SAY IT LOUD: I'M BLACK AND I'M PROUD?

Black Racial Identity in the 21st Century

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October 3, 2011
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Who is Black? A Brief History of Black Racial Identity

- One-drop rule based in oppression, prejudice, and hatred
- Black Pride: Nationalism and a collective, "authentic" African American culture and heritage
  - This new "Black" was still static and unidimensional and assumed one "true" and "authentic" identity
  - Black racial identity was the most prominent social identity, more important than gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, or political ideology
  - Socioeconomic differences were ignored
- More recent challenges:
  - Multiraciality as a "legitimate" identity
  - Sociodemographic differences within the black community
  - Effects of recent African and Caribbean immigration

Black Identity Today: Still Undertheorized

- Two fields of study challenge the traditional unidimensional definition of Black identity: studies of multiraciality and of Black ethnic identity

- Unfortunately, both continue to rely on the singular, unidimensional definition of Black identity as a strawman

- Multiracial identity work: "Passing as Black" (Khanna and Johnson 2010) continues to assume one is *either* Multiracial *or* Black, and not that one holds both identities in different contexts (Kao and Doyle 2009; Burke, Kramer and Charles in progress)

- Black ethnic identity: While Caribbean and African immigrants see themselves as distinct from multigenerational Black Americans, that does not mean they do not have a strong Black identity as well (see, for example, the African and Caribbean reaction to Obama's election)

Authenticity, Identity, and the Black Elite

- Renewed interest in studying middle class blacks and black elites, both during and after college (Bok and Bowen 1998; Lacy 2007; Massey, Charles, Lundy, Fischer 2003; Patillo-McCoy 2000, 2007; Willie 2003)

- Growing concern over the underrepresentation of multigenerational African American students in selective, predominantly white institutions (Massey, Charles, Mooney 2007)

- Oh, and we have a Black President
  - Return of the "authenticity" police: Some argued that Obama could not gain Black support because he was not "black enough" (Steele 2008), while others argue Obama's has a "fear of free black men" (West 2011)
    - And relatedly, Eddie Glaude's attack on Melissa Harris-perry
  - (Re)turn of the one-drop rule: Suddenly, one-drop of White blood mattered: Obama and the Census

Another Approach to Black Racial Identity

- What is racial identity?
  - Surprisingly difficult to answer
  - Most previous academic and common sense definitions are unidimensional
    - Sense of common fate
    - Relative importance of "Black" and/or "American" identities
- Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton and Smith 1997)
  - *Centrality*: whether or not race is a core aspect of one's self-concept
  - *Ideology*: the ascribed meanings of one's racial identity that suggest the appropriate ways to behave
  - *Salience:* relevance of Black identity to a person at a particular moment in time
  - *Regard*: The affective judgment one has for one's race
  - Why ideology matters as a part of racial identity: Martin Luther King and Malcolm X both have high centrality, salience, and regard but radically different ideologies.

Student Critique of Unidimensional Black Identity

- Jessica (biracial student at Penn):

  "I feel it is a small, very vocal group of people that feel that they have given themselves the power of defining what black is. So, kind of basing it on these 1960s models of [blackness]. And, not even 1960s, because I think it's something that the media has come to represent."

The National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen

- Sample taken from 28 selective colleges and universities over 5 waves of the incoming lass of 1999

- 4160 students total, 1051 Black students, of whom 736 completed the MIBI racial identity questions during their junior year of college

- Due to time and financial constraints, only the centrality and two of the four ideologies in the full MIBI were included in the NLSF

- Interviews conducted at Penn and Princeton with 65 Black students (37 monoracial, 28 multiracial students)

Methods

- Separate OLS regressions for each MIBI subscale
- Variable Construction:
  - Immigrant status:
    - Multigenerational students have native-born parents.
    - 1st generation immigrants are foreign-born with foreign-born parents.
    - 2nd generation immigrants are native born to foreign-born parents.
  - Mixed students have one black and one non-black parent and are multigenerational.
  - Racial isolation is a 0-10 scale in which 0 indicates that a respondent was the only black person is his/her neighborhood and school, while a score of 10 indicates that a student lived in and was educated in total segregation
- Multiple imputation then deletion to use full sample of Black students who had missing data on independent variables but not the MIBI scales

Table 1. Summary Statistics, Black NLSF Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	
Racial Classification/Nativity Status	
Multigenerational African American	66.5%
1st Generation/Immigrant	8.2%
2nd Generation/Children of Immigrants	15.2%
Mixed (one non-black parent)	11.1%
Male	34.1%
Socioeconomic Characteristics	
Family Structure	
Two parents in house	54.3%
Other	45.7%
Parental Education	
No College Degrees	26.4%
One or Both are College Graduate(s)	30.7%
One or Both have Advanced Degree(s)	42.8%
Parental Occupation Status	
Neither Professional/Managerial	31.2%
One or Both Professional/Managerial	68.8%
Family Socioeconomic Status	
Family Income less than $50,000	39.3%
Family Income $50,000-$100,000	34.8%
Family Income over $100,000	25.9%
Parents Own Home	73.3%
Neighborhood & School Characteristics	
Racial Isolation	
Predominantly Non-Black experience	36.6%
Integrated experience	38.6%
Predominantly Black Experience	14.8%
Mean Racial Isolation	3.93 (2.99)
Exposure to Violence and Social Disorder (0-10)	2.23 (1.60)
N	721

Table 2. Summary Statistics, MIBI Subscale for Racial Centrality

Being Black/African American…	Mean (SD)
Has a lot to do with how I feel about myself	5.63 (3.56)
Is an important part of my self image	7.85 (2.53)
Is tied to the destiny of other African Americans	5.52 (3.18)
Is important to what kind of person I am	6.73 (3.07)
Provides me with a strong sense of belonging	7.04 (2.49)
Gives me a strong attachment to other African Americans	7.28 (2.34)
Is an important reflection of who I am	7.37 (2.54)
Is a major factor in my relationships	5.44 (3.05)
Mean Racial Centrality	**6.47 (1.83)**
N	721

Table 3. Summary Statistics, MIBI Subscale for Assimilationist Ideology

Blacks/African Americans Should…	
Not espouse separatism (as racist as Whites who do the same)	6.30 (3.17)
View more blacks in mainstream as a sign of progress	6.42 (2.58)
Attend white schools to learn to interact with whites	5.12 (2.85)
Be full members of the political system	7.81 (2.26)
Work within the system to achieve political/economic goals	7.43 (2.20)
Strive to integrate all segregated institutions	7.41 (2.64)
Feel free to interact socially with Whites	9.11 (1.44)
View themselves as American first and foremost	5.93 (3.11)
Gain important positions to improve plight of the race	6.75 (2.46)
Mean Assimilationist Ideology	**6.92 (1.48)**
N	721

Table 4. Summary Statistics, MIBI Subscale for Nationalist Ideology

Culturally Nationalist Ideology	
Blacks/African Americans Should…	
Surround children with African American culture	7.82 (1.96)
Shop at African American stores	6.85 (2.61)
Have knowledge of African American history	8.53 (1.83)
Mean Culturally Nationalist Ideology	**7.73 (1.75)**
Political Nationalism	
Blacks/African Americans…	
Should not intermarry	1.99 (1.96)
Should adopt Afrocentric values	3.81 (2.65)
Should attend Black schools	3.25 (2.38)
Should organize into a separate political force	3.18 (2.71)
Can never live in harmony with Whites	2.90 (2.92)
Cannot trust Whites where African Americans are concerned	2.30 (2.53)
Mean Politically Nationalist Ideology	***2.90 (1.80)***
Overall Mean Nationalist Ideology	**4.51 (1.54)**
N	**721**

Table 5: OLS Models of MIBI Subscales for Centrality, Assimilationist Ideology, and Nationalist Ideologies

	Centrality	Assimilationism	Cultural Nationalism	Political Nationalism
Intercept	6.77 (.28)***	6.66 (.23)***	7.49 (.30)***	2.89 (.29)***
Racial Classification/Nativity Status				
Multigenerational Native (ref)	----	----	----	----
1st Generation Immigrant	-0.60 (.27)***	0.37 (.17)	-0.30 (.21)	0.22 (.26)
2nd Generation Immigrant	-0.45 (.18)*	0.29 (.16)	-0.46 (.19)*	-0.02 (.20)
Multiracial/Mixed	-1.77 (.24)***	0.43 (.17)*	-1.60 (.24)**	-0.71 (.21)***
Sociodemographic Background				
Gender (1 = Male)	-0.29 (.14)*	0.25 (.11)*	-0.50 (.13)***	0.00 (.14)
Two parent household (1 = yes)	-0.03 (.16)	0.16 (.13)	0.01 (.14)	-0.28 (.16) †
Parental Education				
No college (ref)	----	----	----	----
One or Both Parents have Bachelor's Degree	-0.54 (.20)**	-0.13 (.18)	-0.45 (.18)*	-0.00 (.21)
One or Both Parents have Advanced Degree	0.04 (.21)	-0.39 (.19)*	-0.10 (.19)	0.16 (.22)
Parental Occupational Status				
Neither Parent is Managerial/Professional (ref)	----	----	----	----
One or Both Parents is Managerial/Professional	-0.01 (.20)	0.41 (.17)*	0.20 (.19)	-0.21 (.21)
Family Income				
Less Than $50,000 (ref)	----	----	----	----
$50,000 to $100,000	0.12 (.20)	-0.25 (.16)	-0.14 (.17)	0.19 (.21)
Over $100,000	0.23 (.28)	-0.07 (.19)	-0.02 (.22)	0.25 (.24)
Owns own home (1 = yes)	-0.15 (.18)	0.32 (.14)*	0.09 (.16)	-0.12 (.17)
Neighborhood & School Contexts				
Racial Isolation(0-10)	0.02 (.02)	0.02 (.02)	0.09 (.04)*	0.02 (.03)
Exposure to Violence/Social Disorder (0-10)	0.14 (.05)**	-0.16 (.04)***	0.32 (.09)***	0.11 (.05)*
Isolation*Violence/Social Disorder	n/a	n/a	-0.03 (.02)*	n/a
R-squared	0.14***	0.08***	0.15**	0.04**
N			721	

Conclusion

- Racial identity is *not* a proxy for social class status
  - In fact, racial identity elements are not even strongly associated with socioeconomic background
- Identity *is* multidimensional
  - In fact, some evidence that nationalism is multidimensional itself
- Integration into the white elite neither demands nor results in "racelessness" or "selling out" for Black students

Limitations

- Racial identity varies strongly by the individual regardless of background
- Ideally, we would compare the strength of racial identity across multiple racial groups
- No comparison to peers in less selective institutions
- Data are cross-sectional
- Only able to use part of the full MIBI scale
- Future work will explore whether or not racial identity affects future outcomes