

# Racial Identity and Depression Among African American Women

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This study examines direct, interactive, and indirect effects of racial identity and depression in a sample of 379 African American women. Results indicated that higher racial private and public regard were associated with lower depression. The relationship between private regard and depression was moderated by racial centrality, such that higher private regard was more strongly related to lower depression when women's race was a central part of their self-concept. Finally, results indicated that self-esteem fully mediated the relationship between private regard and depression and partially mediated the relationship between public regard and depression. The authors discuss the results in relation to reflected appraisal, the insulation hypothesis, and identity theory.

**Keywords:** racial identity, African American/Black women, psychological well-being, depression, self-esteem

What others think of us would be of little moment did it not, when known, so deeply tinge what we think of ourselves.—*Paul Ambrose Valery*

The realities of group-based inequality persist for African Americans across many domains of life in society (M. K. Brown et al., 2003; Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). These racial disparities may present unique challenges to individuals' self-worth, value, and esteem. Early work on ethnic identity and self-perception assumed that African Americans internalized society's lack of regard for their group membership, and as a result had negative self-images (Clark, 1965; Clark & Clark, 1950; Kardiner & Ovesey, 1951). However, recent scholarship challenges this view and suggests that African Americans may parry the psychological effects of public disregard using various coping strategies. One such strategy is for African Americans to focus on their racial group, rather than society in general, when making self-evaluations (Broman, Neighbors, & Jackson, 1988; Hughes & Demo, 1989). A number of researchers, in fact, contend that a major psychological function of racial identity is to buffer African Americans against the potentially harmful effects of societal stigmatization (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Caldwell, Zimmerman, Bernat, Sellers, & Notaro, 2002; Crocker & Major, 1989; Cross, 1991; Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998;

Phinney, 1990, 1995; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998; Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). The current study seeks to add to the existing literature linking intrapersonal and interpersonal evaluations and racial identity using a heterogeneous sample of African American women. Specifically, we examine when and why personal assessments of one's racial group (private regard) as well as perceptions of society's view of one's racial group (public regard) are related to feelings of depression and self-esteem for African American women.

## Racial Identity

Previous research on the palliative effects of racial identity has typically used the lens of social identity theory (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI; Sellers, Smith et al., 1998) has been a pivotal measure in this research. The MMRI proposes that racial identity consists of three stable elements, two of which are racial centrality and racial regard. *Racial centrality* refers to the degree to which African Americans typically define themselves in terms of race, or place importance on race within their self-concept. Regard has two components related to affective and evaluative assessments of African Americans. *Private regard* refers to the individual's personally held judgment of African Americans and of being a member of that group, whereas *public regard* refers to the degree to which individuals feel that others in society hold positive or negative views of African Americans. It is the interplay among these three elements of racial identity that is hypothesized to interact in complex and important ways to affect psychological well-being among African Americans.

## Racial Identity and Psychological Well-Being

The evaluative dimensions of racial identity, private and public regard, may be particularly relevant for psychological outcomes.

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Cooley's (1922) notion of the looking-glass self and Mead's (1925) reflected appraisal theory suggest that how others see us influences how we see ourselves. Such theories of *reflected appraisal* suggest that African Americans' perceptions of public regard, how others view African Americans, may inform their views of themselves (Cross, 1991). Furthermore, Simon (1999) argued that "finding one's place" in the social environment is essential to the subjective experience of a meaningful life. Along these lines, social rejection by others can have detrimental effects on various facets of well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Fable, 1993). Taken together, these arguments suggest that the internalization of negative group-based societal images may harm mental health outcomes among African Americans (Bynum, Best, Barnes, & Burton, 2008; Caldwell et al., 2002).

The *insulation hypothesis* instead posits that African Americans make self-evaluations by comparing themselves to people of their own racial group rather than to all members of society—a tendency spurred by the history of racial segregation in the United States (e.g., Broman et al., 1988; Rosenberg, 1979). In other words, African Americans use the reflected appraisals of other African Americans to assess their worth (Hughes & Demo, 1989). This hypothesis suggests that private regard, rather than public regard, will impact the self-perception of African Americans. Indeed, the high degree of collectivism found in African American culture (Jones, 2003; Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995) is said to allow African Americans to focus on the unique strengths of their group in determining their sense of worth and well-being. Thus, high private regard of one's race may increase the psychological well-being of African Americans.

Over the past decade, researchers have examined these theoretical relationships. The empirical literature on the relationship between public regard and well-being has been mixed. Some researchers have found that African Americans' perceptions of how others view their racial group were unrelated to their psychological well-being (Rowley et al., 1998; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003; Sellers et al., 2006). However, others have found that higher levels of public regard were related to less depression (Yip, Seaton, & Sellers, 2006), lower concurrent psychological distress (Sellers & Shelton, 2003), and positive educational attitudes (Chavous et al., 2003), consistent with reflected appraisal theory.

In contrast, the results for private regard have consistently supported the insulation hypothesis. Studies have found that African Americans' positive feelings about their racial group membership (i.e., private regard) were related to less depression (Bynum et al., 2008; Sellers et al., 2006), less stress (Sellers et al., 2006), less concurrent psychological distress (Sellers & Shelton, 2003), and higher self-esteem (Rowley et al., 1998). Private regard has also been found to be related to less alcohol use (Caldwell, Sellers, Bernat, & Zimmerman, 2004) and positive beliefs about school and education (Chavous et al., 2003). In summary, private regard has demonstrated a consistent positive relationship with relevant important life outcomes, such that more favorable personal perceptions of African Americans are related to more positive psychological well-being. This stands in contrast with the mixed findings obtained for the direct relationship between public regard and psychological outcomes.

One reason for the ambiguity in the racial identity literature may be that aspects of racial regard do not always affect psychological

outcomes directly; rather, their impact may arise through more complicated relationships. According to identity theory, central identities will have a greater impact on attitudinal, behavioral, and psychological outcomes than will less important identities because of their prominence within the individual's self-concept (Stryker & Serpe, 1982; Thoits, 1983). Consistent with this theory, racial centrality has been found to moderate the impact of private racial regard on psychological well-being. In both college and high school samples of African Americans, Rowley et al. (1998) found that the relationship between private regard and self-esteem was moderated by racial centrality. Specifically, higher private regard was related to higher self-esteem only for those African Americans who placed importance on their race. Similarly, in a sample of African American high school students at risk for dropping out, Caldwell et al. (2004) found that private regard was more strongly related to less alcohol use for those with higher levels of racial centrality. Thus, although Cross et al. (1998) suggested that one function of racial identity for African Americans is to protect their psychological well-being from negative racial experiences, another function of racial centrality may be to accentuate the benefits of positive racial attitudes and experiences.

### Racial Regard and Self-Esteem

Given the strong evidence for the positive effects of private regard on psychological well-being, as well as the moderate evidence for the positive effects of public regard on psychological well-being, it is important to understand why African Americans' evaluative feelings about their racial group are associated with their own psychological well-being. Self-esteem is widely viewed as a general measure of individual well-being that is distinct from depression (Trzesniewski et al., 2006). We propose that self-esteem may be a more proximal outcome of racial regard perceptions than is depression, because of the shared evaluative properties of both self-esteem and regard. Clark and Clark (1950) and Clark (1965) argued that African American's internalization of the negativity directed at them through discrimination, stigmatization, and devaluation led them to experience a lack of self worth, or low self-esteem. More recently, researchers have suggested that the link between racial identity and self-esteem is specifically through racial regard (Rowley et al., 1998). Consistent with this notion, studies have found dimensions similar to private regard to be related to self-esteem (e.g., Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994; Hughes & Demo, 1989).

Crocker et al. (1994) found results consistent with the proposed mediating role of self-esteem. Specifically, they found that private racial self-esteem was related to African Americans' life satisfaction. However, when individual self-esteem was held constant, the relationship between private racial self-esteem and life satisfaction was no longer significant. Consistent with Clark and Clark (1950), Crocker et al. suggested that racial regard should be more strongly related to personal self-esteem than to other measures of psychological well-being because both assess evaluative perceptions of the self-concept. Thus, on the basis of the logic of this corpus of theory and research, we propose that the relationship between racial regard and depression will be mediated by self-esteem. Furthermore, we examine general personal self-esteem because we are interested in whether African Americans' race-related evaluations are related to depression via their general self-evaluations.

## Overview of the Present Study and Study Predictions

In the present study, we had three primary goals: (a) to examine whether the two racial regard dimensions have a direct relationship with depression; (b) to examine whether the relationship between racial regard and depression might differ depending on African American women's level of racial centrality; and importantly, (c) to examine the role of self-esteem in mediating the relationship between racial regard and depression. Specifically with respect to the last point, we are interested in whether racial regard might be associated with less depression because of its association with positive self-esteem. We examine these questions in a broad, demographically heterogeneous sample of African American women.

In the study, we explore the effects of both private regard and public regard, because the lack of clarity in the existing literature regarding the psychological impact of public regard in fact underscores the importance of including it as a variable in racial identity research. In doing so, we seek to gain a better understanding of when and why African American women's perceptions of how others see Black people have an impact on depression. On the basis of the research described above, we expect that others' perceptions of African Americans influence how Black women see themselves. Accordingly, we expect that both higher private regard and higher public regard will be associated with more positive psychological outcomes and will demonstrate similar patterns of relationships. Our specific study hypotheses are as follows:

### Hypothesis 1

Higher private regard and higher public regard will be related to lower depression.

### Hypothesis 2

The relationship between depression and private regard (Hypothesis 2a) and that between depression and public regard (Hypothesis 2b) will both be moderated by racial centrality. Specifically, greater private regard and greater public regard will be more strongly related to lower depression for African American women with higher racial centrality than they will be for women with lower racial centrality.

### Hypothesis 3

To the extent that these racial regard dimensions are related to depression, self-esteem is expected to carry the effects. Specifically, self-esteem is predicted to mediate the effects of private regard (Hypothesis 3a) and of public regard (Hypothesis 3b) on depression.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited on the Internet from postings on discussion groups and websites, including those related to African American women's interests.<sup>1</sup> Participants were invited to take part in an online survey for Black women. From an initial pool of 519 participants, observations were retained in the present analyses

from respondent who (a) were 18 years of age or older, (b) were female, (c) had two Black parents and self-identified as Black or African American, (d) self-reported being a U.S. citizen, and (e) had completed all survey items necessary for our analyses. Using these criteria, we included 379 female respondents' data in the analyses. In order to reduce the length of the survey, we obtained only limited demographic information. The women in the final sample ranged in age from 18 to 64 years ( $M = 33.11$ ,  $SD = 9.96$ ). Education levels ranged from middle school to doctoral degree, and 95% of the sample completed high school. The highest level of education for the largest number of women was 4-year college; 26% earned a bachelor's degree, whereas 29% left without a degree. Thirty-one percent of the women pursued postgraduate education as their highest level, with 23% earning a postgraduate degree.

After following the link to the survey, participants were presented with an information sheet describing the goals of the study. The study was described as a survey of social attitudes regarding social identity, self-esteem, beauty practices, and mental well-being. Consent was given when participants clicked the button to begin the survey.

### Measures

The means, standard deviations, possible ranges, and reliability coefficients for all scale scores are available in Table 1.

**Age.** Among various demographic items, one item assessed age in years.

**African American racial identity.** To assess participants' racial identity, we used three subscales from the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). The Centrality scale comprises 8 items assessing the degree to which race plays an important role in how respondents define themselves (e.g., "Being Black is an important reflection of who I am"). Private Regard consists of 6 items designed to measure the extent to which respondents feel positively about African Americans and being an African American (e.g., "I am proud to be Black"; "I feel good about Black people"). The Public Regard scale includes 6 items assessing participants' perceptions of how much society values African Americans (e.g., "Blacks are not respected by the broader society"). All items were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Appropriate items were reverse coded, and means were calculated for each of the three subscales. Final scores on the three subscales reflect higher levels of each construct. The scale reliability coefficients in the present study (see Table 1) were comparable to those in other studies of African Americans using the same measure. For example, reliability coefficients for centrality, public regard, and private regard were reported as .77, .78, and .78, respectively, by Schmerund, Sellers, Mueller, and Crosby (2001), and .75, .73, and .73, respectively, by Sellers and Shelton (2003).

**Depression.** Depression was assessed with the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II; Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996). The BDI-II

<sup>1</sup> Participants were recruited from the following: Hairboutique.com, Nappturlarity, Craigslist, SocialPsychology.org, Psychological Research on the Net, and Experimental Biological Anthropology at UCLA-XBA.

Table 1  
Means, Standard Deviations, Scale Ranges, Reliability Coefficients, and Intercorrelations for All Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	33.11	9.96	—	—					
2. Centrality	4.69	1.21	1–7	-.01	.74				
3. Private regard	6.18	0.92	1–7	.16**	.30**	.78			
4. Public regard	2.79	1.15	1–7	.07	-.05	.30**	.77		
5. Depression	1.68	0.58	1–4	-.17**	-.11*	-.33**	-.28**	.93	
6. Self-esteem	4.27	0.80	1–5	.20**	.15*	.50**	.24**	-.69**	.91

Note. Reliability coefficients are shown on the diagonal.

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

consists of 21 items in which participants report the extent to which they have experienced cognitive and somatic symptoms of clinical depression by using a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*minimal*) to 4 (*severe*). Items were averaged such that higher scores indicate more symptoms of depression. The BDI-II has demonstrated good reliability and validity in African American samples (Joe, Woolley, Brown, Ghahramanlou-Holloway, & Beck, 2008).

**Self-esteem.** Self-esteem was assessed with Rosenberg's (1979) 10-item self-esteem scale (e.g., "At times I think I am no good at all"—reverse-coded). Participants reported their agreement with each item by using a 5-point scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Items were coded such that higher average scores indicate higher self-esteem. The reliability and validity of this scale in samples of African Americans has been previously established (see Hoelter, 1983; Hughes & Demo, 1989), and Rowley et al. (1998) reported psychometric properties similar to those found in the present study ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = .65$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ ).

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, scale ranges, reliability coefficients, and correlations for study variables. Results indicated that older women reported higher private regard and self-esteem, and less depression, than did younger women. Racial

centrality was positively associated with private regard and self-esteem, and negatively with depression. Those women who had higher private regard for their Black identity also reported higher public regard. Higher private regard and higher public regard were both related to lower depression and higher self-esteem. Finally, depression and self-esteem were negatively related to each other.

### Moderation Analyses

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis, with depression as the dependent variable, was conducted to test our moderation hypothesis. We included age as a control variable because previous studies suggest that racial identity varies by age (e.g., Yip, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008), a relationship also reflected in our own descriptive results described above. On the first step, we entered age and our three identity variables: centrality, private regard, and public regard. On the second step of the analysis, the two-way interactions were entered: Centrality  $\times$  Private Regard, Centrality  $\times$  Public Regard, and Private Regard  $\times$  Public Regard. Prior to creating interaction terms multiplicatively, the racial identity variables were centered (Aiken & West, 1991).

Table 2 displays the results of the multiple regression analysis. The variables on the first step accounted for a significant amount of the variance in depression. In support of Hypothesis 1, women with higher public regard and higher private regard reported less depression. In Step 2, the two-way interactions accounted for a significant additional amount of the variance in depression. How-

Table 2  
Depression Regressed on Racial Centrality, Racial Regard, and Their Interactions

Variable	Depression			
	Step 1		Step 2	
	B ( $\beta$ )	<i>SE</i>	B ( $\beta$ )	<i>SE</i>
Age	-.01 (-.12)*	.00	-.01 (-.12)*	.00
Centrality	-.02 (-.05)	.02	-.03 (-.05)	.02
Private regard	-.15 (-.23)**	.03	-.16 (-.26)**	.04
Public regard	-.11 (-.21)**	.03	-.11 (-.22)**	.03
Centrality $\times$ Private Regard			-.06 (-.13)*	.03
Centrality $\times$ Public Regard			-.01 (-.03)	.02
Private Regard $\times$ Public Regard			.02 (.03)	.03
$\Delta R^2$	.16**		.02*	
Total $R^2$	.16**		.18**	

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

ever, the only significant interaction was between centrality and private regard. Thus Hypothesis 2a was supported, but not Hypothesis 2b. To examine the nature of the significant interaction, the relationship was graphed (see Figure 1), and simple slope analyses were conducted by using conditional values for racial centrality that were 1 standard deviation above the mean and 1 standard deviation below the mean (Aiken & West, 1991). The simple slope analyses indicated that the relationship between higher private regard and less depression was stronger for women with higher racial centrality ( $B = -.24, \beta = -.38, SE = .06, p < .001$ ) than for women with lower racial centrality ( $B = -.09, \beta = -.14, SE = .04, p < .05$ ).

**Mediation Analyses**

To reiterate our final hypothesis, we predicted that higher regard, both public and private, would be related to lower depression via their impacts on self-esteem. In other words, we predicted that the relationship between each regard dimension and depression would be mediated by self-esteem. We tested this prediction with mediation analyses, whereby private regard or public regard was the independent variable, depression was the dependent variable, and self-esteem was the mediator (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Following recommendations by Shrout and Bolger (2002), we used a bootstrapping procedure in which a 95% confidence interval (CI) was created for the size of the indirect effect. With this procedure, if the confidence interval does not contain zero, one can conclude that there is significant mediation present. We followed this procedure (using 5000 bootstrap resamples to create the 95% confidence intervals) with an SPSS algorithm provided by Preacher and Hayes (2008). In the analyses, the effects of age, centrality, and the regard dimension not of focus in each analysis were held constant (i.e., private regard is controlled in the analysis in which public regard is the independent variable, and vice versa).

Our first mediation analysis used private regard as the independent variable. As is seen in Figure 2 (top), higher private regard was related to significantly lower levels of depression. In addition, higher private regard was related to higher self-esteem, and higher self-esteem was related to lower depression. In support of Hypothesis 3a, self-esteem fully mediated the relationship between private regard and depression, 95% CI (-.25, -.13); indirect effect = .19; total  $R^2 = .49, p < .01$ . Figure 2 (bottom) also shows the results

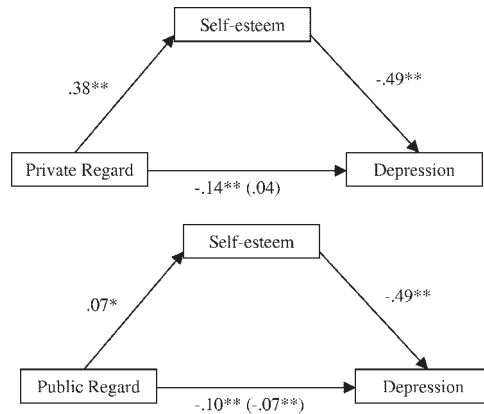


Figure 2. The mediating role of self-esteem in the relation between private regard and depression (top) or public regard and depression (bottom). Coefficients are unstandardized; those in parentheses represent the direct effect with the mediator in the model. Analyses control for age, racial centrality, and public regard (top panel) or private regard (bottom panel). \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

for the analysis in which public regard served as the independent variable. The analysis indicated that higher public regard was related to lower depression and higher self-esteem. Again, self-esteem was related to lower depression. Hypothesis 3b was supported in that self-esteem significantly mediated the relationship between public regard and depression, 95% CI (-.07, -.01); indirect effect = .04; total  $R^2 = .49, p < .01$ . However, the residual direct effect of public regard on depression remained significant, suggesting only partial mediation.

**Discussion**

The current study sought to examine the relationships among three dimensions of racial identity and depression in a broad sample of African American women. Specifically, we considered how the direct, interactive, and indirect dynamics of racial centrality and racial regard can serve to reduce the negative psychological effects of low social status. We were interested in demonstrating the positive effects of racial centrality when combined with high regard for African Americans, as well as how these dimensions of identity operated via self-esteem. Our hypotheses were largely supported and indicated that both private and public regard had important psychological implications for the African American women in our sample and that self-esteem plays a key role in this process.

Our first hypothesis was that private regard and public regard would be related to lower depression. The bivariate correlations and multiple regression analysis indicated that women who reported more of both types of regard also reported significantly less depression, supporting this prediction. Thus, the results for private regard suggest that women's own positive perceptions about Blacks are associated with reports of fewer depressive symptoms. Similarly, to the extent that African American women believed that others view Black people more positively (higher public regard), they also reported lower depression. These results together offer some support for both the insulation hypothesis and reflected appraisal theory.

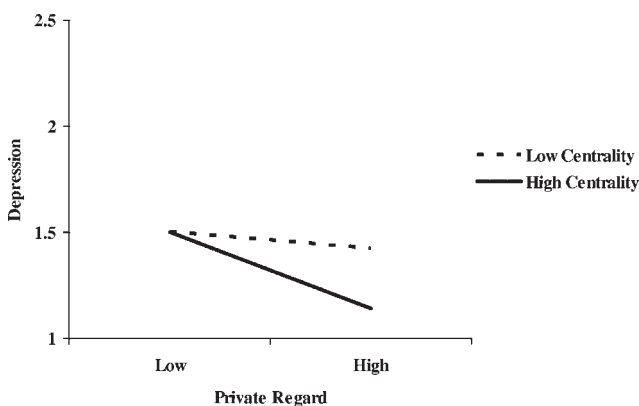


Figure 1. Depression as a function of private regard and racial centrality.

The negative relationship between private regard and depression suggests that Black women may be able to protect their psychological well-being by focusing on the positive characteristics of their racial group membership (Broman et al., 1988). Positive perceptions of Black people may be acquired through positive racial socialization practices and positive interactions with other Black people (e.g., Brown, 2008; Harris-Britt, Valrie, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2007; Neblett et al., 2008). Yet although African American women in our sample appear to use other Blacks as an important reference group, they remain influenced by the attitudes and opinions of the broader society, as is evidenced by the negative relationship between public regard and depression. Public regard perceptions may reflect an individual's encapsulated belief about others' evaluations of Black people, and these beliefs may be based on both women's personal experiences and women's vicarious experiences of racial discrimination (e.g., Sellers et al., 2006). Thus, Black women appear to be psychologically affected both by their own and by others' racial regard for African Americans in general.

Intriguingly, the multiple regression analysis did not indicate an interaction between public and private regard as predictors of Black women's depressive symptoms. Thus, the two types of regard appear to operate independently of one another in predicting depression. More specifically, levels of depression do not depend on women privately feeling high regard for Black people and believing that society does as well. Rather, African American women's depressive symptoms are lower when they either (a) feel positively about Black people or (b) perceive that others feel more positively about Black people. Consequently, it may be that helping depressed Black women to improve their own perceptions about Black people would be a successful avenue for enhancing their psychological well-being. Alternatively, Black women's depression might also be lowered through cognitively reframing their beliefs about society's regard of Black people. An example of this might be to point out that our President, Barack Obama, is a striking indicator that our country as a whole must be willing to judge Black people (or at least Black men) on their individual merits, as they do with White people. An additional strategy might be to encourage Black women to focus on positive daily interracial interactions.

Our second hypothesis was that racial centrality would moderate the relationship between racial regard and depression. This prediction was not supported for public regard, which did not interact with racial centrality. However, we did observe a significant interaction between private regard and racial centrality, such that the association between women's positive views about Blacks and lower levels of depression was stronger for those with higher racial centrality than for those with lower racial centrality. Hence, for women who regard their race to be a central component of their self-concept, higher levels of private regard may be especially helpful in preventing or mitigating feelings of depression. This suggests that consistent with prior work (e.g., Sellers et al., 2003) and resilience theory, centrality can be understood to have a protective effect. Black women with a highly central racial identity, by definition, feel more a part of their racial group and feel more connection with and belonging to other Black people. Thus, positive regard for Black people may more strongly translate into positive self-regard for women with high racial centrality, as the self and the group overlap to a greater extent within the self-

concept for this group. As a result, Black women with high racial centrality may be better able to benefit from their positive beliefs about Black people than those with low centrality.

A similar moderating relationship was not observed for public regard. This suggests that women's beliefs about the positive or negative views of others are related to their level of depression, regardless of how important they view their race to be. Thus, the reflected appraisal process does not appear to require race to be an important identity. Instead, this process may operate in a manner similar to stereotype threat (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002), such that it is the knowledge of others' beliefs or stereotypes, rather than an individual's agreement with those beliefs, that impacts their psychological outcomes.

Our third prediction was that the relationship between racial regard and lower depression would be mediated by self-esteem. Consistent with our hypotheses, the results suggested full mediation between private regard and depression by self-esteem, and partial mediation for public regard. That is, more positive regard perceptions were related to higher self-esteem, which in turn was related to lower depression. These results are consistent with the contention of Crocker et al. (1994) that racial regard will be more closely related to self-esteem than other aspects of psychological well-being because they are both dimensions of the self-concept that are related to perceptions of value and worth. The current study provides a more direct test of this assertion and suggests that self-esteem may be the more proximal mechanism by which racial regard is associated with other components of psychological well-being, such as life satisfaction and depression. Our finding that the relationship between public regard and depression is not entirely accounted for by self-esteem is not altogether surprising. Rather, the results suggest that in addition to changes in self-esteem, there are other reasons that African American women's beliefs about how the broader majority group views Black people affect their level of depression. For example, negative public regard perceptions may be related to experiences of discrimination or other real-world barriers. In such cases, low public regard may result in feeling a lack of control, which in turn might lead to more depression.

### Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study is more revealing than most psychological studies that solely use university undergraduates, one limitation of this study is that, because participants were recruited on the Internet from African American focused websites, the results from this sample may not be generalizable to the experiences of other African American women—particularly those unable or unwilling to visit the kinds of sites at which they would have received a recruitment notice. For example, the participants in this sample, although representing a diverse range of educational backgrounds, had a fairly high average level of education. Nearly all participants had completed some college, and over half had received at least a 4-year college degree. At the same time, researchers in this area face challenges in their attempts to recruit highly educated, community samples of African Americans. As such, this study is valuable in providing information about an understudied segment of the African American population.

Along similar lines, despite the recruitment strategy we used, on average our sample reported racial centrality levels only slightly

above the scale midpoint. Thus, the African American women in the study do not seem to have self-selected into the study because race was unusually important to their self-concept, although they did report extremely positive feelings about Black people. Finally, Internet sampling permitted us to obtain a relatively large sample size, which provided us with greater analytical power. Future studies should continue to study Black people from a range of educational and socioeconomic backgrounds to gain a better understanding of the heterogeneity of this group.

Future studies are needed to replicate and extend these findings, so as to establish the generalizability of our conclusions. Specifically, researchers could determine the boundary conditions for the mediation results we obtained by investigating whether self-esteem mediates the relationship between racial regard and other dimensions of psychological well-being. Future studies could also examine whether self-esteem is a mediator of the relationship between psychological well-being and the regard attached to other identities, such as gender identity. It is possible that the salience and visibility of race for African Americans makes perceptions related to their racial group especially relevant to personal self-esteem. Alternatively, identity regard, generally, may be related to well-being through one's overall sense of self-esteem.

## Conclusion

The current study of African American women sought to examine three types of relationships: direct, moderated, and mediated relationships among racial centrality, private and personal racial regard, depression, and self-esteem. Using a diverse sample of African American women, we replicated and extended previously documented direct relationships between racial regard and psychological well-being and highlighted the mechanistic properties of these associations. Our results support reflected appraisal theory (Cooley, 1922; Mead, 1925) and the insulation hypothesis (Broman et al., 1988) in that African American women's depression was associated both with how they believe others perceive their racial group and with how they themselves perceive Black people. For private regard, this relationship was stronger for women with higher racial centrality, supporting the protective role of racial identification. Finally, we found that the relationship between private regard and depression was almost fully explicable in terms of the high self-esteem that results as a function of belonging to a group that is personally valued. In contrast, the relationship between public regard and depression was only partially accounted for by self-esteem, suggesting that others' opinions of African American women's racial group do affect their level of depression, albeit through multiple pathways. Thus, this study points out some of the important facets of positive racial identity for the resilience of African American women, but it also underscores the continued need for greater social equality with respect to race and gender in America. Positive racial regard and identity should never be expected to act as a surrogate for racial justice.

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