Do Culturally Empowering Courses Matter? An Exploratory Examination of Cultural Identity and Academic Motivation among Black Collegians

by

Collette Chapman-Hilliard, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
College of Staten Island, CUNY
collette.chapmanhilliard@csi.cuny.edu

Collette Chapman-Hilliard, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor at the College of Staten Island, City University of New York in the Department of Psychology. Her scholarship focuses broadly in the area of African American/ Black psychology, with an emphasis on psychosocial and cultural factors that influence mental health and academic achievement among African descent populations.

Samuel T. Beasley, Ph.D.
Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology
Western Michigan University
samuel.beasley@wmich.edu

Samuel T. Beasley, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of counseling psychology at Western Michigan University. His research focuses on predictors of academic identity and achievement using a strengths-based, culturally-contextualized framework. He also explores strategies to improve the professional psychology pipeline for men, with a particular emphasis on men of color.

Shannon McClain, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
Towson University
smcclain@towson.edu

Shannon McClain, Ph.D. is an assistant professor of counseling psychology at Towson University. Her research examines psychosocial factors impacting the academic achievement and mental health of racial-ethnic minority students.

Kevin O. Cokley, Ph.D.
Departments of Educational Psychology (Counseling Psychology) & African and African Diaspora Studies
The Institute for Urban Policy Research and Analysis
The University of Texas at Austin
kcokley@austin.utexas.edu

Kevin Cokley, Ph.D. is a Professor of Counseling Psychology and African and African Diaspora Studies at the University of Texas-Austin and he is the Director of the Institute for Urban Policy Research & Analysis. Dr. Cokley's research and teaching can be broadly categorized in the area of African American psychology.

Athanasios Nioplias, M.A.
Staff Clinician
Center for Anxiety, New York, NY

Athanasios Nioplias received his M.A. degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from The College of Staten Island, City University of New York. His research interests focus on racial and ethnic identity variables informing the counseling experiences and mental health outcomes among ethnic and racial minority youth.

Desire S. Taylor, Ph.D.
Postdoctoral Fellow
South Texas Veterans Healthcare System

Desiré Taylor, Ph.D. is a member of the clinical staff at Baylor Scott & White Health. Her scholarship focuses on the sociocultural determinants of health.

Abstract

Afrocentric scholars argue that culturally relevant instruction matters for Black students' achievement and personal development, but there is a paucity of empirical studies evaluating the influence of formal instruction in culturally relevant courses in postsecondary settings. The current study fills this gap by examining how participation in culturally empowering courses (CECs) impacts cultural identity development and academic outcomes among Black college students. Results revealed significant relationships between racial and ethnic identity and enrollment in CECs. Participation in CECs was also linked to more self-determined motivation behaviors. Recommendations for college and university personnel are discussed.

Keywords*:* Blacks, achievement, Black identity, motivation, self-determination theory

Introduction

Researchers contend that the creation of culturally empowering learning contexts, including African-centered pedagogy, is paramount to Black students' success. Participation in culturally relevant classes and programs has been associated with salubrious academic outcomes such as increased academic resilience (Belgrave, Chase-Vaughn, Gray, Dixon-Addison & Cherry, 2000), improved academic motivation (Adams, 2005; Bass & Coleman, 1997) and may also serve to debunk long-standing Eurocentric educational hegemony (Bell, 1994; King, 2004). Despite a developing body of literature examining the effects of culture-centered learning contexts on both cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes among Black students, few studies have specifically examined the impact of culturally empowering curriculum on these students' cultural identity development and academic outcomes. Hence, the goals for this study were twofold: 1) to determine group differences in academic and cultural identity outcomes by enrollment in culturally empowering courses (CECs) – courses with a primary content focus on the experiences of African descent people (e.g., Black Studies courses, African and African Diaspora history, etc.) – and, 2) to examine the moderating role of CECs on the relationship between academic motivation and academic performance among Black collegians.

Culturally Empowering Spaces

In recent years, scholars have highlighted the influence of culturally empowering spaces such as culture-centered intervention programs on cultural identity development and academic performance among Black students. Prior scholarship highlights characteristics of culturally empowering spaces, noting these environments: (a) act as a safe space, (b) stimulate a sense of connectedness, (c) provide a source of validation, (d) engender resilience, (e) foster intellectual stimulation, (f) encourage empowerment, and (g) can serve as a home base (Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley, 2008). They also emphasize cultural pride and the acquisition of knowledge related to

one's cultural heritage and history. These spaces can provide affirming messages about Black people while often simultaneously debunking pathology-driven narratives associated with the Black community. In fact, among Black students, culturally empowering spaces have been discussed as counter-spaces or environments where notions of inferiority are challenged and where a growth-fostering atmosphere is cultivated (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Previous scholarship establishes that counter-spaces can exist within formal academic and informal social contexts (Solorzano et al, 2000). While scholars have identified the positive impact informal counter-spaces, such as Black student organizations (Guiffrida, 2003), can have for Black postsecondary students, there is a dearth of empirical scholarship on formal academic counter-spaces. Consistent with the qualities of informal counter-spaces, CECs provide Black students with opportunities to challenge the status quo, critically engage with their history, and explore their cultural identities (Adams, 2005; Banks, 2004). However, informal (e.g., Black student organizations) counter-spaces differ from formal counter-spaces (e.g., classrooms) in that formal counter-spaces tend to provide greater access to content knowledge that serves to validate Black students' experiences and provide them with a language to articulate collective and personal narratives associated with being a Black student, particularly at a historically White college/ university (HWCU) (Adams, 2005). For example, courses utilizing African-centered pedagogy include a focus on cultural knowledge and the contributions of African-descent peoples (King, 2004; Shujaa, 1994), a knowledge base that has been hypothesized as essential to increasing academic performance and psychological well-being among Black youth and young adults (Adams 2005, 2014; Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2015). Hence, exploring the influence of formal academic counter-spaces, such as CECs, on Black students' cultural identity and academic experiences seems key to better understanding pedagogies that promote Black students' success in college.

Cultural Identity and Culturally Empowering Spaces

Scholars have provided strong evidence indicating the significance of culturally empowering spaces in cultivating cultural identity among Black collegians, particularly among those students attending HWCUs (Guiffrida, 2003). In the current study, we operationalized cultural identity in terms of race centrality and ethnic identity. Specifically, race centrality refers to the extent to which race is a core or primary aspect of one's self-concept (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997), and is conceived to be enhanced, in part, by culturally congruent experiences like those fostered in CECs (Carter, 2007; Sellers et al., 1997). In a complimentary vein, ethnic identity reflects the nature of one's affiliation with his or her ethnic group, and it is conceptualized to involve a process of exploring the meaning of one's identity, and a felt sense of belonging or commitment to that identity (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Research on culturally empowering spaces like African-centered rites of passage programs has been linked to ethnic identity related processes. For example, Brookins (1996) suggested that a rites of passage program strengthened ethnic identity among Black youth through activities that provided cultural information and promoted values congruent with the Black community. Further, learning focused on African descent history and cultural principles present in culturally empowering spaces has also been shown to boost critical and social consciousness among Black youth and young adults (see Belgrave et al., 2000; Watts et al., 2002 for examples), which are two constructs related to cultural identity development (Carter, 2008b).

Other research has demonstrated that Black students enrolled in CECs endorsed several attributes consistent with enhancing ethnic and racial identity development, such as stimulating a strong interest in issues related to Africa, honing an increased awareness of Black history and culture, and acquiring skills and knowledge to speak out about issues affecting Black communities (Adams, 2005; 2014). Formal learning spaces that encourage Black students' cultural identity development and facilitate cultural empowerment have the potential to galvanize Black students and inspire them to affect change in their personal lives and communities (Carter, 2008a). Further, enhanced cultural identity may also indirectly facilitate academic success among Black college students (Cokley & Chapman, 2008). Despite the potential of culturally empowering spaces to encourage personal and scholastic success among Black collegians, there remains limited scholarship on the link between CECs and cultural identity development or other areas relevant to Black students' academic performance in college.

Academic Motivation and Culturally Empowering Contexts

Academic motivation is, arguably, a key factor contributing to academic performance among Black collegians. According to the self-determined theory of motivation, a framework often cited to explain academic motivation (see Cokley, 2003 for example), people exhibit intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, or amotivation based behavioral styles (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This multidimensional framework suggests that intrinsically motivated behaviors are those guided by the pleasure and fulfillment one receives from engaging in a particular activity, and include three types: intrinsic motivation to know (IMTK), intrinsic motivation to accomplish (IMTA), and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation (IMTES) (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Vallerand et al., 1992). Intrinsic motivation to know reflects engaging in specific behaviors for the pleasure one derives from learning something new. Engaging in activities because of the fulfillment one receives from achieving or creating something illustrates intrinsic motivation to accomplish. Intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation involves participating in an activity because of the experienced sensation one receives from engaging in the activity.

In contrast to intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation is reflective of activities that are performed with the goal of achieving some independent outcome or include activities having instrumental value. Deci and colleagues (1985; 1991) identified external regulation (EMER), introjected regulation (EMID), and identified regulation (EMIN) as extrinsic motivational styles. External regulation refers to behaviors that one engages in because of some external demands or to obtain a reward from an externally imposed contingency. Introjected regulation occurs when one engages in behaviors with the experience of pressure to avoid feelings of anxiety or to enhance or maintain one's self-esteem. In other words, these behaviors are externally regulated with a focus on self- and other acceptance. Identified regulation represents a more autonomous or self-determined type of extrinsic motivation in which an individual identifies with the value of a particular activity while also acknowledging external benefits. In other instances, an individual may neither be extrinsically nor be intrinsically motivated. This motivational style would be characterized as amotivation. These individuals tend to lack purpose or intentionality in their actions. Such behaviors result when a person does not value a particular activity or perceives themselves as incompetent to perform a specific task.

Together, intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation behaviors reflect a continuum of self-determined styles with intrinsic motivation being the most demonstrative of a proactive, autonomous and competent stance. Assessing academic motivation not only yields a means of examining what moves people to engage in certain behaviors in educational contexts but also lends insight about the role of social and environmental contexts, like CECs, that may influence academic motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) highlight the significance of identifying the factors that facilitate versus undermine self-determined behaviors, and further note that such behaviors have important associations with academic performance (e.g., GPA). For example, intrinsic motivation behaviors, though conceptualized as inherent to all people, are catalyzed or elicited under specific social and environmental conditions where individuals perceive and experience the environment as growth fostering and supportive.

For Black collegians, mixed findings have been presented regarding the significance of environmental context on academic motivation and performance, and much of this work has focused on identifying differences by types of institution, that is comparing HWCUs to historically Black colleges/universities (HBCUs). Although some research reports no differences in the academic achievement of Black collegians attending HBCUs as compared to those attending HWCUs (e.g., Flowers, 2002), there is also evidence that Black collegians attending HBCUs perform better academically (e.g., as operationalized by GPA) (Allen, 1992) and exhibit more self-determined motivation behaviors (Cokley, 2003) as compared to their counterparts who attend HWCUs. Hence, the HBCU environment may offer an important degree of cultural congruence and safety in academic contexts that promotes positive academic motivation behaviors and school performance among Black students.

Much like the HBCU environment, CECs have been theorized to offer a similar kind of growth-fostering, culturally congruent, and secure atmosphere in which positive achievement outcomes are likely to accrue (Adams, 2014). In one of the few published empirical evaluations of the impact of CECs (in the form of Black Studies) on academic achievement, Adams (2005) documented the positive impact these classes have on the scholastic experiences of Black collegians. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, findings from this study illustrated that Black students who took Black Studies courses reported increased interest in school and greater academic motivation. Further, Black students who reported taking CECs as a part of their major were found to demonstrate greater academic performance as compared to those who did not report taking such courses (Adams, 2005). While this study establishes a connection between academic outcomes and CECs, this study was primarily focused on assessing Black ideology and ascertained students' perspectives on academic performance and school adjustment via a small sample of focus group participants. Hence, additional research on CECs needs to be conducted to produce more generalizable findings and better understand how participation in this instructional context influences an interrelated constellation of factors important for Black collegians' success, namely cultural identity, academic motivation, and academic performance (e.g., GPA).

The Present Study

As evident from the literature review, there is a paucity of studies that directly evaluate culturally empowering spaces such as CECs, and this gap is particularly pronounced at the postsecondary educational level. Our study addresses this gap in the literature, providing exploratory findings regarding the influence of CECs on Black students' cultural identity and academic motivation. This study is the first investigation to the authors' knowledge to quantitatively examine CECs, cultural identity, and academic outcomes among Black collegians. Based on the limited available literature, we hypothesized that participants who participated in CECs (i.e., CEC group) would significantly differ from their counterparts who did not participate in CECs (i.e., No CEC group), with those participants in the CEC group reporting higher cultural identity scores (e.g., race centrality and ethnic identity), more self-determined motivation behaviors, and higher grade point averages. We further hypothesized that self-determined behaviors would relate to higher cumulative GPAs, and taking a CEC would moderate this relationship such that the relation between self-determination and cumulative GPA would be significantly influenced by taking a CEC when including racial and ethnic identity as covariates.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants included a total of 218 students attending a Black Student Government conference held at a large public university in the Southwest. Universities represented at the conference included twelve large state HWCUs in the midwestern, western, and southwestern United States regions. Seven participants did not complete parts of the survey (i.e., 4 participants did not indicate whether or not they took a CEC, 2 participants did not indicate cumulative GPA, and 1 participant did not complete the Academic Motivation Scale), and were excluded from the analyses related to variables in which the survey was incomplete. Of the participants, 169 self-identified as African American, 29 identified as Biracial, 13 identified as African, 6 identified as West Indian/Caribbean and 1 did not self-identify. The sample consisted of 157 females and 61 males. Participants ranged in age from 15 to 45 (M= 20.93, SD = 3.47), with the majority (87%) being 18 to 22 years. Cumulative grade point average (GPA) ranged from 1.90 to 4.00, with over 50% of participants reporting GPAs of 3.0 or above on a 4.0 scale. There were 41 freshman, 56 sophomores, 56 juniors, 51 seniors, 10 graduate students, and 4 unidentified.

Participants were recruited during a Black Student Government conference. Participants were told about the option to fill out a survey through announcements and by visiting an information table between conference sessions. It was explained that completion of the questionnaire would contribute to an enhanced understanding of the experiences of Black college students. In addition, they were informed that upon submission of the survey their names would be entered into a gift card raffle to occur before the end of the conference. Participants were instructed to read, sign, and return the consent form in addition to the completed questionnaire. All procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board.

Measures

Demographic Form. All participants completed a demographic form attached to the packet of survey materials. The form captured information regarding racial/cultural/national identification, sex, age, year in school, socioeconomic status, and cumulative GPA. Data for GPA was self-reported utilizing two methods. One method included an open-ended self-report and the second method asked participants the self-report their GPAs using five categories on a standard 4.0 scale (1 = GPA $\leq$ 1.99, 2 = GPA between 2.0 and 2.49, 3 = GPA between 2.5 and 2.99, 4 = GPA between 3.0 and 3.49, and 5 = GPA $\geq$ 3.50). This strategy was utilized to accommodate students who may not have known their exact GPA, while still offering an assessment of academic performance. For the purposes of the analyses, these categories were used where a higher category endorsement by a participant indicated a higher GPA.

Participants also indicated on the demographic form if they had taken a culturally empowering course (i.e., have you taken a course(s) that you found to be culturally empowering?). For the purpose of this study, CECs were defined for respondents as courses with primary focus on the experiences of African descent people (e.g., Black Studies courses, African and African Diaspora history, etc.).

Race Centrality Subscale. To measure racial identity participants completed the Race Centrality subscale (RCS) (Sellers et. al., 1997). The RCS is an eight-item scale that measures one of three stable dimensions of the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (Sellers et al., 1997). The RCS uses a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The RCS measures the degree to which race is a core part of one's identity. A Cronbach's α of .73 has been reported for this subscale with Black collegians (Cokley & Helm, 2001). The Cronbach's α in the current study is .76. Concurrent validity has been demonstrated through positive correlations with ethnic identity (Cokley & Helm, 2001).

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-R. To measure ethnic identity participants completed the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-R (MEIM-R) (Phinney & Ong, 2007). The MEIM-R consists of six items that measure the common components of exploration and commitment of ethnic identity across ethnic groups. A Cronbach's α of .83 and .89 for each subscale has been reported (Phinney & Ong, 2007). The Cronbach's α for each subscale in the current study is .79 and .81, respectively. For this study, the full scale was used with a Cronbach's α of .83.

Academic Motivation Scale. Academic motivation was measured using the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) (Vallerand et al., 1992). The AMS is a 28-item scale that measures intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. The scale is comprised of seven subscales containing four items each. Three subscales measure intrinsic motivation: Intrinsic Motivation to Know (IMTK), Intrinsic Motivation to Accomplish (IMTA), and Intrinsic Motivation to Experience Stimulation (IMTES). Three subscales measure extrinsic motivation: Extrinsic Motivation External Regulation (EMER), Extrinsic Motivation Introjected Regulation (EMIN), and Extrinsic Motivation Identified Regulation (EMID). One subscale measures Amotivation (AM). Individuals respond to the question "Why do you go to college?" by rating their level of agreement with each item using a 7-point format (1 = does not correspond at all to 7 = corresponds exactly).

To examine academic motivation across subscales, a self-determination index (SDI) was calculated to reflect participants' motivation behaviors along a continuum of self-determination. Commonly, researchers combine the subscales on motivation measures to create a SDI (Guay, Mageau, & Vallerand, 2003). The index was formulated by weighting the subscales according to their relative placement along the self-determination continuum. Subscale scores were then combined to create a single score.

The following formula, informed by Vallerand and colleagues (1997) and Guay and colleagues (2003), was used to calculate the SDI using the seven Academic Motivation Scale subscales: [2*((IM knowledge + IM accomplishment + IM stimulation/3)) + identified regulation – ((external regulation + introjected regulation/2) + 2*amotivation)]. Scores on the SDI range from -18 to +18 with higher scores reflecting more self-determined motivation behaviors and lower scores reflecting less self-determined motivation behaviors. During the development of the English version of the AMS, Cronbach alphas ranged from .83 to .86 (Vallerand et al., 1992). Cronbach's alphas for the current study ranged from .73 (EMIN) to .86 (IMTA).

Analytical Strategy

The goals of this study were to ascertain differences in the cultural identities and academic outcomes of Black students based on whether or not they had taken a CEC. After reporting baseline data, research questions regarding differences in cultural identity and academic outcomes were assessed using analyses of variance (ANOVAs). Eta-squared (η^2) is provided to report effect sizes ($\eta^2 \leq .02$ = small effect, $\eta^2 \leq .13$ = medium effect, and $\eta^2 \leq .26$ = large effect). Additionally, a moderation model was tested to determine whether taking a CEC or not would moderate the relationship between academic motivation (as operationalized by the SDI) and cumulative GPA. This model was tested based on significant changes in variance and utilizing a bootstrapping strategy, or a resampling technique that estimates indirect effects. This procedure has been demonstrated as useful when conducting analyses on smaller sample sizes (Hayes, 2013). According to Hayes (2013), the resampling procedure in bootstrapping provides a confidence interval; if 0 does not fall within the confidence interval then the moderation is considered significant. If 0 falls within the confidence interval then the moderation is non-significant.

Results

Preliminary Data Analyses

All analyses were completed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22. Preliminary review of the data included an examination of intercorrelations, means, and standard deviations among the measured study variables. Bivariate correlations (See Table 1) among the study variables revealed race centrality and ethnic identity were statistically significantly associated with one another in the positive direction for both the CEC and No CEC group. However, this association was stronger in the CEC group (r = .44) than in the No CEC group (r = .35). All of the academic motivation subscales were statistically significantly associated with ethnic identity in the CEC group with the exception of extrinsic motivation external regulation.

The pattern of associations between ethnic identity and the academic motivation subscales differed for the No CEC group, with only the intrinsic motivation subscales demonstrating statistically significant positive correlations. In contrast to ethnic identity, race centrality was significantly negatively correlated with only the amotivation subscale (r = -.25) specifically in the CEC group. Additionally, in the CEC group cumulative grade point average was significantly associated with intrinsic motivation to know and to accomplish, and extrinsic motivation identified regulation in the positive direction as well as amotivation in the negative direction. For the No CEC group, grade point average was inversely and significantly associated with extrinsic motivation introjected regulation.

Table 1
Bivariate Correlations among Study Variables by CEC Group

	Correlations									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Race Centrality	--	.35**	-.10	.00	-.03	.08	.13	.09	.09	-.05
2. Ethnic Identity	.44**	--	-.08	.25**	.28**	.29**	.13	.16	.01	.02
3. CGPA	.16	.11	--	.02	-.08	.02	.00	-.23*	.03	-.15
4. IMTK	.18	.33**	.32**	--	.74**	.60**	.55**	.51**	.30**	-.40**
5. IMTA	.06	.19*	.19*	.63**	--	.74**	.53**	.72**	.28**	-.21*
6. IMTES	.05	.22*	.18	.62**	.58**	--	.42**	.65**	.07	.03
7. EMID	.04	.23*	.22*	.71**	.52**	.48**	--	.52**	.53**	-.43**
8. EMIN	.10	.19*	-.01	.64**	.64**	.48**	.68**	--	.30**	-.14
9. EMER	.04	.10	.09	.41**	.29**	.14	.70**	.50**	--	-.43**
10. AMO	-.25**	-.30**	-.29**	-.41**	-.16	-.06	-.40**	-.19*	-.32**	--

Below diagonal and shaded in gray represents correlations for study variables in the Culturally Empowering Course (CEC) group; above diagonal, without shading represents correlations for study variables in the No Culturally Empowering Course (No CEC) group. CGPA = Categorical Cumulative Grade Point Average Range; IMTK = Intrinsic Motivation to Know; IMTA= Intrinsic Motivation to Accomplish; IMTES = Intrinsic Motivation to Experience Stimulation; EMID = Extrinsic Motivation Identified Regulation; EMIN = Extrinsic Motivation Introjected Regulation; EMER = Extrinsic Motivation External Regulation; AMO = Amotivation; ** $p < .01$; *$p < .05$

Cultural Identity, Academic Motivation, and GPA

When examining cultural identity, participants who indicated taking a CEC endorsed higher cultural identity scores as compared to participants who did not endorse taking a culturally empowering course. Specifically, there were statistically significant effects for culturally empowering course on participants' reports of race centrality (F (1,211) = 4.35, $p <$ .05) illustrating that participants in the CEC group held race as a defining feature of their self-concept more so than participants in the No CEC group. Additionally, participants in the CEC group reported higher ethnic identity scores than participants in the No CEC group,
(F (1,211) = 9.09, $p <$ .01).

Academic motivation subscales and cumulative grade point average were assessed to determine differences in academic outcomes by group. As presented in Table 2, there were not statistically significant differences in cumulative grade point average by CEC group; however, there were statistically significant effects by CEC group on the academic motivation subscales. For the intrinsic motivation subscales, participants in the CEC group endorsed higher scores on two of the three academic motivation subscales including intrinsic motivation to accomplish (IMTA) ((F (1,211) = 4.36, $p < .05$) and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation (IMTES) ((F (1,211) = 9.11, $p < .01$). Hence, participants in the CEC group reported experiencing self-determined behaviors characterized by engaging in activities for the satisfaction and stimulation one receives from participating in the activity. For the extrinsic motivation subscales, only extrinsic motivation introjected (EMIN) ((F (1,211) = 6.59, $p < .05$) demonstrated significance. Participants in the CEC group reported experiencing self-determined behaviors characterized by engaging in activities for the satisfaction and stimulation they received from participating in the classroom context.

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analysis of Variance for the Effects of CEC and No CEC Group on the Dependent Variables

Variable	CEC (N=109)		No CEC (N= 102)					
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*Df*	*F*	*p*	η^2
1. Race Centrality	5.06	1.09	4.75	1.03	(1,211)	4.35	.04	.02
2. Ethnic Identity	3.31	.55	3.07	.59	(1,211)	9.09	.00	.04
3. CGPA	3.73	.85	3.72	.98	(1,211)	.02	.89	.00
4. IMTK	5.74	1.26	5.51	1.15	(1,211)	1.86	.17	.01
5. IMTA	5.14	1.42	4.72	1.44	(1,211)	4.36	.04	.02
6. IMTES	4.49	1.42	3.85	1.66	(1,211)	9.11	.00	.04
7. EMID	5.82	1.12	5.85	1.04	(1,211)	.05	.82	.00
8. EMIN	5.44	1.37	4.92	1.58	(1,211)	6.59	.01	.03
9. EMER	5.60	1.32	5.89	1.13	(1,211)	2.88	.09	.01
10. AMO	1.58	1.05	1.40	.77	(1,211)	1.88	.17	.01

CEC = Culturally Empowering Course; No CEC = No Culturally Empowering Course; CGPA = Categorical Cumulative Grade Point Average Range; IMTK = Intrinsic Motivation to Know; IMTA = Intrinsic Motivation to Accomplish; IMTES = Intrinsic Motivation to Experience Stimulation; EMID = Extrinsic Motivation Identified Regulation; EMIN = Extrinsic Motivation Introjected Regulation; EMER = Extrinsic Motivation External Regulation; AMO = Amotivation; η^2 = effect size

Test of Moderation

Following the steps outlined in our analytical strategy, a hierarchal multiple regression was conducted with cumulative GPA as the criterion variable, race centrality and ethnic identity as covariates, and self-determination (i.e., index score of all academic motivation subscales) as the independent variable.

As shown in Table 3, the results of the moderation indicate that CECs statistically significantly moderate the relationship between self-determination and cumulative GPA as the confidence interval yielded from the bootstrapping strategy did not span 0. The pattern of the interaction revealed that as grade point averages increased, self-determination index scores also increased; however, for participants who endorsed taking a CEC the degree of the self-determination index – GPA increase was higher. Figure 1 displays the pattern of this interaction plotting cumulative GPA (Y- axis) against self-determination index scores (X-axis) for individuals who took a CEC and those who did not take a CEC.

Table 3
Regression Analysis Examining the Moderating Effect of CECs on Academic Motivation to Predict Cumulative GPA

	Coeff.	*SE* (B)	t	Bootstrap 95% CI
Race Centrality	.01	.06	.20	[-.11 - .14]
Ethnic Identity	-.12	.12	-.95	[-.36 - .13]
CEC	-.49	.28	-1.78	[-1.04 - .05]
SDI	.02	.03	.95	[-.03 - .08]
SDIxCEC	.07	.03	1.99*	[.001 - .14]
			R^2 = .072, MSE = .791	
			F(5, 206) = 3.21, $p < .01$	

*$p < .05$; CEC = Culturally Empowering Course (0 = No, 1 = Yes), SDI = Self-determination Index (Scores range from -18 to 18); $N = 212$

Discussion

Because graduation rates among Black students remain low, particularly when compared to White students (Nichols, Eberle-Sudre, & Welch, 2016), it is important to understand the range of factors that support Black students' success in college. Opportunities to engage culturally empowering spaces for Black students influences experiences of interpersonal safety, cultural awareness, and academic growth (Adams, 2005; Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley, 2008; Guiffrida, 2003). The goal of the current investigation was to examine group differences in cultural identity and academic outcomes based on Black students' experiences with CECs. Consistent with prior research (e.g., Sellers et al., 1997), students who endorsed CECs possessed higher cultural identity scores as compared to those who did not report taking a CEC. Specifically, Black collegians who participated in these formal classroom counter-spaces had significantly higher racial centrality scores compared to their same race peers who did not enter these spaces. Additionally, our results indicated Black collegians who had taken CECs had significantly higher ethnic identity scores compared to those who had not taken a CEC. Although it is possible Black students who score higher in race centrality and ethnic identity are more likely to participate in activities with the intention of enhancing their cultural identity (Van Camp, Barden, & Sloan, 2010), our findings nonetheless illustrate exploratory evidence that CECs may provide a suitable venue for the cultural identity exploration process to unfold. As discussed by Carter (2007),

identity affirming spaces like CECs allow students opportunities to embrace their culture and to develop greater competence in negotiating racial tensions, allowing students greater autonomy to focus on their academic performance.

With regard to academic outcomes, ethnic identity development processes appeared to draw on intrinsic sources of motivation for participants in this sample irrespective of whether or not they took CECs. However, an examination of participants' mean scores, though not all statistically significant, indicates that Black collegians who took a CEC had higher intrinsic motivation scores compared to their counterparts who had not taken a CEC. As suggested by Ryan and Deci (2000), it may be that behaviors associated with intrinsic motivation are enhanced in the counter-space environment provided by CECs. Additionally, among participants who reported taking CECs, ethnic identity was significantly associated with extrinsic sources of motivation (i.e., external motivation introjected regulation and external motivation identified regulation). Introjected regulation has been labeled as engagement in certain behaviors to attain ego enhancement such as pride (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For students who are just beginning to explore their ethnic identity, introjected regulation may be an appropriate response. They may be interested in understanding themselves more as ethnic beings, while simultaneously searching for ways to combat deficit narratives that may be present in the HWCU environment. In a similar vein, extrinsic motivation identified regulation has been linked to mindful valuing of a particular behavior and conscious acceptance of a goal as personally relevant (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The association between identified regulation and ethnic identity for the CEC group may be explained by Black students' recognition that ethnic identity is beneficial for their personal growth; thus, these students may be intentional about seeking avenues to develop in their cultural self-knowledge.

Interestingly, race centrality was significantly inversely associated with amotivation in the CEC group but not with any other academic motivation subscales in either group. This association suggests as race becomes more salient, behaviors that characterize amotivation such as devaluing an activity (e.g., academics) or feelings of incompetence decrease for those students who reported taking a CEC. It may be that Black students for whom race is more salient are more cognizant of racial barriers, particularly those barriers often found within a HWCU (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000) and those barriers associated with the myth of anti-intellectualism among Black students (Cokley, 2014). These students may consciously or unconsciously find the knowledge of racial challenges to be catalysts to persist in the classroom, supporting the notion that knowledge of racial barriers among Black students may, in fact, facilitate positive academic outcomes if provided in culturally validating spaces (Carter, 2007).

An examination of academic motivation styles based on the AMS by CEC group revealed several differences. Specifically, participants who took CECs reported motivational styles consistent with an internal desire to achieve and with fulfillment associated with engaging the

learning process (i.e., intrinsic motivation to accomplish and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation). Similar to findings associated with ethnic identity, for our participants, CECs possibly helped to contextualize chronic issues that seem to plague the Black community by providing space for counter-narratives about Blacks' success, particularly in academic contexts, allowing students to more readily explore their academic interests. Further, our finding that participants enrolled in CECs showed higher endorsement (compared to the No CEC group) of a motivational style consistent with engaging behaviors to avoid the experience of anxiety and/or maintain self-esteem (i.e., extrinsic motivation introjected) may be reflective of a strategy to negotiate race in the academic context. Externally motivated behaviors like the aforementioned may be reflective of a coping strategy aimed to mediate the challenges associated with Black students' college success, particularly given the presence of harmful academic stereotypes and the related negative association with academic self-concept (Okeke, Howard, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2009). Additionally, like all other collegians enrolled in coursework, Black students experience the pressures of being evaluated externally for their performance in class and may engage behaviors to maintain a sense of competence.

Finally, an examination of the moderating role of CECs in predicting academic performance (i.e., GPA) yielded a significant outcome with Black collegians who had taken CECs demonstrating higher increases in autonomous academic motivation behaviors and GPA compared to their counterparts who had not taken a CEC. While this model estimates only a small portion of variance, it provides preliminary evidence that the relationship between academic motivation and GPA may be influenced by the classroom context with CECs, perhaps, serving to enhance the motivation-performance relationship, a finding consistent with theorizing about self-determination (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000).

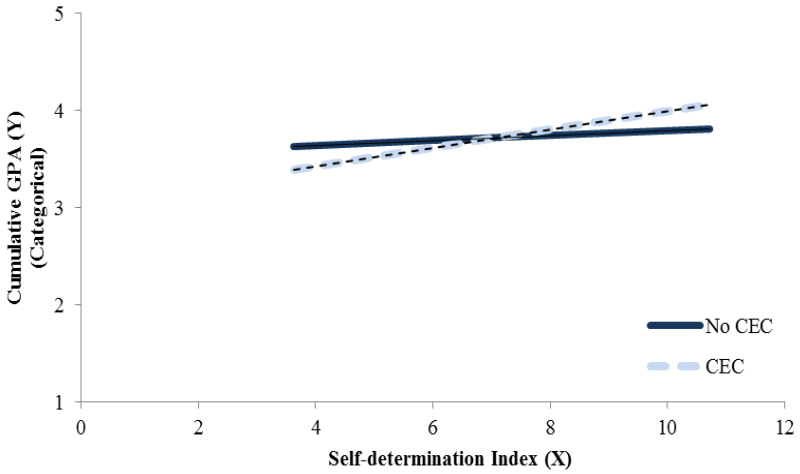

Figure 1. Interaction between Self-determination Index and CEC in Predicting GPA

Study Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of our study. The CEC variable was dichotomized rather than measured on an interval scale. It may be that by simply combining all Black students who had taken a CEC and comparing them to Black students who had not taken a CEC minimizes within-group differences. Our study also utilized a cross-sectional design and no causal relationships between the variables can be determined. While this study follows a model of examining potential environmental group differences similar to literature comparing HBCUs and HWCUs, future studies should consider pretest - posttest research designs to further assess and interpret group differences related to CECs. Additionally, while cumulative GPA and academic motivation are important achievement related variables, future work might consider other academic outcome variables such as academic self-concept or multiple methods of measurement to assess academic variables. This is particularly important in light of recent scholarship presented by Cokley (2015) which cautions researchers to carefully consider the use of the AMS with Black populations. Nevertheless, in the current study, the AMS demonstrated acceptable to good reliability coefficients.

Implications for Pedagogical Practice with Black Students

Despite limitations, this study contributes an important addition to scholarship focused on identifying pedagogical practices that foster college success among Black collegians. In particular, our study provides exploratory evidence that CECs indeed matter for Black collegians and have the potential to foster growth in personal and academic domains which may have indirect or direct implications for Black college students' retention and graduation rates. Providing opportunities for Black students to affirm their identities, learn to negotiate racial milieu, and autonomously pursue the learning process is essential to their success in college, and culturally empowering spaces provide such opportunities. Recognizing that every student enters the college context with a variety of needs, college and university sponsored events as early as freshman orientation should consider introducing students to the utility of CECs as well as informal counter-spaces. Academic advisement offices are also encouraged to consider exploring with students the potential utility of CECs for some Black collegians. The environment offered by these courses is likely to support students as they grapple with the complexity of the messages received about being Black and performing well academically while also potentially enhancing their cultural identities. Moreover, for Black learners at HWCUs, as with the participants in the current study, CECs may offer an opportunity to better connect with the campus community by engaging with same-race peers, seeing themselves reflected in the curriculum, and acquiring anti-deficit knowledge about Blacks within the classroom (Adams, 2005; Carter, 2007). Because CECs may have a significant impact on college adjustment and success for Black collegians, colleges and universities should not only consider taking heed to their offerings of cultural extracurricular activities and campus resources, but also the availability of and emphasis on formal educational counter-spaces such as CECs.

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