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The Relationship of Demographic and Background Factors to Racial Identity Attitudes

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During the previous decade, the explosion of research articles in the nigrulence area has contributed significantly to the understanding of the relationship between racial identity attitudes and other psychological constructs. In some respects, research that attempts to further develop the theoretical constructs of the nigrulence models has yielded to those studies that attempt to apply the model. Using the Cross model of psychological nigrulence, the present study sought to build on the work by Cross, Parham and Helms, especially Parham's recent efforts to elaborate on those factors that might influence the development of a person's racial identity attitudes. Questions regarding specific factors that instigate a person's movement through the stages are explored, as well as questions about various identity resolution alternatives.

Recent advances in the study of racial identity development of African Americans theorized about how an individual's racial attitudes are manifested at different stages of the adult life cycle process (Parham, 1989b). Despite the importance of the theories and their utility for helping researchers and practitioners better understand the identity development process, Parham (1989a) also recommended that the theoretical constructs should be studied

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This article is dedicated to the memory of Mr. Paris T. Williams, the second author. Paris was an aspiring young Black psychologist who recently left this world to join the community of ancestors after an extended illness. My hope is that his name will live on as we wish him everlasting peace and thank him for his extensive work on this project. Correspondence regarding this manuscript should be addressed to Thomas A. Parham, Ph.D., Counseling Center, University of California, Irvine, CA 92717.

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empirically to provide more solid support of the theories involved. The
purpose of this study then, is to empirically examine racial identity attitudes
that characterize African American people at different stages of life and the
relationship of these attitudes to several demographic variables.

During the past two decades, the psychological literature has experienced
a substantial increase in the number of studies focusing on the phenomenon
of racial identity development in Black/African Americans (Carter, 1987;
Carter & Helms, 1987; Cross, 1978, 1986; Helms, 1984; Parham & Helms,
1981, 1985). In part, this increase has been stimulated by the need of
practitioners and researchers to better understand the influence of social
phenomenon on the development of racial attitudes and the need to more
thoroughly examine within-group variability among Black people, rather
than simply compare between-group differences (i.e., Blacks vs. Whites)
(Pettigrew, 1964). In addition, the increase has been fueled by the useful data
that are provided when racial identity attitudes are used to explore and/or
predict variables such as counselor preference (Parham & Helms, 1981;
Porche & Bankiotes, 1982), ego development (Looney, 1984), choice of
typical and atypical occupations (Grace, 1984), and Black values orientation
(Carter & Helms, 1987).

More recently, Ponterotto (1989) and others have called for the expansion
of racial identity studies, both in focus and in methodologies used to conduct
research in the area. Whether heeding Ponterotto’s call or not, various authors
seem to have responded with studies discussing (a) the institutional effects on
identity development of African American students (Cheatham, Slaney, &
Coleman, 1990), (b) the interaction between racial identity and locus of
control for Black clients in psychotherapy (Oler, 1989), (c) the role of racial
identity in Black student attitudes toward counseling and counseling centers
(Austin, Carter, & Vaux, 1990), and (d) the relationship between racial
identity and ego function/defense mechanisms in Black adult school samples
(Marriette, 1990).

Not surprisingly, those articles commonly referred to as models of psycho-
logical nigrescence have had the most influence on facilitating a better un-
derstanding of the identity development process (Cross, 1971, 1978; Jackson,
1975; Thomas, 1971; Williams, 1975). Nigrescence is a term de-
"ed from French and means “to become Black” (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991). It
describes a process and struggle by which a Black person attempts to come
to terms with a process of deracination and subsequent attempts to develop
a consciousness that is centered in an African American versus a European
American worldview.
IDENTITY CHANGE PROCESS

Cross et al. (1991) have synthesized the racial identity models by suggesting that nigrescence models tend to have four or five stages and the common point of departure is not the change process per se, but an analysis of the identity to be changed. The person is first described as functioning in an ongoing steady state (stage 1) with a deracinated or “Negro identity”; following this, some event or series of events compel the person to seek to be a part of change (stage 2); this is followed by psychological metamorphosis (stage 3) and finally the person is described as having internalized the new Black identity and enters another steady state (stage 4). The period of metamorphosis or transition is depicted as an intense struggle between the “old” and emerging “new” self. (p. 322)

Despite their differences in geographical location (Watts, California; Chicago, Illinois; Albany, New York; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) and time of publication (Cross, 1971; Thomas, 1971; Jackson, 1975; Millions, 1973; Williams, 1981; Taylor, 1976), Cross et al. (1991) have observed that each author of a nigrescence model seems to have developed a common set of assumptions regarding the identity change process. These assumptions include the following: (a) Racial identity development occurs through a sequential movement from stage to stage; (b) the movement from one stage to another is fueled by an individual’s reaction to socially oppressive phenomenon; and (c) developmental progression through the stages represents an attitudinal shift from negative to positive self-perceptions. For example, Thomas (1971) developed the five-step model that described the process used by individuals to overcome their confusion of self-worth and their obsessive need to seek validation from the White culture. Jackson (1975) and Taylor (1976) developed a theory of Black identity development designed to explain movement from negative to positive racial attitudes. In a similar fashion, Williams (1981) has developed an Afrocentric theory of Black personality in which he attempts to relate levels of racial consciousness with specific behavioral responses to social phenomenon.

Despite the depth of knowledge that these writers and models add to the understanding of the nigrescence phenomenon, unfortunately, their lack of visibility in the psychological literature has contributed to their salience remaining more latent than visible. In fact, except for the original writings of Jackson, Thomas, Taylor, and Williams, few studies exist that either expand the theoretical constructs of these theories or seek to correlate the theories with other counseling process and/or outcome variables. In addition, the few studies that do exist are either unpublished theses and dissertations
or studies published in *Dissertation Abstracts International* and not easily accessible. The one theory that has received extensive attention in the literature is the model articulated by Cross (1971, 1978). Cross (1971) speculated, and then more definitively concluded (1978), that the development of a Black person's racial identity was characterized by movement through four distinct psychological stages. According to Cross et al. (1991) the identity resolution process was a psychological struggle to overcome the effects of deracination efforts perpetuated by White society. The stages, ranging from least to most self-secure, follow.

**Pre-Encounter.** In this stage, an individual is prone to view the world from a White frame of reference. He or she typically thinks, acts, and behaves in ways that devalue his or her Blackness. The person has accepted a non-Black frame of reference, and because his or her reference point is usually a White normative standard, he or she develops attitudes that are very pro-White and anti-Black.

**Encounter.** The second stage is characterized by an individual's experiencing one of many significant personal or social events that are inconsistent with his or her Pre-Encounter frame of reference. The Encounter experience(s) begins to shatter an individual's investment in a Pre-Encounter worldview and challenges the individual's assumptions related to his or her own racial attitudes.

**Immersion-Emersion.** This stage is characterized by an individual's obsessive search to develop a frame of reference or worldview that is more consistent with recent experiences he or she has encountered. There is an attempt to erase and/or purge from one's mind all references to one's Pre-Encounter orientation, while simultaneously becoming concerned with how to more exclusively explore one's Black culture and heritage and develop a more positive sense of self. The immersion into Blackness is characterized both by withdrawal from interactions with other ethnic (particularly White) groups and by an obsessive attempt to connect with Black/African American people through participation in clubs and organizations, absorbing massive amounts of Black literature, and developing peer groups that are all Black as well.

**Internalization.** This stage is characterized by an individual's achieving a sense of inner security and self-confidence with his or her Blackness. The resolution of conflicts between the old and the new worldview becomes evident as tension, emotionality, and defensiveness are replaced by a calm,
secure demeanor. This stage is also characterized by a psychological openness, ideological flexibility, and a general decline in strong anti-White feelings. Although still using Black as a primary reference group, this person moves toward more pluralistic, nonracist perspectives, but does so from a position of strength rather than one of weakness (Cross, 1978).

**MOVEMENT ACROSS STAGES**

Analysis of the stages in Cross’s model underscore movement from a psychological space where a person’s Blackness is denied or distorted to a space where the person develops a stronger sense of cultural integrity. The stages imply that there is an initial tendency to identify with the oppressor (a European American worldview) followed by the person having his or her belief system shaken by an emotionally traumatic event. Once experienced, the individual is believed to be more vulnerable to a new interpretation of reality representing what seems to be a 180-degree shift in perspective. That new worldview represents a total immersion into Black/African culture followed by a development of a set of attitudes that is characterized by a more realistic sense of one’s cultural identity and one’s relationship to other culturally different people. For a more extensive discussion of Cross’s model and other nigrescence models, the reader is referred to Cross et al. (1991).

**DEVELOPMENT OF THE NIGRESCENCE MODEL**

In part, the extensive use of Cross’s model was as much a result of Parham and Helms’s (1981) innovative application to the issue of counselor preference as it was a result of the model’s ease in providing conceptual clarity of the nigrescence process to the user. Undoubtedly, another factor contributing to the widespread use of the Cross model is the development and subsequent modification of the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Parham & Helms, 1981, 1985), which was originally designed to measure racial identity attitudes reflected in the Cross model.

According to Cross, Parham, and Helms (1991), one of the most important recent theoretical advances in the nigrescence literature in general, and the Cross model in particular, has been articulated by Parham (1989a) in his article entitled "Cycles of Psychological Nigrescence." Recognizing that several constructs of the Cross model required reexamination, Parham set out to build on Cross’s original work by postulating several assumptions of his own.
First, Parham questioned whether the racial identity development process was restricted to the late adolescence/early adulthood period of life. His observation of the previous literature in the nigrescence field revealed that most of the authors had relied on college student populations as research subjects. Consequently, such restrictive research samples helped to implicitly perpetuate the notions that identity development in Blacks is a phenomenon that occurs during the college years and that an individual’s racial identity was resolved once a person had completed a single cycle through the stages. Second, he questioned the assumption that movement through the nigrescence process was fueled solely by a Black person’s negative reactions to White people and that pro-White/anti-Black attitudes characterized one’s initiation into the nigrescence process. Third, he questioned whether movement through the stages in a stagewise linear fashion (i.e., Pre-Encounter to Internalization) was the only resolution alternative. Although these questions all merit further debate and analysis, the substance of Parham’s (1989a, 1989b) latest work is his speculation about how racial identity attitudes are manifested at three stages (late adolescence/early adulthood, middle adulthood, late adulthood) of the adult life cycle process and how each phase is characterized by a central underlying theme. According to Parham, late adolescence/early adulthood is characterized by a theme of activism, middle adulthood by a theme of institutionalization, and late adulthood by a theme of reflectiveness.

It seems almost too obvious to mention that racial identity attitudes continually change throughout the life cycle, yet the fact that the majority of the previous writings using nigrescence theories have used college students as subject samples and the fact that one’s identity was assumed to be resolved on reaching the Internalization stage have implicitly supported the idea that the dynamics of the identity change process do not affect people at middle and late stages of adulthood. However, the fact that studies consistently show that people reflected at all stages of the nigrescence process does lend some credence to the idea that racial identity struggles do characterize early phases of life.

In addition to the concerns raised by Parham, other writings and readers have raised questions about the model’s relevance and utility, believing that Black/African American people do not struggle with issues of racial identity and consciousness in present day America (Smith, 1989). Judging by the significant increase in the studies on the nigrescence phenomenon during the last decade and the number of citations referenced in other studies (Ponterotto, 1989), there does not appear to be widespread support for Smith’s assertions. However, perhaps it is time to raise this question as well.
Therefore, the purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between racial identity attitudes and various demographic variables (socioeconomic status [SES], income, education level, gender, and racial designation).

A secondary purpose is to explore how subjects feel about what specific factors have most influenced the identity development process in their lives. Specifically, what is the relationship between developmental experiences (i.e., region of country they grew up in, educational environment, parental messages about their racial identity, etc.) and the development of racial attitudes?

A third purpose of this study is to use the Cross model as a reference point in further exploring the racial identity development process of individuals representing various stages of the adult life cycle. Specifically, do respondents believe that identity resolution patterns are restricted to sequential stagewise progression? Also, is the identity change process instigated solely by negative experiences with Whites?

**METHOD**

**SUBJECTS**

Initially, 150 participants were sought from three different sites in the Southern California area. One hundred fourteen participants (37 males, 77 females) eventually completed the questionnaires. Age ranges for this sample were 18 through 68 years with most participants (49%) in the age range of 30 to 45 years. With regard to education level, only 2% finished grade school, 23% finished high school, 57% finished college, and another 18% completed graduate and professional training. Occupationally, subjects described themselves as professional (37%), business (38%), blue collar (7%), student (6%), unemployed (6%), and retired (1%). Subjects' SES was self-reported as follows: working poor (4%), lower middle class (21%), middle class (58%), upper middle class (14%), upper class (4%). Although all respondents currently reside on the West Coast (Southern California area), only 22% of them were born there. Another 10% were born in the North, 25% were born in the East, and 43% were born in the South (Table 1).

**INSTRUMENTS**

Three instruments were used to gather data on research participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (in years)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-45</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-up</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Designation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colored</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negro</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>73</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Status</td>
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<td>Lower class</td>
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<td>Working class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper class</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Region of country born in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>42.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Means and Standard Deviations for Racial Identity Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Encounter</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encounter</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalization</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS).* The RIAS is a 50-item scale developed by Helms and Parham (1990) to measure attitudes associated with various stages of the Black identity development process, as articulated in
the Cross (1971) model of psychological nigrescence. Respondents used a 5-point Likert-type Scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to indicate the extent to which each item is descriptive of them. Parham and Helms (1985) have reported the following internal consistency reliability coefficients for the four subscales: Pre-Encounter, .67; Encounter, .72; Immersion, .66; and Internalization, .71.

*Demographic scale.* The demographic questionnaire included a series of questions designed to obtain descriptive information on subject samples. Data were gathered by asking participants to endorse the category that each felt to be most descriptive of their gender (male, female); racial designation (Colored, Negro, Black, African American); SES (lower class, working class, middle class, upper middle class, upper class); level of education completed (grade school, high school, college, graduate/professional); income (up to $7,900; $8,000-$14,999; $15,000-$29,999; $30,000-$49,999; $50,000-$74,999; $75,000 up); and geographical region born in (North, South, East, West). In addition, respondents answered a few questions about the type of socialization each respondent received while growing up, as well as what factors each believed were influential in their identity development.

*Developmental questionnaire.* The developmental questionnaire was designed to sample and catalog those experiences that participants believed were most descriptive of their experiences over time regarding racial issues. Participants answered questions regarding the predominant race-specific messages received from parents while growing up; if they could recall changes in their racial attitudes during adolescence or adulthood, and if so, what general experiences contributed to the change (i.e., positive or negative experiences with Whites; positive or negative experiences with Blacks; personal insights or experiences unrelated to any racial group).

A fourth instrument was used to gather data for a subsequent study to be reported at a later time.

**PROCEDURES**

Subjects were solicited via cooperation from several local churches and one major corporation in a Southern California county. Because of the difficulty in accessing Black subject pools in this population center, different administrations of the instruments were used. Some respondents were randomly selected from church master lists and a list of Black employees for a local company and asked to complete the survey after receiving it through
the mail. Others were asked to participate in a group administration held at those same local churches after Sunday services where a Black examiner administered and proctored the session. The differential testing environments were not expected to influence content responses to the survey, although the mailed surveys had a lower rate of return (45/100). Responses to the surveys were then collected and transferred on to Scantron sheets for computer scoring and data analysis. No incentives were offered to subjects for their participation; however, participants received a verbal or written word of encouragement from their pastor/manager to voluntarily participate in the study.

RESULTS

The first phase of the analysis sought to determine if the respondents from the three sample groups (Church 1, Church 2, and Corporate 1) differed significantly on demographic variables or racial identity attitudes. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted yielding no significant differences on self-reported SES, age, gender, or racial identity attitudes across sample groups. Significant differences were found on income ($F[2, 109] = 5.22; p < .006$), with the salaries reported for the corporate sample slightly higher; and one church group had a lower education level than did the other two groups ($F[2, 109] = 6.403; p < .002$). Neither income nor education level was expected to be related to racial identity. Because of the general absence of significant differences across sample groups, the three groups were merged for further analysis. A summary of the means and standard deviations for the racial identity attitudes are contained in Table 1.

The second phase of the analysis involved calculating frequency distributions on a number of variables in order to examine specific characteristics of the sample. In recalling their experiences growing up, participants were asked to describe their households, focusing on which parent(s) worked and who took primary responsibility for the child care. Data indicate that 45.2% of the sample grew up in households where two parents worked and shared child-rearing responsibilities. Respondents also reported growing up in households where the father worked while the mother stayed home (25.2%), the mother worked and raised the children (12.2%), the mother worked while another relative provided primary day care (7.0%), and the father worked and raised the children (2%) alone.

When asked to describe the types of race-specific messages they received from their parent(s) while growing up about being Black in a White society,
38% of the respondents were raised to “feel good about being Black and don’t be inhibited to show it.” Other messages received included “feel proud of being Black but don’t show it” (3.5%). Interestingly, nearly 50% of the sample reported receiving either neutral or negative race-related messages when growing up. Of the respondents, 27.8% were raised to believe that “it was more important to be a human being regardless of whether you’re Black or White”; 2% were raised to believe that “being Black was not something to be proud of” (1.7%); and 20% reported that race and racial attitudes were rarely or never discussed in the home.

On the issue of racial designation, participants were asked which label they most identified with. Sixty-three percent identified with Black, 28% with African American, 4% with Negro, and 1% with Colored. Two percent responded as other, and another 2% did not answer the question. These data are interesting because of the ongoing debate in the Black community over whether to use the term African American or Black. It appears that the majority of respondents in this sample prefer the term Black, despite reflecting a diversity of opinion regarding racial self-designation labels.

Frequency distributions were also used to assess the degree to which respondents found their racial identity attitudes changing over time. If change in attitudes was indicated, respondents were also asked to identify the factor that they believe contributed most to that change. When asked specifically if their racial identity attitudes had changed over time, 45.9% of respondents indicated that there was a noticeably positive change in attitude, 4.6% experienced a noticeably negative change in attitude, 23% experienced fluctuation in racial attitudes between positive and negative, and another 23% reported no change in their racial attitudes over time.

When asked to identify what they believed contributed to the change in racial attitude over time, 13.5% cited negative experiences with Whites; 11.5% cited positive experiences with Blacks; 2% cited negative experiences with Blacks; and 9.4% cited positive experiences with Whites. These data clearly lead to speculation that changes in identity states are influenced by more than negative experiences with Whites or what others have deemed “socially oppressive phenomenon” (Cross, 1978; Parham & Helms 1981, 1985a, 1985b). An interesting finding was that 57.3% of the respondents believed that “personal insights unrelated to negative or positive experiences with either Blacks or Whites” was the major influence in their identity change process.

The third phase of the analysis sought to explore what specific developmental demographic factors were related to respondents’ racial identity attitudes. Independent variables included region of the country respondent
TABLE 2
Summary of MANOVAs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Hypothesized</th>
<th>Error</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Region of country born in</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>.008*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region of country when growing up</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>.026*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial designation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>.015*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial messages received while growing up</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significance obtained at the .05 level.

was born in, region of the country respondent grew up in, parental messages about race that each respondent received while growing up, the racial designation label (i.e., African American, Black, Negro, Colored) a respondent most identifies with presently, education level, current SES level, and income. Dependent variables were the mean scale scores on the four racial identity attitude variables (Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion, Internalization).

Two multiple analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were used to examine the relationship between sets of mean scores on the racial identity attitude subscales (dependent variables) and (independent variables) region of origin (either birth place or where subjects grew up). Each of the independent variables had four values (North, South, East, West). For each of these independent variables, a Pillais multivariate $F$ was used to determine significance at the .05 level (see Table 2). Next, a univariate analysis of variance was used to explore differences in mean scores for single dependent variables (e.g., Pre-Encounter attitudes and racial messages received while growing up). To determine which specific groups differed from one another, the Tukey post hoc test was used.

When exploring racial identity attitudes and region of birth, data indicate that overall, racial identity attitudes are significantly related to where one is born (approximate $F[12, 321] = 2.308; p < .008$). Significant differences were found on Pre-Encounter attitudes and those born in the West versus the South and East ($F[3, 108] = 5.3; p < .0017$). Subsequent Tukey tests indicate that those respondents who were born in the West had Pre-Encounter scores significantly lower than those born in the South or East. Significant differences were also found on Immersion attitudes and region born ($F[3, 108] = 2.83; p < .0418$); however, differences were too small to determine significance between specific pairs of regions. Differences on Encounter attitudes
and where a person was born were almost significant \(F[3, 108] = 2.59; p < .056\).

When examining the relationship between racial identity attitudes and the geographical region where respondents grew up (North, South, East, or West), MANOVA revealed a significant relationship overall (approximate \(F[12, 324] = 1.97; p < .026\)). However, the Pre-Encounter variable was the only racial identity attitude to be affected by where the person was raised \(F[3, 108] = 5.261; p < .002\). Respondents who grew up in the South had significantly higher Pre-Encounter scores than did those growing up in the West.

Further analyses sought to identify the impact of race specific messages on racial identity attitudes. Subjects were classified into one of six groups based on self-reported messages that they received from their parents while growing up (i.e., “Feel good about being Black and don’t be afraid to show it”; “Being Black is not something to be proud of”; “It’s more important to be a human being than Black or White”). The Pillais overall \(F\) test indicated no significant relationship between the set of four racial identity attitudes and the six racial message categories (approximate \(F[20, 412] = 1.369; p < .133\)). In addition, none of the individual racial identity attitude scales was found to be uniquely related to parental messages received while growing up. Rather than conclude that parental messages are less important in developing racial identity attitudes, it is more likely that the question regarding messages received from parents is not sensitive enough to capture the actual differences.

Another MANOVA was performed to examine the relationship between sets of mean scores on the racial identity attitude subscales and four racial designations (i.e., Colored, Negro, Black, African American). Overall, the analysis reveals a significant relationship between racial identity attitudes and preferences for racial designation (approximate \(F[12, 321] = 2.13; p < .015\)) labels. Data indicate that individuals who identify themselves as Black or African American disagree more strongly with Pre-Encounter attitudes than do those who designate themselves as Negro \(F[3, 108] = 4.78; p < .003\). These data are interesting given the fact that previous studies conducted over a decade ago found no such relationship between the variables (Parham & Helms, 1981). Perhaps the difference in the age range of the present sample (ages 17-68) versus previous samples of college students (ages 17-24) accounts for the difference in that older people tend to endorse the label “Negro” more frequently.

Finally, a set of multivariate linear regression analyses were conducted exploring the relationship between education level completed (grade school,
high school, college, graduate/professional training), income level (up to $7,900 through $75,000 and up), self-reported SES (lower, working, middle, upper-middle, upper class) with racial identity attitudes. Each of the three independent variables were analyzed separately. In each case, there was no statistical control for the remaining independent variables. The inclusion of all of the variables into a single analysis might have obscured observed relationships of the other two independent variables. Data indicate significant relationships between the four racial identity attitude subscales and education level ($F[4, 109] = 3.53; p < .009$). Data suggest that differences in education level are most evident in persons with Immersion attitudes ($F[1, 112] = 5.95; p < .016$). Results suggest that the higher one’s education level, the lower one’s endorsement of Immersion attitudes. Overall significance was also found between income level and racial identity attitudes ($F[4,107] = 2.93; p < .024$), with Pre-Encounter ($F[1, 110] = 4.04; p < .047$) and Internalization ($F[1, 110] = 10.10; p < .002$) attitudes contributing to the relationship’s significance. Data suggest that higher income levels are associated with higher Pre-Encounter scores and lower Internalization scores.

**DISCUSSION**

Previous research in the area of Black identity development has indicated that identity resolution is achieved through a stagewise linear progression (movement from Pre-Encounter to Internalization attitudes in a sequential fashion) and that socially oppressive phenomenon are the catalyst for movement through the stages (Cross, 1971, 1978, 1986). The present research findings indicate that those notions, whether explicit or implicit, may require some modification. Parham (1989a) speculated about different identity resolution alternatives, suggesting that at least three options were plausible: stagnation (failure to move beyond one’s original position), stagewise linear progression (movement through the stages in a sequential pattern), and recycling (recycling through the stages again after an earlier cycle has been completed). Respondents in the present study reported that in retrospect their attitudes had, in fact, changed in a positive way, implying that their movement from negative to positive self-perceptions was consistent with the ideas of the Cross theory. Curiously, a number of respondents reported experiencing either no change in their racial attitude over time, or a change characterized by movement from positive to negative self-perception. Perhaps these respondents are suggesting that where identity resolution is concerned, stagnation (little or no movement beyond one’s original set of attitudes),
recycling, or even a regression phenomenon (movement from positive to negative self-perception) is possible.

It also appears that movement through the stages is, in fact, instigated by more than negative experiences with Whites. Although it is not possible in the present study to determine which experiences contribute to which resolution alternative, there does appear to be some support for the idea that positive as well as negative experiences with Blacks and Whites can serve as the catalysts for change. The fact that a majority of the respondents also believe that “personal insights unrelated to either positive or negative experiences with Whites or Blacks” were a major influence in their identity struggle also mandates that the theory be modified further. Conclusions about socially oppressive phenomenon (experiences with racism and oppression) serving as the only encounter experiences imply that changes in identity are externally driven by experiences outside of the individual, over which he or she has little or no control. These data provide tentative support for the idea that there is both an external as well as an internal dimension to the change phenomenon. Intuitively, it makes sense that “personal insights” would be a major factor, although it is difficult to imagine how external events play no part in the formation of one’s perceptions regarding his or her racial identity attitudes. Perhaps individuals are asserting their belief that regardless of whether one is exposed to either positive or negative events, there is a personal choice component as to how one chooses to respond to those experiences. Intellectually, such an assertion is consistent with previous research that suggests that examination of the racial identity phenomenon must involve attention to both the personal identity (PI) and reference group orientation (RGO) factors (Cross, 1986). Helms (1990) describes the PI factor as those aspects of racial identity that occur as part of the normal process of self-actualization, and the RGO factor as aspects of racial identity that occur as a result of or in response to perceived or actual racial oppression.

Data also indicate that, overall, racial identity attitudes are related to where one is born and where one grew up. Persons who were born in and grew up in the South had significantly higher Pre-Encounter scores than did those who were born in the Western region of the country. Previous descriptions of individuals with Pre-Encounter attitudes suggest that these people view the world from a “White frame of reference” (Cross, 1971, 1978; Parham, 1989a, 1989b; Parham & Helms, 1981, 1985). The present data appear to provide further support for how Pre-Encounter attitudes in particular, and Encounter, Immersion, and Internalization attitudes in general may be operationalized. Although these data as analyzed in this study cannot predict which factor was most important in the identity development process, it is
interesting to note that where one is born and raised definitely influences the attitudes one develops later in life.

The fact that a significant relationship was found between education level, income level, and racial identity attitudes is interesting. However, the degree of significance in these relationships suggests that although there is a possible confound with sample groups (i.e., church samples or corporate sample), it is unlikely that differences in population samples could account for the degree of significance. In fact, when the sample was controlled for, relationships between Immersion attitudes and education level as well as Pre-Encounter and Internalization attitudes remained significant.

Curiously, no significant relationship was found between self-reported SES level and racial identity. Given the intuitive relationship between education level, income, and SES level, and their significance to racial identity attitudes, one might have expected a significant relationship with SES. Perhaps in the African American community, SES designation is not as good a predictor as is education level or income, particularly in light of the fact that African Americans with advanced degrees may be less likely to earn salaries equal to their White counterparts with similar educational backgrounds.

In summary, the findings suggest that the Cross model of psychological nigrescence (and by implication, other nigrescence models) may require some expansion. Of particular importance is the idea that Encounter experiences (those personal or social events that challenge a person's belief in a Pre-Encounter worldview) may not be restricted to racist acts perpetrated by Whites. Positive and negative experiences with African Americans and other ethnic groups can serve as the stimulus for change. Also, there appears to be tentative support for the idea that "stagewise linear progression" from negative to positive self-perceptions may not be the only resolution alternative where identity development is concerned.

Although these data tentatively speak to the increased complexity of the identity struggle and resolution process, these findings should be interpreted with caution for several reasons. First, the study is exploratory in nature and will undoubtedly require replication with a larger sample. The use of non-college student populations, however, seems to provide a wider distribution of members of the African American community, making generalizing the results much easier. Therefore, future studies involving the nigrescence phenomenon should attempt to use similarly diverse participant pools. Second, the study relies on self-report measures from participants that may or may not provide the most accurate method of assessment of the variables in question. Third, the study could be enhanced by conducting in-depth interviews on a subset of participants that might yield more qualitative data.
Finally, the impact of developmental experiences needs to be investigated longitudinally to gain a more crystallized picture of the nigrescence process in the developmental years.

REFERENCES


