

**Exploring the Strength of Black Racial Identity and Effects on Life Satisfaction**

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**Author Note**

I have no known conflicts of interest to disclose.

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### **Abstract**

Black racial identification is multifaceted and does not happen overnight, but rather, emerges over a lifetime. The U.S. Black community shares a reality of historical enslavement that included loss of their family name or tribe, no personal freedoms including economic, social, political, as well as over their physical body. One major question this research has uncovered is, how can a Black individual form an individual identity that is not tied to slavery and oppression? There is a gap in literature and research findings on the adverse effects of strong adherence to Black racial identity and the psychological effect of aligning with the Black community, whose history has been laden with trauma and struggle. This present study used a quantitative method comparison and cross-sectional design using survey methodology to measure and compare the strength of Black identity and life satisfaction. The first hypothesis was that there would be a negative association between life satisfaction and a higher endorsement of Black identity (Centrality subscale). The second hypothesis was that the nationalist ideology would be positively correlated with life satisfaction. Finally, the third hypothesis was that the oppressive ideology would be negatively correlated with life satisfaction. The total participants consisted of 67 individuals who identified as having Black ethnicity. The results revealed that there was a statistically significant impact on reported satisfaction of life with higher adherence to Black identity subscale of Oppressed Minority. However, there were no significant correlations between Black identity subscales of Nationalist and Centrality and life satisfaction. These results indicated that Black individuals with prominent levels in the Oppressed Minority subscale highly identify with current and historical discrimination, oppression, and racial

trauma. They also identify with other minority groups and find alliances with other oppressed groups, which reflect lower reports of life satisfaction.

*Keywords:* Black racial identification, Black racial identity, Black identity, life satisfaction

## Chapter 1

Black individuals have a long, complex, and often brutal history that has served to form a community defined and enlivened by a uniquely shared trauma of their ancestors (Park, 2019). Racial demarcation is a trademark of the United States and has been since the formation of this country consisting of Native Americans, immigrants, and slaves. Within slave culture, there was a social hierarchy designed to foster divisions. These divisions were created when Black Africans were stripped of their rightful cultures and made to adopt a culture steeped in slavery, trauma, and abuse. Social hierarchy among plantation slaves was set in place to ensure separation between slaves (Lynch, 2020). The highest place belonged to house slaves, who tended to be of lighter skin, followed by those persons with a specific skill; in the lowest place, where the majority resided, were the field workers.

This new Black community in the United States shared a reality of enslavement which included no personal freedoms, such as economic, social, political, and of their physical body. In the Constitution of the United States, in 1788, Black people were counted as three fifths of a person for objective taxation and representation in Congress, increasing the numbers of representatives for slave states, which strengthened enslavement (Lynch, 2020). Mandates or slave codes were put in place to monitor the slave system by ensuring the power of the master and submission by the slave. Under these mandates, a slave was a piece of property that could be bought and sold like an animal. A slave had no privilege of a stable family, privacy, or education.

Various terms used to label Black individuals have changed over time: *Negro* was derived from the word for “black” in Spanish; *Negro* or *Negroid* was used universally for



racial classification until the beginning of the 20th century; *Black* became the term that covered the ethnically different persons of color; and *African American* was used in the 1920s but did not become popular until the 1970s, when individuals wanted to get in touch with their African roots (Agyemang et al., 2005).

African American and Black are two labels used synonymously in U.S. culture and literature which many believe are interchangeable (Grayman, 2009). These descriptive labels are not one and the same, however, as the term Black refers to the shared phenotypic characteristic of an individual (e.g., brown skin tones, curly hair), whereas the term African American denotes a shared nationality, traditions, and social and political heritage (Betancourt & López, 1993). Although many can be Black, not all Blacks can be African American. For the purposes of this study, the term Black was used and was considered interchangeable with the term African American (Grayman, 2009).

### **Literature Review**

#### **Positives and Negatives of Being in the African American Community**

Black neighborhoods and communities are known for the endurance and resilience among the residents who live in environments pervaded with poverty, unemployment, low-income housing, drugs, and street gangs (Blokland, 2015; Hunter & Robinson, 2016). Sampson et al. (1997) found that the collective efficacy of the people who reside in these neighborhoods forms social cohesion strong enough that people are willing to intervene on behalf of a collective common good. In Black communities, there are several protective factors that help lower rates of depression and the effects of emotional damage caused by racism and discrimination. Family unity, flexible family roles, extended family inclusion in raising children, higher rates of religious affiliation,

and the number of church communities available all contribute to a strong sense of belonging (DiClemente et al., 2018; Zapolski et al., 2019).

According to the Pew Research Center (Tamir et al., 2021), the Black population in the United States is 46.8 million. Most of the Black population lives in what is known as the “J” area in the United States, which includes the South, Midwest, and Northeast. The “J” breaks down regionally, with 56% of the Black population living in the South states, 17% in the Midwest, 17% in the Northeast, and 10% in the West. Texas has the largest population of Black individuals with 3.9 million, Florida has 3.8 million, and Georgia has 3.6 million.

Being a part of group membership in Black communities has many benefits, such as increased dignity, which help with social isolation resulting from joblessness and provide a sense of belonging and connection (Yap et al., 2011). Research has shown, having group membership and identifying with one’s minority group positively affects psychological well-being (Sue et al., 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Utsey et al., 2000; Wakefield et al., 2017; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000; Yap et al., 2011). Finding self-identity within one’s own racial group increases self-esteem and informs social guidelines, which mitigates the negative associations with the out-group prejudice and discrimination (Yap et al., 2011).

Living in Black neighborhoods and communities has its disadvantages. Education is not valued, as 44% of Black adults have a high school degree or less (Tamir et al., 2021). Twenty-five percent of the U.S. Black population is 22 or younger. These youth are growing up without parents (Pettit & Gutierrez, 2018). In the United States, 11.4% of Black children have a currently incarcerated parent, as compared to 1.8% of White

children. In addition, 24.2% of Black children have had at least one parent incarcerated compared to 3.9% of White children.

Between 50% and 96% of Black young men are vulnerable to recurring community violence during their adolescence (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2017). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2021) stated that the number one killer of Black males between ages 10 and 13 is homicide, which is higher than any other ethnic group (Frazer et al., 2018). Black young women have a 12% chance of being victimized (e.g., being beaten up or having a gun shot at them), compared to a 25% chance among Black young men (Chen, 2009). For Black females, intimate partner violence is 4 times more likely to end in murder than for White females (Frazer et al., 2018). Black individuals are at risk for incarceration at a rate of 26.8%, compared to 5.4% of White individuals (Pettit & Gutierrez, 2018). Once incarcerated, Black individuals will be sentenced to prison at a rate of 9.1%, compared to 1.6% of Whites. In contrast to jail, prison sentences are given for longer periods and are generally for crimes which are deemed more severe.

Being exposed to community violence daily causes aversive conditioning on the expression of physiological stress and materializes as hypertension, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, chronic pain, diabetes, gastrointestinal disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, such as hyperarousal, hypervigilance, and anxiety (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2017). A 2017 study by Gaylord-Harden et al. showed, individuals who suppress their genuine emotions become numb and exhibit an increased amount of aggressiveness in their daily life.

Grayman (2009) found that contemporary elderly Black adults reported feeling less community support than when they were part of Black communities in the 1960s. The elders endorsed negative changes, calling their community divisive with a profound sense of hopelessness (MacQueen et al., 2001). The idea of a Black community is a constructed term and is a tool for personal meaning-making, which plays a significant role for those who hold a strong identity of being Black (Grayman, 2009). When Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old Black teenager, was shot and killed in Florida by a police officer in 2013, President Barack Obama highlighted how Black communities were filtering the events that occurred through a racial/cultural-experiential lens. These racial/cultural lenses were formed and shaped by the long and deep history of Black marginalization, hate crimes, and lack of justice that exist and perpetuate the oppression of Blacks today (Blackmon & Thomas, 2015). A 2013 Pew Research Center poll reported 78% of people of color stated they believed the Trayvon Martin case resurrected topics surrounding race that need to be talked about, and 28% of White individuals agreed with that same notion.

Although being in a Black community may mitigate some racism from non-Black racial groups, it does not shield individuals from racism that exists in Black communities (e.g., “not acting Black enough;” Durkee et al., 2019). For instance, Black youth who are high academic achievers are often ostracized by in-group members who state they are “acting White.” To be told one is “acting White” is an insult meant to invalidate a person culturally. “Acting White” refers to actions, behaviors, and speech that are ways of being in step with core values in White communities (e.g., speaking in proper English, getting a good grade in school, or dressing conservatively). It is an attack on the Black youth’s social identity and undermines or discredits one’s “Blackness” in their community.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) coined the term “acting White” (p. 2) as a practical and conceptual meaning to describe racial insults which encourage Black youth not to assimilate into White culture.

Positive self-concept and self-esteem are developed through membership in groups to which we belong (Durkee et al., 2019). Cultural invalidations target one’s personal identity by threatening one’s concept of self and one’s standing within the Black community, which can have an adverse effect on the psyche (Hogg & Hornsey, 2006). Not all discrimination and racist remarks are overtly expressed. Many racist actions are often subtle, unconscious, automatic, and nonverbal, influencing a person’s language and behavior (Nadal et al., 2019; Sue, 2010; Torino et al., 2019). Microaggressions and microinvalidations aim to omit, invalidate, and negate the experiential perceptions and understanding of Black individuals (Sue et al., 2007). Black individuals may feel stuck between two different worlds. Suppose an individual wishes to pursue their dreams of going to college. In that case, they may become less motivated to do so if the people in their community treat them as if they have betrayed their racial identity. This may be especially relevant, because community connection is an essential value, as defined previously. Black individuals may feel the burden to stay connected with their racial group in rejecting anything similar to “acting White” and desire to achieve and move toward success in their own life.

Anxiety, poor well-being, depression, and suicidal ideation or suicide attempts have been linked to cultural invalidations (Campbell & Troyer, 2007; Franco & Franco, 2016). Reports of cultural invalidation from the same racial identity group go largely unaddressed. It is often internalized and invokes negative feelings, leading to rejection of

one's identity and rejection from the Black community (Franco & Franco, 2016; Iijima Hall, 2004). When someone's Black identity is in question, individuals must prove themselves authentic by conforming to hyperbolic stereotypes (Franco & Franco, 2016). In a 1995 study, Steele and Aronson found that when a Black individual has a well-developed racial or ethnic identity, they reject the notion that "White" attributes make them less Black. Self-concept is no longer grounded in racial labeling but by another aspect such as gender, occupation, performance, or religion.

### **Cross's Black Racial Identity Development Model**

A study by Cross (1991) stated, "The transformation is realized by individuals attempting to come to terms with their collective disenfranchisement and exploitation but essentially acting alone" (p. 292). Cross's Black racial identity development model is also known as the nigrescence model (Cross, 1994). The word *nigrescence* is a French word meaning "the process of becoming Black" (Owens, 2010, p. 165). Cross's developmental model was popularized in 1971 and outlines the developmental journey of integrating racial identity into one's personality and sense of self (Owens, 2010). This model claims to consider the holistic view of Black identities and looks at the within-group variance.

In Cross's (1994) model, there are five stages in the process of becoming Black. Stage 1 in the nigrescence model is pre-encounter. Exploring pro-White and anti-Black attitudes happens during pre-encounter. In this stage, Blacks try to assimilate to pro-White characteristics. Adolescents may want to try to fit into the majority group. They may start thinking, talking, and acting in ways that downplay the opposing views of being Black. As individuals internalize anti-Black features, self-hatred views emerge, resulting in low self-esteem in the Black individual. Black hatred stems from the extensive Black

history in the United States. White culture's idealization has been the core to Black individuals hating their skin color or the shape of their facial features. Gaining acceptance from their White counterparts becomes paramount to be part of the majority group (Cross, 1994; Vandiver et al., 2001).

Stage 2 in the nigrescence model is encounter (Cross, 1994). During the encounter stage, Black individuals come to terms that they cannot reach the unattainable White ideal. At this point, disillusionment replaces self-hate, and energy is directed toward downplaying the impact of race in everyday life. A sense of the individual's self-identity is lost (Cross, 1994; Vandiver et al., 2001). Anxiety, depression, and confusion may be present. Black individuals may question if their race is an essential aspect of their personality. By this stage in development, many Black individuals have been privy to or have experienced some sort of racism. Going through racist episodes creates more questions about their self-worth and value, leaving individuals asking themselves, "Where do I belong?"

Stage 3 in the nigrescence model is immersion/emersion (Cross, 1994). Black individuals attempt to embrace their Blackness and learn to adopt a sense of pride in their history. During the immersion phase, issues and items not connected to Black identity are rejected or viewed as having less importance. Feelings of guilt and anger may emerge with the realization of one's oppression. Immersion of the Black identity into one's personality feels like a longing to learn more about what it means to be Black. There may be an urgency to make connections and to interact with others in the Black community who are like-minded and endorse their Blackness as deeply as they do.

Stage 4 in the nigrescence model is internalization (Cross, 1994). Black individuals begin to be secure in who they are. There is a sense of Black pride and a strong sense of self. Individuals stop being so culturally focused and begin to reestablish relationships with White people. Black individuals have evolved to the point in which culture and race have become integrated into their worldview and are congruent in their personality (Cross, 1994; Vandiver et al., 2001).

The fifth and final stage in the nigrescence model is internalization/commitment (Cross, 1994). Not all people will reach this developmental stage. In this stage of development, Black individuals have an intense sensitivity to action and activism. Their activities may include taking part in the political scene or speaking out against oppression for a wider range of oppressed groups. The individual is concerned about issues that affect the future for people of the same race (Cross, 1994; Vandiver et al., 2001).

### **Individuality and Black Racial Identity**

According to Erikson (1964), identity is the aptitude to participate in oneself as a being that has continuity and sameness, thus acting accordingly. However, in addition to developing a sense of self, self-identities are also developed through the process of learning characteristics one does not possess. Erikson (1964) proposed humans' biological, psychological, and social development happens in eight distinct stages, which range from birth to adulthood. With each stage of development, there is a fundamental crisis that each human experiences, which has potential for a negative or a positive effect. These fundamental crises revolve around the individual psychological needs when confronted with societal needs. Erikson's approach has been widely studied and has been influential in the areas of personality development, lifespan development, and identity



formation (Knight, 2017). Erikson's stages of development include: (a) trust versus mistrust, from birth to 1 ½ years old, in which the basic virtue is hope; (b) autonomy versus shame, from 1 ½ to 3 years old, in which the basic virtue is will; (c) initiative versus guilt, from 3 to 5 years old, in which the virtue is purpose; (d) industry versus inferiority, from 5 to 12 years old, in which the virtue is competency; (e) identity versus role confusion, from 12 to 18 years old, in which the virtue is fidelity; (f) intimacy versus isolation, from 18 to 40 years old, in which the virtue is love; (g) generativity versus stagnation, from 40 to 65 years old, in which the virtue is care; and (h) ego integrity versus despair, from age 65 years and older, in which the virtue is wisdom (Erikson, 1964). Each stage indicates a key developmental marker that is considered essential in proper maturity. Erikson's (1959) theory of development has been used in cross-cultural studies. Erikson (1993) stated that no individual eludes the dichotomy of the minorities and majorities, differences of economic class, or national or cultural diversity. Every individual will still experience fundamental crises throughout their life. An individual's primary social institutions and individual strengths will forge an identity with a unique autonomy (Erikson, 1994).

Black individuals in the United States are caught between two different identities (Lynch, 2020). One identity is as a citizen of the United States, which gives equal rights under the law; another identity automatically places them in a group according to the color of their skin. As citizens of the United States, individuals are automatically covered by the Declaration of Independence, which affords every citizen three fundamental inalienable rights—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—endowed on every human being by his or her Creator. However, Black identity has an extensive history that

correlates to a group of people who were and are dehumanized by the countrymen who oppressed and enslaved them.

Growing up Black, it is a given that a fundamental crisis happens during life's development, because there was and is an ever-present awareness of being oppressed and devalued, living in a society which places a higher value on being White (Chao et al., 2017). This awareness causes individuals of color to be depressed, anxious, and have low self-esteem and self-worth (Chao et al., 2017; Chen, 2009).

According to Sellers et al. (1998), Black individuals' identity formation is unique from that of other immigrants. The racial identification system has consequences for the experiences and opportunities for Black individuals. Black racial identity has to reconcile with the oppressive society and the history of discrimination placed upon Blacks in the United States throughout generations. Interactions between individuals and across multiple contexts influence an individual's view of identity (Hardcastle et al., 1981). Considerable research has been conducted looking at individual identity and how race impacts the identity of people of color (Hurd et al., 2013). Racial identity and Black communities are positively correlated with an increased positive self-regard with individuals who are faced with discrimination (Chae & Yoshikawa, 2008; Gaylord-Harden et al., 2017; Mereish et al., 2016; Nadal et al., 2019; Yap et al., 2011). Consistent with this notion, the four dimensions of Black racial identity give a framework of the role environmental context plays in shaping the idea of what it means to be Black in the United States (Hurd et al., 2013). These four dimensions include centrality, regard, salience, and ideology. Centrality and salience have been found to be the most important factors associated with strong adherence to Black identity (Sellers et al., 1997, 1998).

***Centrality***

Centrality alludes to the degree to which a Black individual strongly endorses their racial group membership through thoughts, beliefs, and actions (Scottham et al., 2010; Sellers et al., 1998). In a 2006 study, Johnson and Arbona found a correlation between racial identity and psychological well-being; however, there have been mixed outcomes regarding the direction in which racial identity and psychological well-being are associated (McClain et al., 2016). Researchers have found, in some cases, racial identity is linked to negative psychological outcomes (Johnson & Arbona, 2006; McClain et al., 2016). Racial centrality was found to be a considerable negative predictor of well-being, exceeding beyond gender and assimilation in a study of young Black youth in college (McClain et al., 2016; Pillay, 2005). Literature has persistently endorsed the notion of a positive link between racial centrality and psychological well-being; however, a 2016 study by McClain et al. showed there is a possibility individuals who strongly endorse their race as a central part of their identity have lower psychological stress when seen as a minority. However, when the individual was in the majority and not acculturated in the Black culture, it caused increased psychological stress (Adams et al., 2020; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

***Regard***

Regard alludes to a Black individual's affective disposition toward the Black community and is separated into two areas: private and public regard (Scottham et al., 2010; Sellers et al., 1998). Private regard is defined as how one sees themselves and conceptualizes their Black identity. Public regard is how the environment and society affect how an individual feels about the racial group into which they were born. One of

the best examples of racial regard is the doll experiment, which was initially conducted by Clark and Clark in 1947 (Clark, 1955) and was later replicated in a study by Byrd et al. (2017). Clark and Clark ran the doll experiment to explore race awareness, because they found that negative beliefs in racial identification were related to negative racial attitudes held by young children (Clark, 1955). Researchers showed pictures of dolls of different skin tones to Black children from ages 5 to 10. The children were asked questions pertaining to self-concept (i.e., Which doll is the nice doll? and Which doll is the mean doll?). Clark and Clark found that most participating children at each age level chose the Brown doll rather than the White doll when asked, “Which doll looks bad?” Throughout the study results, the Brown doll had all the negative attributes, whereas the positive attributes were reflected in the White doll. This experiment was crucial in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to desegregate schools, as it demonstrated how Black children had internalized negative attitudes toward themselves (Byrd et al., 2017). In 2017, Byrd et al. replicated the experiment but provided four dolls of varying skin tones. When asked which doll was bad, the darkest skin-toned doll was still chosen. However, a new finding was that participants were more readily able to identify “What doll looks more like you?” and they were also able to identify more positive traits within the doll that resembled themselves. This response was consistent with more positive attitudes of self-concept. These findings were contrary to the findings in the 1947 Clark and Clark doll study, where the children associated prettiness and niceness to having White skin (Clark, 1955). With that said, the children chose the dark-skinned doll when they were asked which doll looked mean (Byrd et al., 2017). In the 70 years spanning the two studies, results indicated that Black children have begun to have a positive self-

concept with dolls who they perceive look like them. Although Black identity has become more positive, it also means the definition of what it means to be Black may have changed. Black identity is a subjective definition and can be affected by changing social culture.

**Private Regard.** Private regard alludes to the degree to which a Black individual feels positively or negatively toward the Black community in addition to how he or she feels about belonging to or automatically being associated with the Black community (Scottham et al., 2010; Sellers et al., 1998). Private regard is strongly associated with global self-esteem, which refers to how people value the self (Leary, 1999) and internalizing behaviors. Racial socialization builds private regard emotions toward race and identity (Davis et al., 2017). Private regard promotes the message of Black pride and encourages historical knowledge of the Black journey. Another factor of private regard is alertness to discrimination, which is taught at a young age to socialize children regarding race. According to researchers, private regard serves as a protective manner and as a connectiveness toward one's ethnic group (Davis et al., 2017; Sellers et al., 1998). However, when the message of the reality of discrimination and oppression is emphasized, the message is internalized and becomes demoralizing, fostering adverse feelings about being Black (Davis et al., 2017). When the alertness to discrimination is heightened, it perpetuates racial bias and racial mistrust, which leads to self-hatred and depression, and in some cases breeds anger.

**Public Regard.** Public regard alludes to the degree to which a Black individual feels the Black community is perceived positively or negatively by the out-group (Scottham et al., 2010; Sellers et al., 1998). Rivas-Drake (2010) stated when an

individual believes others appreciate their ethnic-racial group, there is a positive association that correlates with lower depressive and somatic symptoms, in addition to increased academic motivation. However, when public regard is negative, individuals perceive greater rates of discrimination and oppression (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2016). During adolescence, individuals are increasingly aware of impression management and are greatly influenced by their peers' perceptions of them. Negative messages, such as bullying and harassment from peers, are strongly associated with adverse psychological and physical health.

### ***Salience***

Salience alludes to the degree to which one's race is significant to one's self-concept at a specific point in time or in a specific situation (Scottham et al., 2010; Sellers et al., 1998). Cross (1994) found that it is imperative to have high salience regarding racial identity, to move through developmental models of racial growth. This growth is important because the more progressive stages of development achieved indicate a stronger core identity, which is correlated with a multitude of positive outcomes including greater self-esteem and confidence (Hurtado et al., 2015). Racial identity salience is a pivotal transition point in the racial developmental process.

### ***Ideology***

Ideology alludes to Black individuals' disposition and concept about the way Black individuals should act and behave (Scottham et al., 2010; Sellers et al., 1998). According to Sellers et al. (1998), ideology is comprised of four subscales that represent the formation of how Black ideological philosophies are constructed. Ideological philosophies are formed by four subscales: Assimilation, Humanist, Oppressed Minority,

and Nationalist. Racial assimilation emphasizes and examines the similarities between Black individuals and U.S. society as a whole. Assimilation is the act of interacting with the majority (i.e., White individuals) to truly understand a different side of one's identity outside of race. Racial humanism examines the similarities of all human beings; race, class, and gender are not the focal point. Humanists view the world as a whole and focus on the environment, homelessness, and the poor. Moral issues concern reasons why some people are oppressed and others are oppressors (Sellers et al., 1997, 1998). Individuals who belong to an oppressed minority endorse similar ideological notions and strongly relate with other minority groups who are oppressed, such as people of color; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people; and immigrants. Sellers et al. (1998) examined the similarities of different oppressed groups and the various issues they face and found individuals who are nationalist appreciate the wonder of being Black and the unique Black experience as being unlike that of any other racial group in America. Nationalist ideologists are invested in the advancement of Black individuals. There is a deep appreciation for the unique Black history, culture, and resilience of the Black community.

The disenfranchised Black psyche, or Black people who have been stripped of power or freedoms, have endorsed the notion that being Black is inherently a negative attribute to possess (Yap et al., 2011). Negative psychological processes continue to be reinforced through a separate model of identity for Black individuals that is markedly different than other developmental identity models. Some may argue that Black identity is formed in reference and reaction to the history and current oppression that people of color face daily. Yap et al. (2011) suggested African Americans report lower life

satisfaction when individuals from the out-group view the Black community through judgment and discrimination. Researchers have found when one internalizes the oppression and devaluation of their racial group, it is correlated with increased self-hatred and low self-evaluation, in turn increasing the chances of mental health issues and unhealthy behaviors (Chae & Yoshikawa, 2008). When greater importance is placed on race and ethnicity in defining who one is, research has shown significantly elevated levels of depression. In contrast, Black individuals who characterize themselves by race see their racial group more positively with private regard and believe other groups see their racial group more positively with public regard (Yap et al., 2011). They report high self-esteem and a high sense of life satisfaction.

### **Self-Esteem and Life Satisfaction**

Self-esteem is a central indicator when assessing well-being among the Black community (Chao et al., 2017). The marginalization, racial identity, and the perception and reality of discrimination and prejudice toward Black individuals are related to the complex problems that face the Black community (Branscombe et al., 1999; Chao et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2004). In the United States, the long history of colorism, prejudice, or discrimination against individuals with brown skin which gives more privilege to those who possess lighter skin tones, may have caused repercussions reflecting lower self-esteem to ripple throughout the Black community (Adams et al., 2016; Maddox & Gray, 2002). Perceptions of attractiveness and not being able to obtain the Eurocentric standard of beauty have caused greater threats to young girls' self-esteem and have led to increased levels of depression (Adams et al., 2020; Breland-Noble, 2013).



Black individuals who internalize the Eurocentric standard have diminished self-esteem (Adams et al., 2020; Breland-Noble, 2013). Depression is one of the most common mental health disorders. Two-hundred and sixty-four million people suffer from depression globally (World Health Organization, 2020). According to the criteria in the American Psychiatric Association's (2013) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; *DSM-5*), depression is defined as a persistent feeling of sadness, hopelessness, and lack of interest in activities that one once enjoyed. Mereish et al. (2016) found the prevalence of major depression is lower in Black communities than among non-Hispanic White individuals. However, depression often goes untreated in Black communities, which leads to more severe effects. There are several reasons why Black individuals do not seek treatment for depression: one is that it is a sign of weakness and second, it may be seen as a lack of faith in God (Dessio et al., 2004; National Alliance of Mental Illness [NAMI], 2015). Seeking treatment for psychological issues is seen as a weakness. The perception of strength is used as a protective factor in the Black community (NAMI, 2015). Spirituality is an important tradition in Black communities. Seeking treatment for depression may also be seen as not having enough faith in God to heal oneself (Dessio et al., 2004). Poor self-esteem is associated with the perceptions of discrimination and prejudice. However, studies have shown having strong self-esteem acts as a mediator between depressive symptoms and perceived discrimination (Broman et al., 1988; Mereish et al., 2016).

Life satisfaction is a subjective state that varies from person to person (Wakefield et al., 2017). Research has supported the correlation between group identification and life satisfaction. Group identification does not have to be race related but may be with any

group that provides social support. Diener et al. (2012) found that life satisfaction may vary individually; however, it would likely fall into one of four categories: (a) life chances, (b) course of events, (c) flow of experiences, and (d) evaluation of life. More life chances reflect moral order, social equality, economic welfare, personal resources, and family bonds. A course of events is influenced by the environment, unique challenges, and group membership. The flow of experience includes feelings and responses that individuals develop personally and socially throughout life.

Strine et al. (2007) found that life satisfaction is highly correlated with health issues, such as pain, obesity, anxiety, and chronic illness. A decrease of life satisfaction rates is found in individuals who perceive oppression and discrimination against Black individuals from others (Yap et al., 2011). Researchers have found that the social structure of discrimination may directly affect psychological happiness via internalization of adverse racial group attitudes, leading to impoverished self-evaluation and worse mental health (Clark et al., 1999; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). Social identity theory proposes that individuals may develop a poor self-concept from adverse social values connected to belonging to a devalued group, which can negatively affect self-esteem and mental health (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

Branscombe et al. (1999) found when Black individuals attributed all negative situations to racial discrimination, they had lower self-esteem and poor life satisfaction when compared to individuals who made negative attributions to other causes. Black Americans today believe that the American dream is the dream of equal opportunities, economic attainment, and successful careers that exceed what prior generations could only dream of; this dream is the goal in U.S. culture (Armstrong et al., 2019).

Historically, the Black community has been denied the promises of the American dream in the form of obstacles specific to their minority statuses, such as discrimination, lack of access, and economic hardships. Researchers have found that many African Americans in the Black community who are pessimistic about the American dream are more likely to feel that it is unattainable and give up trying (Cohen-Marks & Stout, 2011).

Discrimination is associated with life satisfaction for individuals in the Black community (Barnes & Lightsey, 2005). For many African Americans, racial discrimination happens daily and is linked to reports of low life satisfaction and happiness rates (Utsey et al., 2000).

Researchers propose that African Americans who commit to achieving the American dream have higher confidence in the process of obtaining success through employing hard work and continued education (Armstrong et al., 2019). However, when an African American individual is surrounded by a community that suffers from significant disparities in poverty, they are less likely to believe that the American dream is attainable (Cohen-Marks & Stout, 2011). The disparities are attributed to the barriers to access quality education, opportunities for jobs, and the institutional and structural inequalities in lower economic areas. Akom (2008) suggested that the imbalance of the economic structure and the deprivation of the American dream is the result of a universal victim mentality within the Black community. Many Black individuals are stuck in the incarceration, poverty, and discrimination cycle. Racial centrality and regard are associated with psychological well-being for Black youth; however, over time racial identity beliefs fluctuate with increased interaction with the racial neighborhood composition (Hurd et al., 2013).

### **Rationale for the Study**

Previous research has shown that belonging to the Black community mediates the effects of discrimination and prejudice by perpetuating the message of endurance and resilience (Yap et al., 2011). Positive well-being has been linked to having a racial group membership and social connection. The present study investigated Black identity and how it affects life satisfaction. Many studies have shown that group identification, which was defined in this study as a sense of belonging to one's ethnic group, including a sense of commonality with the group members, is linked to high levels of satisfaction in life (Chae & Yoshikawa, 2008; Forsyth & Carter, 2012; Yap et al., 2011). There is a wealth of knowledge about Black individuals in the context of community. There is little research that examines Blacks as distinct individuals apart from the larger group called the Black community.

This is an important area to study due to the increased demand in the Black community for reparations and the constant reminder of the struggle that holds Black individuals from moving forward in their life journey. The notion of being Black is something an individual cannot choose; it is biologically passed down. Being Black does not have to define who one is as a person. The current study aimed to examine the Black community experience and highlight reasons that life satisfaction rates may be decreased when there is a strong adherence to Black racial identity.

### **Research Question**

Little research has addressed the link between strength of race identity and life satisfaction. There is a gap in literature and research findings about the adverse effects of strong adherence to Black racial identity and the psychological

effect of aligning with the Black community, whose history has been laden with trauma and struggle. This current study examined and investigated the following: (a) how strongly individuals endorse their Black identity and (b) the link between strength of group identification and life satisfaction.

The current research question was “How does the strength of the Black racial identity affect life satisfaction?” The hypotheses for this study were:

- *H1*: There will be a negative association between life satisfaction and a higher endorsement of Black identity (Centrality subscale).
- *H2*: Nationalist ideology will be positively correlated with life satisfaction.
- *H3*: Oppressive ideology will be negatively correlated with life satisfaction.

## Chapter 2

### Methodology

The present study focused on assessing the association between Black identity and life satisfaction. To investigate the association between Black identity and life satisfaction, a quantitative method comparison study with a cross-sectional design was used to investigate how the strength of African American identification affects the level of life satisfaction. The current study used two questionnaires: (a) the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; Sellers et al., 1997) and (b) the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985). Prior to collecting data, I ran a G power 3.1 analysis for central and noncentral distribution. The researcher looked in the test family  $F$ -test for an ANOVA, fixed effect omnibus one-way. The effect size  $f$  was 0.35 with the 4 groups. Analysis determined the requirement for a minimum sample size of 149 participants. However, the COVID-19 global pandemic and the new Omicron variant made it difficult to collect data.

### Participants

All participants identified as having a Black ethnicity and being 18 years old or older. They were recruited via social media, National Urban League, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Association of Black Psychologists, and by word of mouth. At the end of each survey, participants were encouraged to tell others about the study if they felt comfortable to do so. A web-link was provided that could be passed on to their colleagues and friends.

Participation in this study was voluntary. Participants were given the option to choose not to participate in the study at any time and for any reason. There were no

negative consequences if the participants refused to participate. All responses were designed to be anonymous; however, if the participant wanted to be entered into the raffle for a \$100 Amazon gift card, an email address was required.

### **Materials and Procedure**

Data collection and surveys were administrated using Qualtrics, an online data collection platform. As authorized users of the College of Social and Behavioral Science's Qualtrics account, the researcher and faculty sponsor had sole access to and full control of the data collected through the Qualtrics platform. Qualtrics is FedRAMP Authorized, that is, certified by the Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program. This certification signifies Qualtrics' compliance with the highest industry standards in security, including rules for health information security specified in the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act (HITECH; see <https://www.qualtrics.com/security-statement/> for more detail.). Qualtrics employees will not have access to data unless given consent by the researcher (<https://www.qualtrics.com/privacy-statement/>).

Administration offices of the National Urban League, NAACP, and the Association of Black Psychologists were the first organizations to receive the web-link for the survey, with more participants subsequently recruited as the link was passed on. The web-link was available via email, Facebook, and on a peer-to-peer work platform. Snowball sampling was used to invite Black individuals to visit the online survey site. This type of sampling occurs when word is passed on from interested parties about the study to their friends and acquaintances, in this case, via email, Facebook, or through a peer-to-peer online platform. The procedure for sampling was self-selection, as only

those who initially entered through the avenue of Facebook, a requested email link, or the peer-to-peer work site page were able to continue to the study survey on Qualtrics.

This study website contained a description of the survey, informed consent, and the survey itself. Upon entering the website, visitors were informed of the study description and that they were free to discontinue the survey at any time (see Appendix A). In addition, instructions were included regarding help available for any participant concerned by the content of or reaction to the study. By clicking the “I agree” tab at the bottom of the consent form, participants indicated their consent and were then automatically directed to the survey (see Appendix B).

The online questionnaire began with basic biographical information: gender, age, socioeconomic status, household status, relationship status, and level of education (see Appendix C). The surveys that followed next were in the following order: the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; see Appendices D and E).

The actual number of questions in the survey were 61. Completion of the survey required 6 to 10 minutes. All responses were anonymous, and a chance to win a \$100 Amazon gift card was offered.

### ***The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity***

The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) was developed to gauge the three well-founded dimensions of the multidimensional model of Black identity (MMBI), which includes centrality, ideology, and regard in African American individuals (Sellers et al., 1998). The MIBI is a factor analysis of Black identity-centered questions. Test-retest of this measure proposed adequate reliability and validity (Sellers et



al., 1997). The MIBI is a 56-item questionnaire that evaluates three scales that measure the centrality, ideology, and regard dimensions. The Ideology scale includes four subscales (Nationalist, Assimilation, Minority, and Humanist), and the Regard scale includes two subscales (Private Regard and Public Regard). The questionnaire is a self-reported measure that uses a Likert scale. Participants rate each statement from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. The Cronbach alpha for the subscales range from a low of .60 to a high of .79. Significant alpha levels are less than  $.01/6 = .002$  (Sellers et al., 1997). The Cronbach alpha ratings show: Centrality scale ( $\alpha = .77$ ), Private Regard ( $\alpha = .60$ ), Public Regard ( $\alpha = .18$ ), Assimilation ( $\alpha = .73$ ), Humanist ( $\alpha = .70$ ), Minority ( $\alpha = .76$ ), and Nationalist ( $\alpha = .70$ ). To increase validity and reliability, certain items were reverse scored.

Elevated scores on the Centrality scale indicate characteristics of race being of high importance in the individual's definition of self (Sellers et al., 1997). Elevated scores on Private Regard correlate to more positive feelings toward people of color. Elevated scores on Public Regard scale imply a belief that others have more positive feelings toward people of color.

Questions in each scale were ranked. Examples of questions (Sellers et al., 1997) included: (a) Centrality scale: My destiny is tied to the destiny of other Black people; Being Black is an important reflection of who I am; Black students are better off going to schools that are controlled and organized by Blacks; (b) Private Regard: I feel good about Black people; I am happy that I am Black; Black values should not be inconsistent with human values; (c) Public Regard: Overall, Blacks are considered good by others; In general, others respect Black people; Society views Black people as an asset.

### ***The Satisfaction With Life Scale***

The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) was developed to measure the life satisfaction component of subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1985). Diener et al. (2012) found that scores on the SWLS correlate with measures of mental health and are predictive of future behaviors such as suicide attempts. The SWLS is a 5-item questionnaire that measures life satisfaction and assesses the degree to which one is satisfied with general elements of one's life.

The questionnaire is a self-reported measure that uses a 7-point Likert-style response scale (Diener et al., 2012). Participants rate each statement from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Possible scores range from 5 to 35 when each statement is added together, with a score of 20 describing a neutral point on the scale. Scores that fall between 5–9 signify that the participant is extremely dissatisfied with their life, and scores that fall between 31–35 signify that the participant is extremely satisfied with their life. The coefficient alpha for SWLS ranges from .79 to .89, signifying that the scale has high internal consistency. The SWLS was found to have good test-retest correlation (.84, .80 over a 1-month interval; Pavot & Diener, 2008). The statements given to participants to rate are as follows: In most ways my life is close to my ideal; The conditions of my life are excellent; I am satisfied with my life; So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life; and If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze the results of this study, the survey responses were downloaded and the Qualtrics surveys were taken offline. Data obtained from Qualtrics were entered into SPSS and analyzed. A multilinear regression was performed on the three hypotheses to

determine any relationship between the variables. The correlational analyses were used to measure the strength of Black racial identity and life satisfaction.

### **Summary**

This study was conducted over a 92-day period and consisted of 67 individuals who identified as Black. Participants were recruited via self-selected sample via the National Urban League, NAACP, and the Association of Black Psychologists, and by word of mouth. A web-link was available via email, Facebook, and on a peer-to-peer work platform. Participants were administered an informed consent form, a brief demographics questionnaire, MIBI questionnaire, and SWLS questionnaire via Qualtrics. A web-link was provided that could be passed on to their colleagues and friends. The participants were offered a chance to win a \$100 Amazon gift card that was gifted at the end of the month when the survey was finished.

### **Chapter 3**

This current study aimed to examine the association between Black identity and life satisfaction. I hypothesized high Centrality outcomes would be negatively associated with life satisfaction outcomes, Black individuals who scored high in Nationalist Ideology would have a positive outcome correlated with life satisfaction, and Black individuals who scored high on Oppressed Minority would have outcomes that were negatively correlated with life satisfaction.

The following questions were examined: (a) how strongly individuals endorse their Black identity and (b) the link between strength of group identification and life satisfaction. This current study used a quantitative research method design and survey methodology to investigate the strength of Black identity and satisfaction of life. All subscales of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) were examined. A multilinear regression Black correlational analysis was conducted on three of the Black identity subscales (Centrality, Nationalist, Oppressed Minority) to investigate the relationship between these scales and the degree of life satisfaction.

#### **Participants**

To qualify for participation in this study, participants needed to be 18 years or older and identify as having ethnicity. The total number of participants consisted of 67 individuals. Eleven of the participants were eliminated from the total because their surveys were incomplete. The participants consisted of 14 males, 51 females, one nonbinary/third gender individual, and one individual preferred not to answer regarding gender. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 61 years or over, with most participants between 31 and 40 years old. The participants' yearly income ranged from less than

\$10,000 to \$71,000 or more; most participants made \$41,000–\$50,000 per year.

Regarding relationship status, 52.24% of the participants were single ( $n = 35$ ), 28.36% were married ( $n = 19$ ), 8.96% were divorced ( $n = 6$ ), and 10.45% defined their relationship status as “other” ( $n = 7$ ). Regarding educational level, 2.99% of participants reported being high school graduates ( $n = 2$ ), 11.94% had completed some college ( $n = 8$ ), 4.48% held an associate’s degree ( $n = 3$ ), 22.39% held a bachelor’s degree ( $n = 15$ ), 53.73% held a graduate degree ( $n = 36$ ), 2.99% held a technical school degree ( $n = 2$ ), and 1.49% defined their education as “other” ( $n = 1$ ). The participants identified ethnically as 64.18% Black, 1.49% Afro-American, 14.93% African American, 10.45% Black American, and 8.96% Mixed Heritage.

Table 1 shows the mean scores for the seven individual racial identity variables. Analyzing the identity scores, Private Regard reflected the highest elevated mean and Public Regard reflected the lowest mean. Private regard reflects the psychological assessment of how one regards their own Black identity in either a positive or negative light. Public regard reflects how the individual believes their Black community is positively or negatively viewed and socially valued by others. These scores showed a higher Private Regard ( $M = 6.52$ ) and a lower Public Regard ( $M = 3.32$ ), which suggests that Black individuals have a higher regard for their Black identity than they believe others have of their community.

**Table 1**

## Black Racial Identity Subscales and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Centrality	5.47	1.07
Private regard	6.52	0.57
Public regard	3.32	1.68
Assimilation	4.39	0.96
Humanist	4.84	0.95
Oppressed minority	4.40	1.27
Nationalist	4.11	0.83

*Note.* Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1,000 bootstrap samples.

On the SWLS, there were six categories for scoring: 5–9, *Extremely dissatisfied*; 10–14, *Dissatisfied*; 15–19, *Slightly below average in life satisfaction*; 20–24, *Average*; 25–29, *High score*; 30–35, *Very high score, highly satisfied*. Table 2 shows the overall mean score for satisfaction with life ( $M = 24.84$ ), which reflected an average score of life satisfaction. The standard of deviation ( $SD = 5.05$ ) of the participants in this study reflected a wide range of reports of satisfaction. These results indicate that individuals are for the most part satisfied with their lives yet may have areas in their lives in which they would like to see improvement.

**Table 2**

## Satisfaction With Life Survey and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
SWLS	24.84	5.05

*Note.* SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to explore the prediction of satisfaction of life from three of the subscales of Black racial identity: Centrality, Nationalist, and Oppressed Minority. As shown in Table 3, results of the multiple linear regression analysis showed that Centrality and Nationalist were not statistically significant predictors to model ( $p > .05$ ). However, results of the multiple linear regression analysis showed that there was a significant negative association between the subscale Oppressed Minority and satisfaction of life. The three subscales are highly correlated and may be the reason the inferential significance is off because if one is not significant, all will not be significant.

**Table 3**

*Correlations*

Variable	Centrality	Nationalist	OM	SWLS
Centrality	-	.732**	.276*	-.181
Nationalist	.732**	-	.223*	-.159
OM	.276*	.223*	-	-.346*

*Note.* \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed). \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

The overall model of the three predictive measures together was not statistically significant,  $F(13,52) = 2.559$ ,  $p = .065$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .078$ , because the Nationalist and Centrality subscales were not correlated with satisfaction of life (see Table 4). When the subscale Oppressed Minority was measured separately as a predictive measure, results showed it to be statistically significant  $F(1,54) = 7.350$ ,  $p = .009$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .103$  (see Table 5).

**Table 4***Coefficients*

Model	Variable	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.
		<i>B</i>	Std. error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	33.079	3.841	-	8.612	.000
	Centrality	-.293	.906	-.062	-.323	.748
	Nationalist	-.259	1.160	-.042	-.223	.824
	Oppressed minority	-1.266	.534	-.319	-2.371	.021

**Table 5***Coefficients*

Model	Variable	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.
		<i>B</i>	Std. error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	30.878	2.317	-	13.324	0
	Oppressed minority	-1.372	.506	-.319	-2.711	.009

**Results**

The hypothesis analysis of subscales Centrality, Nationalist, and Oppressed Minority of Black identity and the relationship with life satisfaction are depicted in Figure 1 and Figure 2. An explanation of the results is described in the following section.

Hypothesis 1 – There will be a negative association between life satisfaction and a higher endorsement of Black identity (Centrality subscale). The multilinear regression analysis for the first hypothesis assessed if the subscale Centrality of Black identity affected satisfaction of life and the higher endorsement of Centrality would be negatively associated with satisfaction of life. The analysis revealed that there was not a statistical significance to the correlation between Centrality and satisfaction of life.

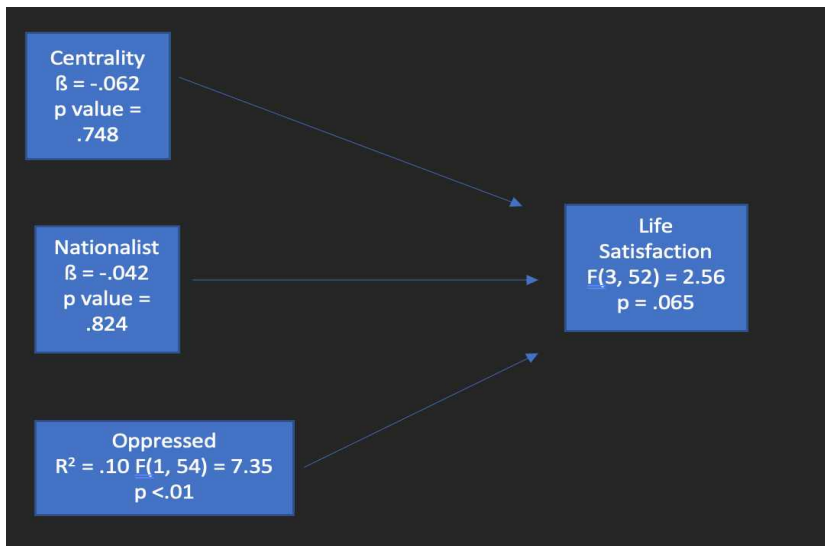


Hypothesis 2 – Nationalist ideology will be positively correlated with life satisfaction. The multilinear regression analysis for the second hypothesis assessed if the subscale Nationalist of Black identity would be positively correlated with satisfaction of life. The analysis revealed that there was not a statistical significance to the correlation between Nationalist and satisfaction of life.

Hypothesis 3 – Oppressive ideology will be negatively correlated with life satisfaction. The multilinear regression analysis for the third hypothesis assessed if the subscale Oppressed Minority of Black identity would be negatively correlated with satisfaction of life. The analysis revealed that there was a statistically significant impact on satisfaction of life and is negatively correlated to the subscale Oppressed Minority within Black identity.

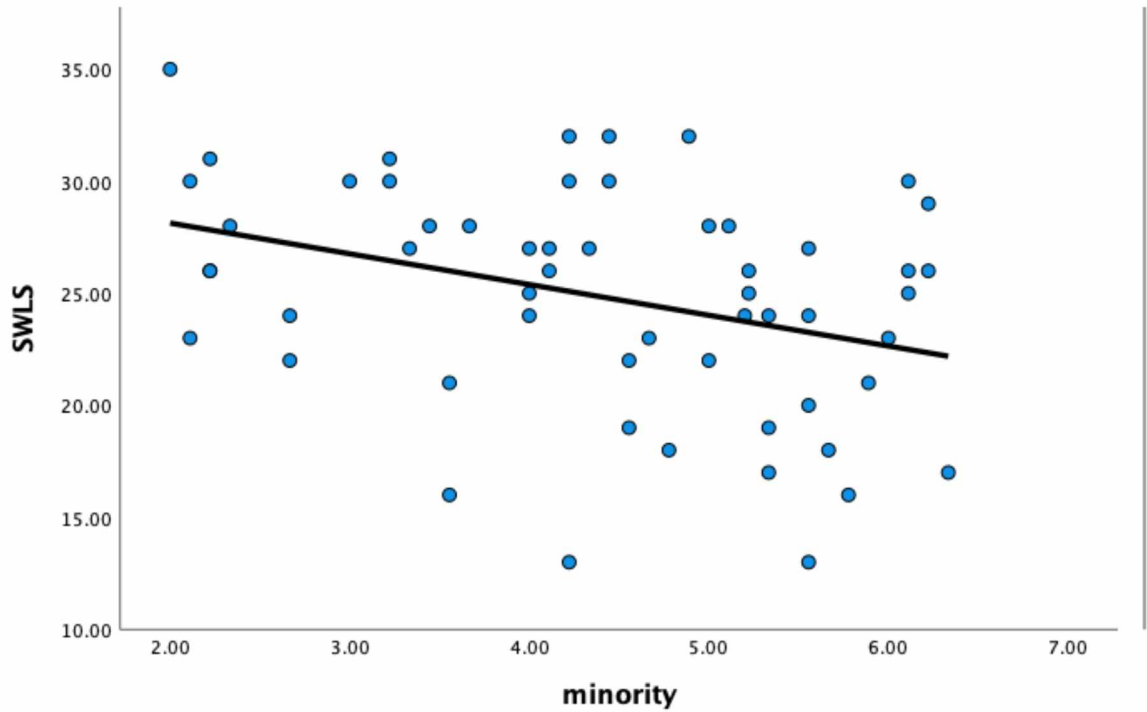
**Figure 1**

*The Relationship Between Subscales Centrality, Nationalist, and Oppressed Minority and Life Satisfaction*



**Figure 2**

*Relationship Between Scores on the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) and the Subscale of Oppressed Minority (Minority)*



*Note.* Pearson's  $r = -.346$ .

## Chapter 4

### Discussion

#### Interpretation

This study aimed to increase knowledge and add to the body of research to understand the link between identification with the various facets of race identity and how these identities affect life satisfaction. The goal of this research was to explore whether strong adherence to various aspects of Black racial identity could impact life satisfaction, as strongly identifying with the Black community would mean also identifying with a history has been laden with trauma, struggle, and oppression. There have been limited research findings regarding the differences in Black identity ideology and the distinct factors of identity formation for Black individuals and how those factors, whether high adherence levels or low adherence levels, may impact life satisfaction rates.

The study results reveal no correlation between Black identity subscales Centrality or Nationalist ideologies and life satisfaction. However, there is a correlation between Black identity oppressive minority ideology and life satisfaction; thus, individuals who scored higher on the subscale of Oppressed Minority were likely to endorse lower levels of life satisfaction.

In the existing literature, racial centrality has been linked to reports of higher life satisfaction (Yap et al., 2011). When Black individuals have a prominent level of centrality, in which they strongly identify with the Black community, Black cultural beliefs, cultural thoughts, and behaviors, they will view themselves more positively. This study aimed to capture those cases that have found that in some cases racial identity has been linked to negative psychological outcomes (Johnson & Arbona, 2006; McClain et

al., 2016). The present study findings were not significant enough to show any association between centrality and life satisfaction.

This current study highlights a significant negative association between the oppressed minority ideology and satisfaction with life. Black individuals with prominent levels in the Oppressed Minority subscale highly identify with current and historical discrimination, oppression, and racial trauma. They also identify with other minority groups and find alliances with other oppressed groups, impacting their life satisfaction (Sellers et al., 1997, 1998). Past research has suggested that when compared to Whites, Black individuals are more likely to deal with anxiety, depression, poor well-being, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts because of cultural invalidations (Campbell & Troyer, 2007; Franco & Franco, 2016). These findings are significant because 90% of suicides are associated with psychological distress and lack of mental health wellness (Office of Minority Mental Health, 2016).

Identifying with other minority groups who have a similar history of oppression can affect individuals in several different ways. For instance, when experiencing oppression, discrimination, and microaggression, it can feel isolating to individuals, especially when they are in the minority. However, if one notices that oppression, discrimination, and microaggression happen to people who are not Black, there can be this unspoken bond that says, “You are not alone,” which builds alliances between various groups. With that said, identifying with other groups that are oppressed may cause a negative affect and feelings of hopelessness or cause anger to grow.

The scores for life satisfaction ( $M = 24.84$ ,  $SD = 5.05$ ) showed an average score of satisfaction and aligned with the SWLS ( $M = 23.5$ ,  $SD = 6.43$ ; Diener et al., 1985),

which indicates that overall, participants are satisfied with their lives but have areas in their lives they would like to improve. These findings are in line with previous studies stating that life satisfaction is a subjective state that varies from person to person and should be examined separately in four different categories: (a) life changes, (b) course of events, (c) flow of experiences, and (d) evaluation of life (Diener et al., 2012; Wakefield et al., 2017). Recent years have been filled with multiple courses of events with visible racial discontent and a global pandemic that has brought life changes and a flow of different experiences, which have caused many people to evaluate their lives and beliefs. Although many of the events of the last 2 years have been difficult, these events have also brought forth some positive aspects, for instance, increased family time, a greater appreciation for life, and a newfound pride in racial identity (i.e., Black Lives Matter).

### **Integration**

Results showed that there was a relationship between life satisfaction and Black identity in some areas. Black identity does not increase or decrease individuals' life satisfaction or happiness as a whole. The different parts of identity need to be examined individually that collectively define Black identity: centrality, private regard, public regard, assimilation, humanist, oppressed minority, and nationalist. Studies by Sellers et al. (1998) and Sellers and Shelton (2003) found that increased adherence to nationalist ideology can serve as a defense against psychological anxiety and stress caused by racial oppression and discrimination. However, this finding was not confirmed in this study. A larger sample size and a more diverse sample would have been needed to look at the intricacies of the nationalist ideology and the evaluation of psychological anxiety and stress that is associated with oppression and discrimination.

Additionally, racial centrality has been linked to reports of higher life satisfaction (Yap et al., 2011). When Black individuals have a prominent level of centrality, in which they strongly identify with the Black community, Black cultural beliefs, cultural thoughts, and behaviors, they will view themselves more positively. However, Johnson and Arbona (2006) and McClain et al. (2016) found that in some cases, racial identity is linked to negative psychological outcomes. There are many factors that could impact identity formation, which is unique to each person. Whether their racial identity is central to who they are and if they feel as if they have acculturated into a particular culture could determine whether they are satisfied with life. McClain et al. showed that an individual who strongly endorses their race as a central part of their identity has lower psychological stress when seen as a minority; however, when seen as a majority and acculturated to that culture, it increased their psychological stress (Adams et al., 2020; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Findings from this study could not find a link between centrality and satisfaction with life at all and lacked the ability to further examine the diversity that lies within Black communities, cultural beliefs, thoughts, and behaviors.

However, the one significant association is between oppressed minority ideology and decreased life satisfaction. When evaluating Black communities, there is a lack of research exploring the disadvantages of being a part of Black communities and the areas of Black culture, beliefs, and ideas that can be harmful and/or damaging to life satisfaction, self-identity, and self-esteem. In 2020, the news cycle in the United States reflected increased media coverage about the challenges in the Black community, which include lack of medical coverage, poverty, and increased violence. Pettit and Gutierrez (2018) reported that 24.2% of Black children have had at least one parent incarcerated

compared to 3.9% of White children. The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2021) reported that the number one killer of Black males between ages of 10 and 13 is homicide. When considering such reports and recent historical events, such as the increased awareness of Black individuals killed by police, which has caused heightened salience regarding racial identity, it is not a surprise to see alignment of oppressed minority. It is important to note that identification with oppressed minority or any racial identity ideology may be a product of one's environment. One might ask: Is the perception of oppression the cause of lower reports of life satisfaction or the societal acceptance of a Black individual being an oppressed minority affecting life satisfaction?

### **Limitation**

The study was done in the societal environment in the recovery of heightened racial tension stemming from the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Jacob Blake, combined with the COVID-19 global pandemic that highlighted the inequality and poverty that disproportionately affect Black communities. Due to these challenges, racial socialization with aspects of private and public regard may have acutely impacted Black racial identity (Davis et al., 2017), which created historical threat to validity.

A limitation of the study is a small sample size, which gave a limited representation of the Black population, increased the margin of error, and reduced the power of the findings. A G power 3.1 analysis was run for central and noncentral distribution prior to collecting data and indicated the study needed a sample size of at least 148 participants to have a moderate statistical power for analysis. This study had 67 participants, which failed to meet the minimum power for statistical power. In addition,



the study ran during the winter season, which impacted participant participation due to the Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year holidays and schools being out for winter break.

This study is not generalizable to the entire Black population because this current study was exclusively administered as an online survey-based measure and recruited participants via social media, National Urban League, NAACP, Association of Black Psychologists, and historically Black colleges. Due to this, the findings were skewed toward participants with higher education backgrounds and from a higher socioeconomic category. These demographics are important because Black individuals from higher economic backgrounds and higher education tend to identify in their Black ethnicity more strongly than Black individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Rowley et al., 1998; Stokes et al., 1994). This may be due to the number of opportunities afforded to those who have more income and have wider experiences outside of their communities. Rowley et al. (1998) reported an increased variance regarding self-esteem, self-conceptualization, and racial regard, regarding identity.

Most participants in this study were female. Seventy-six percent of participants identified as female, which may impact the outcome, and failed to capture gender differences in racial identity. A study by Oney et al. (2011) found that gender affected racial identity attitudes, and when compared to men, women reported higher levels of public regard and centrality. Future research should be mindful of the distribution of gender and recognize that there are differences in Black racial identity and life satisfaction. Recognizing gender is important because Willis and Neblett (2020) found

that racial identity changes over time and psychological distress increases in males as they age, impacting life satisfaction.

### **Future Directions and Recommendations**

Recommendations for future research include research to explore how Black individuals identify themselves and evaluate how race plays a role or changes how individuals see themselves. Secondly, because recruitment for this study occurred solely via social media, National Urban League, NAACP, Association of Black Psychologists, and by word of mouth, future studies should use various data collection methods, such as online and in-person recruitment to obtain a broader range of demographics to increase inclusive and expansive representation of the Black population with various educational, regional, age, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Lastly, moderate statistical power should be met to decrease the margin of error and increase the power of the findings.

### **Conclusions and Implications for Practice**

From a therapeutic perspective, Black racial identification is multifaceted and does not happen overnight, but rather over a lifetime. As noted, Black individuals have a long, complex, and often brutal history that has served to form a community defined and enlivened by a uniquely shared trauma of their ancestors (Park, 2019). Often it is difficult for Black individuals in the United States to see their family identity before slavery, as many Black individuals cannot trace their family background to a specific country, as opposed to many White counterparts who can use advancements such as Ancestry databases to track immigration logs and assist with building family trees. Black individuals may often feel lost in finding who they are because it gets lost in the ever-present reminder of slavery. The American Black community shares a reality of

enslavement that included loss of their family name or tribe, no personal freedoms, such as economic, social, and political freedoms, as well as their physical body. One major question this research has uncovered is how a Black individual can form an individual identity that is not tied to slavery and oppression. Erikson (1994) stated that each individual's unique identity represents their particular strengths with the social institution in which they live. The notion of being Black is something an individual cannot choose; it is biologically passed down. However, being Black in the United States comes with unique challenges, which Black individuals cannot avoid. A Black individual in the United States is not allowed to just be an autonomous person but rather is always considered part of a larger group called "the Black community," whether they have ties in the community. Simply being Black does not define who a person is or should be. This is an important area to study due to the increased demand in the Black community for reparations and the constant reminder of struggle that holds Black individuals from moving forward in their life journey. Black individuals gained their freedom from slavery in 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation; Black individuals gained their civic freedoms in 1964 with the Civil Rights Act; now it is time for Black individuals to gain their psychological freedom.

Given these historical, cultural, and psychological considerations, the following clinical recommendations are suggested. First and foremost, each client is an individual and should be seen as such and not automatically placed in a racial category, as race and identity is such a subjective expression. As noted in Chapter 1, Black individuals in the United States are caught between two different identities (Lynch, 2020). One identity is a citizen of the United States of America, which gives equal rights under the law; another

identity automatically places them in a group according to the color of their skin, in which all personal identity is taken away. In addition, there is an ever-present awareness of being oppressed and devalued, living in a society that places a higher value on being White (Chao et al., 2017).

This awareness causes individuals of color to be depressed, anxious, having low self-esteem and self-worth (Chao et al., 2017; Chen, 2009). Understanding an individual's racial centrality and ideology will help determine their racial group membership, beliefs, and thoughts. Understanding an individual's public regard will help inform how the environment and society have affected how they feel about the racial group they were born into and how they think others feel about that racial group. Knowing the private regard will help clarify how individuals see themselves and conceptualize their Black identity and relate to their life satisfaction (Davis et al., 2017; Sellers et al., 1998). The implication is that improving an individual's private regard will serve as a protective factor against the pressures of discrimination and oppression.

Whether conscious or unconscious, Black individuals in the United States who internalize the Eurocentric physical standards have diminished self-esteem (Adams et al., 2020; Breland-Noble, 2013), which should be considered when working with individuals struggling with confidence, eating disorders, anxiety, and depression. In addition, clinicians should be aware that discrimination exists inside and outside of an individual's racial group. For example, Chapter 1 explained how Fordham and Ogbu (1986) coined the term acting White as a practical and conceptual meaning to describe racial insults that encourage Black youth not to assimilate into White culture, meaning that if a Black individual acts, speaks, or behaves in a way that is in step with core values in White

communities (e.g., speaking proper English, getting good grades in school, or dressing conservatively), the individual may be seen as “less” Black (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Adams et al. (2020) and Fordham and Ogbu (1986) found that when individuals were in the majority and not acculturated in Black culture, it caused increased psychological stress. Black individuals can feel stress from their racial in-group or out-group. Doing values work with clients can assist in finding alternate identity qualities other than race, in turn improving self-esteem.

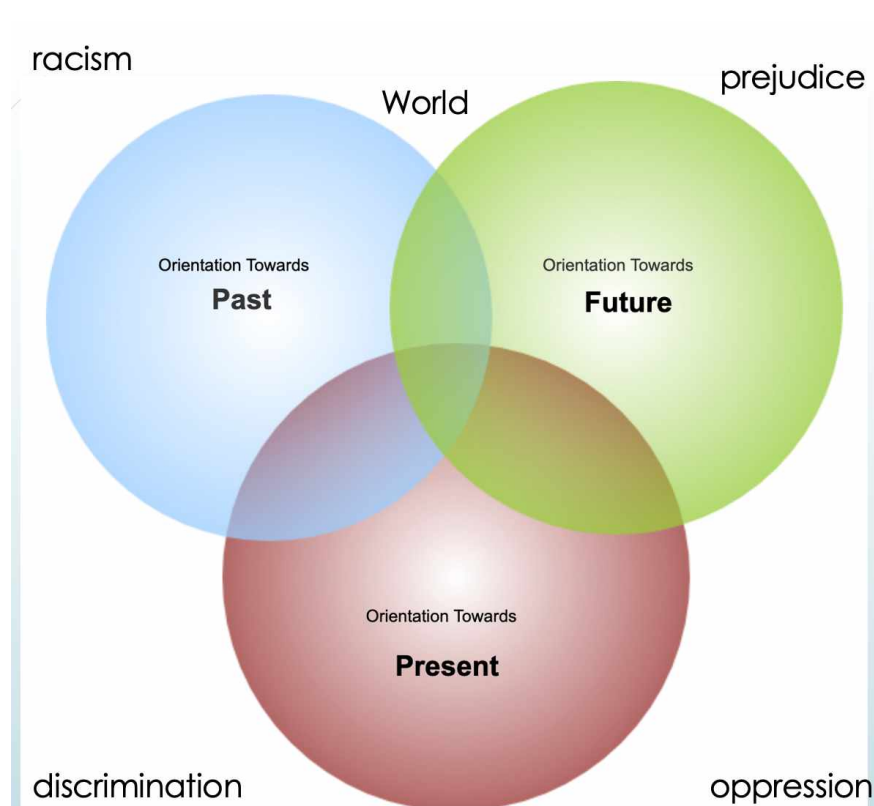
Counseling psychologists working with Black individuals should consider using narrative therapy first to help highlight their story, get the client’s perspective of themselves, identify any unhealthy beliefs, explore events in their lives and the importance and meaning they assign to them, and finally help them find their voice. Motivational interviewing techniques should be used to understand how they feel and think about their identity and how they see themselves in the world.

Figure 3 shows an identity conceptualization of a client of color. In this world there will always be racism, prejudice, discrimination, and oppression. There are three main attitudes that emerge: those individuals who are oriented toward the past, those individuals who are oriented toward the present, and those who are oriented toward the future. When listening to a client’s narrative, an orientation style will emerge. Every person orientates through the past, present, and future at any given time. However, understanding the dominant orientation will help guide the counseling experience. Individuals who are dominant in the past tend to be stuck on the Black struggle, slavery, and reparation. They look at the present and future through the worldview of always having to overcome some obstacle. Individuals who are dominant in the present

acknowledge the past and look toward the future. They tend to be stuck more in the present moment of daily survival. Finally, those individuals who are dominant in the future acknowledge the past and realize their present. They do things that improve their future, regardless of where they came from and where they currently are.

**Figure 3**

*Client Conceptualization*



Clinicians strive to help people move forward and achieve their personal goals through identifying maladaptive behaviors and helping to shape healthier patterns. Each Black individual addresses race multiple times throughout their lifetime, and a Black individual does not have the luxury of ignoring their Blackness in the United States. Therefore, clinicians should treat each client as an individual and not assume every Black individual has the same experiences, beliefs, and thoughts, or acts in a particular way.

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**Appendix A****Informational Handout**

Black Racial Identity and Life Satisfaction

**Dissertation, Northwest University**

Alana Jackson

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by a psychology student in a doctorate program at Northwest University. As a participant of this survey, you have a chance to enter a raffle for a \$100 Amazon gift card as an incentive for participating in the survey. The purpose of this study is to examine the Black community experience and how life satisfaction rates may be related to Black racial identity. If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to respond to an online survey divided into three sections. The survey will take approximately 6 to 10 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions about this study, contact Alana Jackson at [REDACTED]. If you have further questions, please contact my faculty advisor Dr. Nikki Johnson at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the Chair of the Northwest University IRD, Dr. Molly Quick, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Below is the link to the Survey:

[REDACTED]

Thank you for your consideration of the request.

Alana Jackson, Doctoral Student  
Dr. Nikki Johnson, Psy. D

## Appendix B

### Consent Form

Black Racial Identity and Life Satisfaction

**Dissertation, Northwest University**

Alana Jackson

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by a psychology student in a doctorate program at Northwest University. As a participant of this survey, you have a chance to enter a raffle for a \$100 Amazon gift card as an incentive for participating in the survey. The purpose of this study is to examine the Black community experience and how life satisfaction rates may be related to Black racial identity.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to respond to an online survey divided into three sections. The survey will take approximately 6 to 10 minutes to complete. The first screen presented in the survey will provide you the opportunity to complete the survey by clicking the “agree” button or choose not to participate in the survey by clicking “disagree” button. At the end of the survey, you will be given the option to submit your response by clicking “submit” or to withdraw from the study by clicking “withdraw.”

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate in this study at any time and for any reason. There will not be any negative consequences for you if you refuse to participate. All responses are designed to be anonymous; however, if you wish to be entered into the raffle for a \$100 Amazon gift card, an email address is required.

These surveys have minimal risk associated to the participants. If you have any questions or if content of this survey brings up personal questions, confusion, or anxiety, please contact a psychologist near you. You may also seek further help by contacting [www.psychologytoday.com/Washington/Therapists]. You may also seek further help by contacting the crisis text hotline by texting 741741. Thank you for considering participation in this study.

The results from this study will be presented at Northwest University. All data forms will be destroyed July 2022.

If you have any questions about this study, contact Alana Jackson at [REDACTED]. If you have further questions, please contact my faculty advisor Dr. Nikki Johnson at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the Chair of the Northwest University IRD, Dr. Molly Quick, at [REDACTED].

Thank you for your consideration in this study.

Alana Jackson,  
Doctoral Student in Counseling Psychology  
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

Dr. Nikki Johnson, Psy. D  
Assistant Professor  
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

*Please print a copy of this consent form for future reference*

If you are 18 years of age or older, understand the statements above, and freely consent to participate in the study, click on the "I Agree" button to begin the survey.

I Agree

I Do Not Agree

**Appendix C****Questionnaire Part 1: Demographic Questionnaire**

Black Racial Identity and Life Satisfaction

**Dissertation, Northwest University**

Alana Jackson

1. Gender (male/female/prefer not to answer)
2. Age in years (18 – 20, 21- 30, 31 – 40, 41 – 50, 51 – 60, 61+)
3. Household Income (Less than \$10, 000, \$10,000 - \$20,000, \$30,000 - \$40,000, \$41,000 - \$50,000, \$51,000 - \$60,000, \$61,000 - \$70,000, more than \$71,000)
4. Relationship Status (married, divorced, single, widow, other)
5. Education (less than high school, high school, technical school, some college, bachelor degree, graduate degree, other)
6. How do you identify? (Black, Afro-American, African American, Black American, Mixed heritage, Other)



## Appendix D

### Questionnaire Part 2: The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI)

#### Black Identity

#### Black Racial Identity and Life Satisfaction

#### Dissertation, Northwest University

Alana Jackson

**Procedure:** The test consists of fifty items that you must rate on how true they are about you on a seven-point scale where 1= Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Disagree a little, 4 = Neutral and 5 = Agree a little, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly Agree. It takes most people 5-10 minutes to complete.

1. Overall, being Black has very little to do with how I feel about myself.
2. It is important for Black people to surround their children with Black art, music, and literature.
3. Black people should not marry interracially.
4. I feel good about Black people.
5. Overall, Blacks are considered good by others.
6. In general, being Black is an important part of my self-image.
7. I am happy that I am Black.
8. I feel that Blacks have made major accomplishments and advancements.
9. My destiny is tied to the destiny of other Black people.
10. Blacks who support separatism are as racist as White people who also support separatism.
11. Blacks would better off if they adopted Afrocentric values.
12. Black students are better off going to schools that are controlled and organized by Blacks.
13. Being Black is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am.
14. Black people must organize themselves into a separate Black political force.
15. In general, others respect Black people.
16. Whenever possible, Blacks should buy from other Black businesses.

17. Most people consider Blacks, on the average, to be more ineffective than other racial groups.
18. A sign of progress is the Blacks are in the mainstream of America more than ever before.
19. I have a strong sense of belonging to Black people.
20. The same forces which have led to the oppression of Blacks have also led to the oppression of other groups.
21. A thorough knowledge of Black history is very important for Blacks today.
22. Blacks and Whites can never live in true harmony because of racial differences.
23. Black values should not be inconsistent with human values.
24. I often regret that I am Black.
25. White people can never be trusted where Blacks are concerned.
26. Blacks should have the choice to marry interracially.
27. Blacks and Whites have more commonalities than differences.
28. Black people should not consider race when buying art or selecting a book to read.
29. Blacks would be better off if they were more concerned with the problems facing all people than just focusing on Black issues.
30. Being an individual is more important than identifying oneself as Black.
31. We are all children of a higher being, therefore we should love people of all races.
32. Blacks should judge Whites as individuals and not as members of the White race.
33. I have a strong attachment to other Black people.
34. The struggle for Black liberation in America should be closely related to the struggle of other oppressed groups.
35. People regardless of their race have strengths and limitations.
36. Blacks should learn about the oppression of other groups.
37. Because America is predominantly white, it is important that Blacks go to White schools so that they can gain experience interacting with Whites.

38. Black people should treat other oppressed people as allies.
39. Blacks should strive to be full members of the American political system.
40. Blacks should try to work within the system to achieve their political and economic goals.
41. Blacks should strive to integrate all institutions which are segregated.
42. The racism Blacks have experienced is similar to that of other minority groups.
43. Blacks should feel free to interact socially with White people.
44. Blacks should view themselves as being Americans first and foremost.
45. There are other people who experience racial injustice and indignities similar to Black Americans.
46. The plight of Blacks in America will improve only when Blacks are in important positions within the system.
47. Blacks will be more successful in achieving their goals if they form coalitions with other oppressed groups.
48. Being Black is an important reflection of who I am.
49. Blacks should try to become friends with people from other oppressed groups.
50. The dominate society devalues anything not White male oriented.
51. Being Black is not a major actor in my social relationships.
52. Blacks are not respected by the broader society.
53. In general, other groups view Blacks in a positive manner.
54. I am proud to be Black.
55. I feel that the Black community has made valuable contributions to this society.
56. Society views Black people as an asset.

**Appendix E****Questionnaire Part 3: The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWL)**

Black Racial Identity and Life Satisfaction

**Dissertation, Northwest University**

Alana Jackson

**Procedure:** The test consists of five items that you must rate on how true they are about you on a seven-point scale where 1= Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly Disagree, 4 = Neither Agree or Disagree and 5 = Slightly Agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly Agree. It takes most people 3-5 minutes to complete. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 1) In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
- 2) The conditions of my life are excellent.
- 3) I am satisfied with my life.
- 4) So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.
- 5) If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

**Section III: Verification**

I certify that the above information is true and that I will follow the research procedures and method for obtaining consent as approved by the Institutional Review Board during the duration of this study. I will also submit any further changes to the IRB for review. If at any time, an ethical/data breach occurs, I will alert the IRB at the earliest time possible.

Principal Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\*Faculty Advisor Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_