a positive attitude towards one's group and an acceptance of the complexity of others, resembling the final stage of the models. For the Multiracial group, Renn (2004) develops an ecology of multiracial identity in college

students and finds that students will identify with a singular monoracial group, two or more monoracial groups, as multiracial, will opt out of racial classification, or situationally identify in any of those four ways. These multiple patterns are normal and healthy for multiracial students. Renn (2008) later confirms that phenotype, cultural knowledge, and fluidity of peer culture are the three primary factors that influence how these students identify racially. Given the nature of these factors, and others found by Wijeyesinghe (2001), it is possible that students might also go through similar stages as those in the monoracial models.

For the stage models, whether or not individuals advance from stage to stage in their racial identity development depends on their social environment (Kim, 2001) and whether it provides opportunities for individuals to experience difference and increase the salience of their racial identity. Without the encounters that create salience, individuals might stay in one of the early stages where they embody a negative self-concept based on their race (Kim, 2001; Cross, 1995). Since the early stages in most of the models reflect an unquestioned acceptance of dominant culture, it seems that in order to effectively engage in a diverse society, it is necessary for individuals to be color conscious rather than colorblind.

### **Racial Identity Salience**

In one of the few studies that investigates the salience of racial identity as an outcome on a college campus, Steck, Heckert, and Heckert (2003) used a convenience sample of 713 students at one Historically Black College (HBCU) and three Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). They examined differences in racial identity salience between Black students in a minority setting with those in a predominantly White setting, and between White students in a majority setting and those in a setting in which they were a numerical minority. Each student responded to the statement “Who am I?” twenty times and responses were assigned a score. The

study found that, in spite of setting, Whites thought about race less than Blacks, indicating that Whites have the privilege of viewing their race as transparent. The two other variables in the study were gender, which was not significant, and institutional type, which was significant since racial identity was more salient for both groups at PWI's. Though the study is limited in that it only included Black and White students, the findings suggest the importance of context in creating a salient racial identity.

Sanders-Thompson (1999) also examined variables that affect the racial identity salience of African Americans. Salience was measured with a five-item African American Racial Identity Salience Scale based on White and Burke's (1987) Identity Salience Scale. A total sample of 409 participants took the door-to-door survey that examined age, sex, education, income, racial socialization, interaction with other African Americans, positive and negative interactions with non-African Americans, experience of discrimination, and political activism. The sample ranged in age from 18-92 with a mean age of 35.9 years. A hierarchical multiple regression showed moderate but significant relationships between the independent variables and salience, with the exception of experiencing discrimination. The results indicate that most socializing takes place with other African Americans in that community, which suggests that racial identity is salient for some groups even when they are not in the numerical minority in their most proximal contexts.

Other studies have looked at racial identity salience, but have manipulated environmental conditions to increase or decrease it. One such study (Forehand, Deshpande, & Reed, 2002) explored the underlying factors that heightened racial identity salience in Asian American and White undergraduate students from two west coast universities. The researchers found that momentary identity salience is influenced by both an identity primer that directs attention to a person's racial identity and by social distinctiveness in terms of having a person's race become

unique in the immediate environment. While this experiment is useful, it is also important to examine the salience of racial identity in a more permanent natural environment and across multiple settings and racial groups, which this study aims to do.

Racial centrality, having a high racial identity salience across situations, has also been utilized to predict outcomes. In particular, it was found to be positively associated with self-esteem (Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1997) and higher academic performance (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998) for college students. With regard to campus climate, having a low racial centrality has been associated with lower perceptions of fit between African Americans and their college environment (Chavous, 2000), which could be an indicator of the disassociation described in Social Identity Theory. Research has also found racial centrality to be predictive of perceptions of group-based discrimination and disadvantage because it increases one's likelihood of responding as a member of the identity group (Cameron, 2004). Thus, understanding salience can help to better understand intergroup relations and perceptions of campus climate among college students.

Despite these specific studies, the salience of racial identities has not often been studied in higher education, and even less so as an educational outcome. The only study that has been conducted specifically on racial identity salience in higher education in its natural context did not explore factors that contribute to increased salience outside of the institutional environment and gender (Steck et al., 2003), and a study that examined multiple factors that contribute to racial identity salience only focused on African Americans (Thompson-Sanders, 1999). Yet, the literature suggests that it is an important outcome to explore since on its own it can promote cognitive development (Torres & Baxter-Magolda, 2004), contribute to self-esteem (Rowley, et al., 1997) and higher academic performance (Sellers, et al., 1998). Additionally, it helps

individuals advance through racial identity development models, which is important in developing moral reasoning (Moreland & Leach, 2001), institutional commitment (Dovidio, et al., 2001), and intercultural competence and maturity (King & Baxter-Magolda, 2005)—all elements of personal and social responsibility, which is one of the Essential Learning Outcomes for higher education (AAC&U, 2011).

Identity is very complex, but understanding what aspects are salient and the precollege and educational experiences that contribute to that saliency can help student affairs professionals and faculty better understand and support students. Identity development has long been considered a critical task of the traditional college-aged years (Marcia, 1980; Phinney, 1992; Ortiz & Santos, 2009; Chickering & Reisser, 1993), but it is also a lifelong process. Since racial identity salience, in particular, is important in the identity development of diverse populations (Cross, 1995; Kim, 2001; Sue & Sue, 1990), institutions need understand how it is fostered or diminished during the college years for students of all ages.

## **Methodology**

### **Data Source and Sample**

The data for this study came from the pilot administration of the Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The survey instrument is now available nationally for campuses to use to assess climate, campus practices, and outcomes. Data were collected between December 2009 and May 2010 at three community colleges, six public four-year, and five private four-year institutions across the United States. Broad access institutions and structurally diverse selective universities were included to expand the scope of institutions and students featured in higher education research. The DLE administration targeted students

with substantial familiarity with their respective campuses in order to capture their perceptions of the climate for diversity. Accordingly, institutions were instructed to assess students who had earned 24 units or more at the community college level and students in the second and third years at four-year institutions, including transfer students; some four-year institutions surveyed students in their first and fourth or more years as well.

The DLE was administered online, resulting in a 34% average response rate based on students who accessed the survey from notification emails at the 14 pilot institutions. The sample is inclusive of students beyond the historically “traditional” college-going population, which allows this study to examine racial identity salience for a broader scope of college students in the United States. The final sample size was 5,010 after removing unusable cases. The DLE was designed to be administered primarily to sophomores and juniors, although some campuses were interested in also administering to entire cohorts. First-year students comprised 9.4% of the sample ( $n = 469$ ), sophomores 31.8% ( $n = 1,593$ ), juniors 28.4% ( $n = 1,424$ ), seniors 20.8% ( $n = 1,041$ ), and other statuses 9.7% ( $n = 483$ ). The racial and ethnic composition of participants was 0.7% American Indian ( $n = 35$ ), 0.7% Arab American/Arab ( $n = 35$ ), 14.6% Asian American/Asian ( $n = 733$ ), 4.4% Black ( $n = 218$ ), 19.1% Latina/o ( $n = 959$ ), 41.0% White/Caucasian ( $n = 2,056$ ), 0.7% Other ( $n = 35$ ), and 18.2% students who indicated two or more monoracial/monoethnic backgrounds ( $n = 912$ ). About half the sample indicated family incomes below \$50,000 per year (51.7%,  $n = 2,558$ ). One-third of students in the study were age 25 or older, through age 81. Accordingly, this study used student age group rather than class standing to control in part for previous development, as the sample was comprised of students well beyond the traditional college age. Approximately one quarter had no parent with any college-level education (23.5%,  $n = 1,177$ ), another quarter had at least one parent with some

college (24.1%, n = 1,207) and 42.6% (n = 2,132) had at least one parent that earned a bachelor's degree or higher; parental educational attainment for both parents was missing for 9.9% of participants (n = 494). In sum, the sample captures diverse students at a range of institutional types as intended; complete descriptive statistics are listed in Appendix A.

### **Measures**

This study explores factors related to college students' racial identity salience, with particular interest in campus-facilitated activities and the campus racial climate. The dependent variable is a single item measuring the salience of racial identity, "How often do you think about your race/ethnicity?" Item responses are on a 1 to 5 scale from Never to Very Often. Frequency of thinking of one's race or ethnicity represents the cognitive dimension of social identity salience (Cameron, 2004).

Many of the independent measures are factors that have been validated previously for their structure and reliability (Hurtado, Arellano, Cuellar, Guillermo-Wann, 2010). All variables and factors are listed in Appendix A along with their scales, factor loadings and reliability. Of particular interest is the extent to which students have taken courses that reflect a Curriculum of Inclusion and have participated in campus-facilitated Co-Curricular Diversity Activities. These are new factors in the DLE that help measure educational opportunities educators can be involved in directly. As research continues to show how they may be positively related to various outcomes, institutions may be equipped with growing evidence needed to support diversity and equity related curricula and programs. The other independent factor of pointed interest is a new measure of the campus climate for diversity. Discrimination and Bias is a factor that measures forms of discrimination that often go unreported to campus authorities. In addition, research reveals mixed results regarding the effects of negative racialized experiences

on identity salience, so this study presents another opportunity to explore that relationship. The remaining variables and factors in the model reflect concepts from the social identity theory, racial identity development, and racial identity salience literatures.

### **Method**

First, descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, and frequencies were run in SPSS to check for normality in distribution and missing data. Most variables and factors reflected a fairly normal distribution, and factors were weighted and rescaled with a range of 0 to 100 with a mean of 50. However, the data revealed that the institutional sites tended to have either high or low percentages of Students of Color, with very few reflecting a balance in their student populations. The item indicating the percentage of Students of Color was changed to a dichotomous variable that groups together institutions with 30% or fewer Students of Color and those with over 30%, which reflects the bimodal tendency of the data but has a more normal distribution. To replace missing data for all variables except the dependent measure and demographic data, EM was used to calculate expected values. Pearson correlations were also examined for possible multicollinearity. Next, crosstabs were run to examine racial group differences in how often students think about their racial/ethnic identity.

Second, a multiple linear regression was run on the racial identity salience outcome. Following Astin's (1991) Input-Environment-Outcome model, independent variables were force entered in blocks reflecting this framework to test the model, with p-values set at .05. White students were selected as the reference group for this study, as research suggests that marginalized groups tend to think of race more often than Whites (Hurtado, Gurin, & Peng, 1994). Upon examining the results, another regression was run in which college environment variables were force-entered into the model one by one to examine suppressor effects. Post-hoc

tests were then used to further examine significant mean differences in discrimination and bias by reported by racial/ethnic group.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations are apparent in this study. First, the data derive from a single survey administration and are therefore cross-sectional. This limits the interpretation of results in that the regression can only be understood in correlational terms, rather than being able to show what factors predict, or effect, racial identity salience during college. Second, the dependent variable is a single item that only reflects one of three constructs for identity salience (Cameron, 2004). Ideally, future revisions of the DLE instrument should include the remaining dimensions of identity salience that involve interactions with the ingroup, although this study may help identify factors related to the specific component of salience measured in the dependent variable. Third, students who indicated two or more monoracial/monoethnic backgrounds were grouped into a separate category, and were not counted in their respective monoracial/monoethnic categories. This may or many not reflect students' preferred racial identity (see Renn, 2004), as the pilot DLE survey did not ask about multiracial identity, but has since been modified in national administrations. There are also many ways to operationalize race in quantitative data for students who indicate two or more backgrounds, as well as concerns within monoracial communities on related implications (see Inkelas & Soldner, 2009; Morning, 2005). This study opted to explore these students as a singular group for exploratory purposes in racial identity salience for those who indicate multiple backgrounds. Fourth, accordingly the sample sizes for American Indian, Arab American and students who marked Other are very small. Caution should be used in interpreting results for these three groups. Despite these limitations, this study offers important contributions in understanding factors related to racial identity salience in

college through a newly available national survey.

### Results

The results indicate that there are differences in college students' racial identity salience by racial group, and show that a number of pre-college, curricular, co-curricular, and campus climate factors are significantly related to the outcome measure. The crosstab indicates that the frequency in which students think about their race/ethnicity differs by racialized group (chi-square = 697.060,  $p < .000$ ). Most noticeable is that White students think about their race less often than each group of Students of Color, as well as those who marked 'Other.' This is not surprising considering that "Whites do not look at the world through a filter of racial awareness" (Wildman & Davis, 2000, p. 56). Even so, the strong significance confirms that students from Latina/o, Asian American, Black, Multiracial, and Arab American backgrounds are spending more time thinking about race than their White peers.

Table 1

How Often College Students Think about their Race/Ethnicity,  $n = 5,010$

Racialized Group	<i>n</i>	Never/Seldom	Sometimes	Often/Very Often
American Indian	35	31.4%	20%	48.6%
Arab American	36	13.9%	25%	61.1%
Asian American	773	17.3%	31.9%	50.8%
Black	217	16.6%	24.4%	54.3%
Latina/o	958	23.0%	28.2%	48.9%
White	2055	53.1%	28.2%	18.7%
Other	35	34.3%	20.0%	45.7%
Two or More	912	33.4%	30.8%	35.7%

Note: 3 cells (7.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.61.

Because the data are cross-sectional, we provide a series of models that builds upon each concept, showing the change in R square as controls, and college experiences are entered until the final model which accounts for .245 of the variance of the dependent variable. As the crosstab results suggest, with all controls in place, the regression analyses confirmed higher

racial identity salience was evident for all groups of Students of Color and these were significantly different than the White reference group (see Table 2 for all regression coefficients). In addition, the strength of the relationship between race/ethnicity of the student and racial identity salience increases when other demographic characteristics are accounted for in Model 2. The R square increases from .061 in Model 1 (accounting for the negative effects of age, parent education, income, and English language) to .133 when race/ethnicity of the student is taken into account in Model 2. As we would expect, all groups of Students of Color have significantly higher racial identity salience in college than White students, and there is intersectionality with other social identities in the racialization process (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). However, these other social identities are no longer significant once one controls for pre-college sources of socialization. There is one exception, however; being a native English speaker remains significant in the final model and is negatively related to students' racial identity salience ( $\beta = -.065$ ,  $P < .001$ ). This suggests that those who use languages other than English tend to think more about their race/ethnicity than native English speakers. This may be due to social distinctiveness, or being unique in terms of language use in the college environment, and the fact that language oppression is often tied to discrimination based on race and ethnicity (Schniedewind & Davidson, 2000).

---Place Table 2 about here---

Two pre-college factors are significantly related to college students' racial identity salience throughout the models. The first measures the extent to which students' knowledge about racial/ethnic groups came from family members, friends, or co-workers, and represents an aspect of early socialization, a central process that shapes how individuals think about their own and others' race/ethnicity (Sanders-Thompson, 1999; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). The second pre-

college measure that remains related to racial identity salience in the final model is the extent to which students' knowledge about racial/ethnic groups came from classrooms, including teachers and curriculum ( $\beta = .065, p < .001$ ). This suggests that formal K-12 education increases students' racial identity salience before college and can support racial identity development as they learn about their own group(s) and other racial/ethnic groups. However, whether or not K-12 classroom education helps students form positive or negative understandings of their own and others' group(s) is not discernable in this study.

After controls for demographic and pre-college socialization are taken into account, aspects of students' curricular and co-curricular activities as well as the campus racial climate are strongly related to college students' racial identity salience. Taking more classes that contain material and pedagogy focused on issues of diversity and equity, characterized as a college curriculum of inclusion, is positively related to racial identity salience in college ( $\beta = .071, p < .001$ ). Dovidio et al. (2004) model the importance of both contact and enlightenment through education experiences in order to unlearn socialization processes that result in the reduction of prejudice and stereotypes.

Students who participated more frequently in campus-facilitated diversity activities also indicated a higher racial identity salience ( $\beta = .065, p < .001$ ), controlling for demographic and pre-college dispositions towards such activity. This suggests that educational endeavors outside of the classroom, often coordinated through student affairs, contribute to heightening students' racial identity salience. These educators are in positions to support student development outside the classroom, and help students' apply concepts learned through a curriculum of inclusion into their daily lives.

In addition, engaging more frequently in conversations outside of class related to racial or

ethnic diversity also has a strong relationship to racial identity salience in college ( $\beta = .144$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This relationship is rather intuitive, as talking more frequently about race should be correlated with how often students think about their race or ethnicity. The strength of the unique variance such conversations contribute to racial identity salience suggests that whether students are talking about these issues in informal settings or in educationally facilitated settings, such as in a curriculum of inclusion or diversity activities, processing these issues with peers is related to higher racial identity salience and may facilitate students' identity development.

In terms of the racial climate in the college environment, various forms of discrimination and bias are among the strongest predictors associated with how often students think about their race or ethnicity ( $\beta = .177$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This may indicate that students are more aware of race/ethnicity and therefore may be primed to identify racism and discrimination, and also that such personal incidents also increase awareness of their own racial identity. While this measure is a negative aspect of the campus racial climate, we found no significant or unique effect of positive cross-racial interactions once student precollege socialization and other positive ways of learning about race ethnicity in college were controlled. That is, the model accounts for how these positive cross racial interactions come about—through conversations, in an inclusive curriculum, and in diversity co-curricular activities.

Table 3 shows Dunnett T3 post hoc tests to assess racial/ethnic differences associated with discrimination and bias on campuses. Results indicate that Asian Americans are not only more likely to report higher racial salience than Whites but that they are also significantly more likely to report more discrimination and bias than White, Black or Latina/o peers. Multiracial students also tend to report significantly more discrimination and bias than either White or Latina/o students. Less attention has been given to these groups in the past, and it appears that

they are much more likely to see the world through the filter of racial awareness as a result of these experiences with the climate on campus.

TABLE 3. Dunnett T3 Post-Hoc Tests for Discrimination and Bias by Key Group Differences

1 <sup>st</sup> Group	2 <sup>nd</sup> Group	Mean Diff. (1 <sup>st</sup> - 2 <sup>nd</sup> )	Significance level
Asian American	Black	2.9	*
	Latina/o	4.3	***
	White	4.2	***
Two or more race/ethnicity	Latina/o	2.7	***
	White	2.6	***

Note: Table shows only racial/ethnic groups with significant differences: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . A positive mean difference indicates that the 1<sup>st</sup> group is significantly higher than the 2<sup>nd</sup> group.

Interestingly, two measures of validation are also significantly related to racial identity in college, and are tested here for the first time in relationship to this outcome. A measure of general validation from faculty and staff independently has a positive correlation with the outcome ( $r = .034$ ,  $p < .05$ ), but in the final model has a slightly negative effect ( $\beta = -.040$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In contrast, a measure of academic validation in the classroom becomes significant when it enters the model ( $\beta = .033$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These factors are also correlated with each other ( $r = .580$ ,  $P < .001$ ), and suppressor effects with other variables in the model appear to be affecting their relationship with the outcome. However, both predictors are marginally significant compared to the strength of other measures in the model and require further research to understand their relationship with climate and racial issues.

### Conclusion and Implications

In an era of a changing racial discourse and racial/ethnic demographic landscape in education, this study showed that racial identity continues to be salient among college students at

two and four-year colleges. Several findings that characterize this supposedly “postracial” era are worth noting. First, the racial dynamics are changing as the number of particular racial/ethnic groups continues to grow on college campuses. While we expect Blacks and Latina/os to have high racial salience, many other groups that are often erringly overlooked in the racial dynamics on campus, Asian American ethnic groups and Multiracial students, also report relatively high racial identity salience. Moreover, these latter groups have long been part of diversity on campus and this study was able to more effectively provide insight on these students in diverse campus environments. It was particularly revealing that these students also report relatively higher levels of discrimination and bias during the current climate and changes in racial discourse. Campus initiatives need to further consider how to be inclusive of these groups in diversity initiatives and improve an understanding of how these groups experience the campus racial climate. At the same time, heightened racial salience is prevalent among groups that have been historically minoritized, while White peers are less likely to think about their own race/ethnicity—an attribute of White privilege (Wildman & Davis, 2000).

Not surprisingly, early socialization processes associated with school, family and social groups play a role in racial identity salience across all groups. New work on intergroup relations suggests that the first step in the process of creating greater understanding and unlearning socialization processes that reinforce stereotypes is to increase awareness of racial ethnic commonalities and differences or ingroup and outgroup dynamics of social identity groups (Dovidio, et al., 2004). Some campuses have created race awareness workshops, but intergroup relations models in practice suggest a sustained dialogue is necessary in order to break down stereotypes and work through historical or contemporary conflict among specific groups (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001).

This study confirms that talking about race in informal and formal settings through curricular and co-curricular activities is associated with higher racial identity salience regardless of race. Some faculty members use the opportunity to talk about race and racial identity in the classroom to advance learning objectives in diverse classrooms (Tatum, 1992). In short, the notion that we all have multiple social identities that become salient in different contexts is a useful tool to encourage more students to understand how racial identity shapes their own and others' behavior, relationships, decisions, and opportunities. Many campuses have embarked on developing dialogue programs that holds promise in providing students with not only awareness of how race is salient in their own lives and those of others, but begin to provide effective tools for communication. Employers have articulated a need for a diverse workforce that can negotiate difference and have the ability to see the world from another's perspective. This suggests that both cognitive and affective skills are necessary for new levels of intercultural competence and maturity (King & Baxter-Magolda, 2005).

Some may question whether colleges should intervene in race relations or interactions regarding diversity, but others have made a definitive choice to provide education that deals with one of the most enduring areas of conflict and inequality in American society. Others have done so to resolve an environment on campus marred by racial conflict and evidence of discrimination and bias. For example, the University of California now has a website where individuals can report incidents of discrimination and bias in a confidential manner as part of a system wide campus climate initiative. However, collecting information should lead to tangible change and initiatives. Assessment using such instruments like the DLE should be accompanied by plans to improve the climate and interactions across group differences. Creating greater racial awareness is the first step in understanding how we continue to dismantle racial divides in personal and

public life and work together to help students achieve their dreams and aspirations regardless of race/ethnicity.

Institutional researchers help to identify areas for assessment, and campus climate research has now become part of the regular assessment framework. Further development of useful constructs and specific populations depend on working with knowledgeable individuals who can help shape and interpret, and implement action plans that follow from a climate assessment. Moreover, linking these findings with actual campus practices as we have in this study is necessary to evaluate current initiatives and also benchmark progress in creating a more inclusive learning environment.

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Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Regression Coefficients Predicting Racial Identity Salience,  $n = 5,010$ 

Block/Variable	Mean	SD	R <sup>2</sup>	r	Final $\beta$
DV: Racial Id Sal	3.03	1.21	-	-	-
Demographics			.061		
Age Group	2.32	1.42		-.049***	-.002
Parent Ed	2.21	.830		-.108***	-.016
Income	6.96	3.75		-.112***	-.014
Sex: Female	1.68	.465		.023	.023
Native English	1.74	.436		-.226***	-.065***
Racial Group			.133		
American Indian	1.00	.08		.018	.032*
Arab American	1.00	.08		.053***	.059***
Asian American	1.15	.35		.153***	.190***
Black	1.04	.20		.123***	.172***
Latina/o	1.19	.39		.164***	.227***
Other	1.00	.08		.014	.030*
Two or More	1.18	.39		.029***	.124***
White	1.41	.49	-	-.329**	-
(comparison)					
Pre-College Socialization			.149		
Classroom	2.92	.83		.106***	.065***
Workshops	1.93	.93		.134***	-.018
Student Clubs	2.19	1.01		.128***	-.010
Family, Friends, Co-workers	3.33	.766		.095***	.060***
Study Groups	2.07	.772		.104***	-.017
Institutional			.150		
SOC > 30%	.55	.50		.104***	.006
Curricular			.173		
Ethnic Std Class	1.41	.492		.120***	.025
Curric of Inclusion	49.98	9.97		.159***	.071***
Co-Curricular			.221		
Comm w/in Race	2.82	.764		.072***	.010
Diversity Actitvy	49.98	10.00		.249***	.065***
Converse Race	1.94	.693		.261***	.144***
Validation			.222		
Gen Validation	49.99	9.99		.034*	-.040*
Acad Validation	50.04	9.97		.021	.033*
Climate			.245		
Positive CRI	49.96	10.05		.191***	.012
Discrim & Bias	50.10	10.07		.280***	.177***

\* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

## APPENDIX A. Variable Definitions, Coding Schemes, and Factor Reliabilities and Loadings

Variable	Scale	Factor Reliability/ Loading
<u>Dependent Variable</u>		
How often do you think about your race ethnicity?	1=Never; 2=Seldom; 3=Sometimes; 4=Often; 5=Very often	
<u>Input Variables</u>		
Age Group	Open ended, rescaled: 1 = 0-20; 2 = 21-24; 3 = 25-29; 4 = 30-39; 5 = 40-45; 6 = 55+	
Parent Education (Highest of either parent)	1 = No college, 2 = Some college, 3 = Bachelor's or higher	
Estimated total family income last year	1=Less than \$10,000; 2=\$10,000-14,999; 3=\$15,000-19,999; 4=\$20,000-24,999; 5=\$25,000-29,999; 6=\$30,000-39,999; 7=\$40,000-49,999; 8=\$50,000-59,999; 9=\$60,000-74,999; 10=\$75,000-99,999; 11=\$100,000-149,999; 12=\$150,000-199,999; 13=\$200,000-249,999; 14=\$250,000 or more	
Sex	1 = Male; 2 = Female	
Native English Speaker	1 = No, 2 = Yes	
Race: American Indian	1 = No, 2 = Yes	
Race: Arab American	1 = No, 2 = Yes	
Race: Asian American	1 = No, 2 = Yes	
Race: Black/African American	1 = No, 2 = Yes	
Race: Latina/o	1 = No, 2 = Yes	
Race: White	1 = No, 2 = Yes	
Race: Other	1 = No, 2 = Yes	
Race: Marked Two or More of the Above	1 = No, 2 = Yes	
How much of your knowledge about racial/ethnic groups came from: Classroom	1=Not at all, 2=Very little, 3=Somewhat, 4=To a great extent	
Knowledge: Workshops	1=Not at all, 2=Very little, 3=Somewhat, 4=To a great extent	
Knowledge: Student clubs	1=Not at all, 2=Very little, 3=Somewhat, 4=To a great extent	
Knowledge: Family members, friends, co-workers	1=Not at all, 2=Very little, 3=Somewhat, 4=To a great extent	
How often did you interact with people whose racial and ethnic backgrounds are different in: Study groups	1=Not at all, 2=Occasionally, 3=Frequently	

<u>Environmental Variables</u>	0 = Less than 30%, 1 = More than 30%	
Taken an ethnic studies course	1=No, 2=Yes	
I feel a sense of community among students of my own race/ethnicity	1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree	
In-depth conversations outside of class on issues related to racial or ethnic diversity	1=Not at all, 2=Occasionally, 3=Frequently	
<i>Curriculum of Inclusion</i>	Rescaled 0-100, Mean of 50. Original item scales: 1=None, 2=One, 3=2-4, 4=5 or more	$\alpha = .854$
Materials/readings on gender issues		.715
Materials/readings on issues of oppression as a system of power and dominance		.775
Serving communities in need (e.g. service learning)		.578
Material/readings on race and ethnicity issues		.824
Opportunities for intensive dialogue between students with different backgrounds and beliefs		.635
Materials/readings on issues of privilege		.705
<i>Co-Curricular Diversity Activities Factor (Campus Facilitated)</i>	Rescaled 0-100, Mean of 50. Original item scales: 1=Never; 2=Seldom; 3=Sometimes; 4=Often; 5=Very often	$\alpha = .903$
Attended presentations, performances, and art exhibits on diversity		.649
Attended debates or panels about diversity issues		.810
Participated in ongoing campus-organized discussions on racial/ethnic issues (e.g. intergroup dialogue)		.866
Participated in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Center activities		.729
Participated in the Ethnic or Cultural Center activities		.848
Participated in the Women's/Men's Center activities		.782
<i>Academic Validation in the Classroom</i>	Rescaled 0-100, Mean of 50. Original item scales: 1=Never; 2=Seldom; 3=Sometimes; 4=Often; 5=Very often	$\alpha = .863$
Instructors were able to determine my level of understanding of course material		.776
Instructors provided me with feedback that helped me judge my progress		.842
I feel like my contributions were valued in class		.811
Instructors encouraged me to meet with them after or outside of class		.582
Instructors encouraged me to ask questions and participate in discussions		.673
Instructors showed concern about my progress		.588
<i>General Interpersonal Validation</i>	Rescaled 0-100, Mean of 50. Original item scales: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree	$\alpha = .862$
Faculty empower me to learn here		.598
At least one staff member has taken an interest in my development		.764
Faculty believe in my potential to succeed academically		.830
Staff encourage me to get involved in campus activities		.564
Staff recognize my achievements		.721

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At least one faculty member has taken an interest in my development		.773
<i>Positive Cross Racial Interactions</i>	Rescaled 0-100, Mean of 50. Original item scales: 1=Never; 2=Seldom; 3=Sometimes; 4=Often; 5=Very often	$\alpha = .882$
Attended events sponsored by other racial/ethnic groups		.543
Dined or shared a meal		.783
Had meaningful and honest discussions about race/ethnic relations outside of class		.780
Shared personal feelings and problems		.779
Had intellectual discussions outside of class		.839
Studied or prepared for class		.629
Socialized or partied		.729
<i>Discrimination and Bias</i>	Rescaled 0-100, Mean of 50. Original item scales: 1=Never; 2=Seldom; 3=Sometimes; 4=Often; 5=Very often	$\alpha = .889$
Witnessed discrimination		.750
Been mistaken as a member of a racial/ethnic group that is not your own		.444
Heard insensitive or disparaging racial remarks from: Students		.644
Heard insensitive or disparaging racial remarks from: Faculty		.677
Heard insensitive or disparaging racial remarks from: Staff		.664
Types of microaggressions: Verbal comments		.792
Types of microaggressions: Written comments (e.g. emails, texts, writing on walls, etc.)		.762
Types of microaggressions: Exclusion (e.g. from gatherings, events, etc.)		.746
Types of microaggressions: Offensive visual images or items		.733

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