

Original Paper

Revisiting Brown Versus Board of Education:
Differences in School Context and the influence of Racial
Attitudes on Academic Attainment and Civic Engagement
among Black Americans across the Lifespan

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Abstract

Since Brown versus the Board of Education 60 years ago, educators and social and behavioral scientists have tried to identify factors related to better achievement for Black Americans. Since the desegregation of schools in the U.S., Black American students have reported lower grade point averages, standardized test scores, and graduation rates (Allen, 1992). Previous research has investigated school context and climate as well as the influence of racial attitudes on academic achievement. Findings suggest that positive student perceptions of school climate and context (e.g., pride, social support, relationships with a teacher, access to resources) were related to better academic outcomes (Hurley & Lustbader, 1997). However, the research on the influence of racial attitudes have been inconclusive (Chavous et al., 2003; Fordham & Ogbu 1986). Thus, the purpose of this study is two-fold. First, to explore whether racial attitudes were related to academic attainment and civic engagement, and second, to examine whether there are differences in perceptions in school pride and school climate for students in historically black high schools and historically white high schools. To assess the aforementioned research questions, thirty-three Black American high school graduates from a historically white high school and eighty-two Black Americans from historically black high schools were sampled. Spearman Rho correlations and Independent sample T-tests were run to assess the

relationship between the following. 1) Racial attitudes, educational attainment, and civic engagement. 2) Differences in perceptions of school climate for Blacks at historically White and Black high schools. Findings reveal statistically significant associations between racial attitudes and educational attainment as well as civic engagement. Moreover, differences were also found in perceptions of climate across school types. Given these results, further research is needed to explore the influence of students' perception of their school experience and racial attitudes upon educational and life outcomes.

Keywords

Black American, academic achievement, school context, and racial attitudes

1. Introduction

For many Americans, particularly minority Americans, education is perceived as a means for improving their economic and social status (Tillman, 2009). In today's highly competitive work environment, high school is sometimes the last opportunity to reach, influence, and prepare youth with the skills necessary to be productive citizens and competitive workers. Therefore, it is imperative to understand how one's high school experience impacts later outcomes as an adult. It is also important for educators and social-behavioral scientists to understand what factors are related to individuals' achievement and community engagement or activism over the lifespan.

In the U.S., students with high academic achievement and high school diplomas have more access to college scholarships, jobs, and educational opportunities (Hoynes et al., 2012; Orfield et al., 2005; Saunders, Davis, Williams, & Williams, 2003; Wimberly, 2002). Much of the literature on closing the achievement gap between Whites and Blacks, indicates that inequality exists in the American education system today (Fletcher & Tienda, 2010). Although the "Brown vs. Board of Education" decision forced Americans to take a serious look at education, Black children, particularly in urban areas, still lag academically (Clark, 2003; Fratoe, 1980; Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2003). The introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 sought to address issues of inequality in America's education system; but since then, dropout rates, expulsion rates, and underperformance on standardized tests continue to plague America's school systems (Bonneau, 2008; Childs Trend Data Bank, 2008; Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2003).

Despite gains being made for Blacks, there are still gaps in the academic and economic achievement rates between Black Americans and Whites that can ultimately impact their quality of life and self-sufficiency. For example, results from the National Educational Longitudinal Study indicate that the majority of Blacks, graduating with a high school diploma, are still more likely to be unemployed when compared to Whites and earn lower wages (Wimberly, 2002). Education level may account for the discrepancy in wage earnings with a smaller number of Blacks holding postsecondary degrees compared to their White counterparts (Wimberly, 2002). Support for this theory can be found in the results of a study by the U.S. Department of Education (2001b). Findings showed when the wages of Black and White college graduates were compared there was little difference in their employment rates,

(as cited in Wimberly, 2002) suggesting that increasing educational attainment levels of Blacks may help to close the gap in employment rates between Blacks and Whites. However, to increase educational attainment rates educators need to know what factors contribute to Blacks' enrollment in postsecondary education.

Using the National Educational Longitudinal data, Wimberly (2002) studied the achievement of Blacks and long-term outcomes over time, only looked at student socioeconomic levels, the racial make-up of the student populations, and staff and faculty training levels. They did not look at the schools' racial context to determine if there were significant differences in postsecondary educational outcomes for Blacks that graduated from historically Black high schools. Although follow-up research from the Coleman Report by the National Center for Education Statistics (2000) has shown that Black Americans have made gains, educators and social-behavioral scientists need to investigate the impact of the high school on Black students' educational outcomes over the life span.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Factors impacting Black children's academic achievement, such as low economic status, poverty, family structure, and student motivation have all been cited throughout the literature (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; National Center for Education Statistics, 2000a). Some studies argue that environments that require Blacks to interact with White students will result in more positive educational experiences (Fordham, 1988) and that Predominantly White institutions (PWIs) provide superior academic resources (Wenglinsky, 1995). Other research (Fleming, 1981, 1984; Fordham, 1988; Hughes, 1987) on PWIs found that Black American students who were socially and academically successful at PWIs tended to have less connection to Black American culture (Chavous, 2000). Additional research on racial identity (Baldwin et al., 1990; Taub & McEwen, 1992) has suggested that accepting mainstream views or lack of connectedness to Black culture is harmful to Black students' academic and social development (Chavous, 2000). On the other hand, others have argued that only a racially homogeneous institution can fulfill the social and academic needs of Black American students (Tillman, 2009; Baldwin et al., 1987; Coleman, 1990) such as that of a Historically Black Institution (HBIs) (Chavous et al., 2004).

This study aims to clarify the findings of previous research on Black academic achievement in the high school context and identify which high school environments produce graduates that are leaders within the Black community. This study is designed to assess differences in Black high school graduates' from HBIs and PWIs perceptions of their racial attitudes, the perception of high school climates, which includes school pride, academic attainment, and civic engagement over their lifespan. In reviewing research evaluating the impact of school environments on academic achievement and long-term outcomes, previous studies have rarely made a distinction between high school environments that are predominantly Black due to "middle-class or White flight" and historically Black High Schools (HBHSs) that were initially established for Black Americans and continue to educate primarily Black American populations. Furthermore, there is a lack of studies investigating the differences in civic

engagement in a high school setting. Thus, the following questions will be examined: 1) Are racial attitudes among Black students related to educational attainment? 2) Are racial attitudes among Black students related to civic engagement over the life span? 3) Are there differences in perceptions of school climate for Blacks at historically White and Black high schools?

1.2 Racial Identity and Academic Attainment

Racial identity is a “multidimensional construct made up of components that incorporate ethnic awareness, sociopolitical attitudes, and cultural or in-group versus out-group preferences” and is defined as a person’s belief about the significance of race in his or her life (Chavous et al., 2003, p. 1078). In conducting their research, Chavous and colleagues (2003) used the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) to address the two perspectives of race and achievement beliefs in Black Americans. This model looked at racial centrality, private regard, and public regard on the academic achievement of Blacks. Based on significantly different ratings by Blacks on the three variables, Chavous and colleagues (2003) identified four groups of racial identity, including “buffering/defensive,” “idealized,” alienated,” and “low connectedness/high affinity.”

Two of the groups, “buffering/defensive” and “idealized” had higher academic attainment when compared to the two groups of “low connectedness/high affinity” and “alienated.” Overall, “having high centrality, strong group pride (private regard), and positive beliefs about society’s views of Blacks (public regard) were related to more positive academic beliefs” (Chavous et al., 2003, p. 1086). In contrast, Black students in the alienated group that were low on all three dimensions of private regard, public regard, and centrality, also “felt the most negative about their group”, “had the most negative academic attitudes”, the highest number of dropouts by 12th grade, and lowest college attainment when compared to other Black American racial identity groups (Chavous et al., 2003, p. 1086). Additionally, “youth’s own personal group attitudes and feelings about their group influenced their educational behavior more strongly, regardless of their societal views” (Chavous, 2003, p. 1086).

Similarly, in a study conducted by Eccles and colleagues (2006), racial identity was related to student achievement. Eccles and colleagues (2006) found that in contrast to Fordham and Ogbu’s research (1986), Black youth, when compared to White youth, attached “greater personal importance to school achievement” and “perceived general utility of education” (p. 415). Increased anticipation of future discrimination was positively related to students being more committed to their educational success (Eccles et al., 2006). In both studies, racial identity worked as both promotive and protective factors by compensating and shielding against perceptions of racial discrimination (Eccles et al., 2006; Chavous et al., 2003). Both of these studies demonstrate how Black students’ racial identity beliefs impact their academic behaviors, and these behaviors affect their academic achievement (Chavous et al., 2003; Eccles et al., 2006).

Given the gap in research that looks at how high school environments foster racial identity and impact the long-term quality of life outcomes of Blacks, including postsecondary academic attainment and civic engagement, there is a need to explore these associations further to understand what school

climate factors positively impact Black outcomes.

1.3 School Climate

As previous research has shown (Moller & Sterns, 2012; Wimberly, 2002), another important factor that has been linked to adult outcomes over time is the high school experience, as influenced by the climate of the school: “the physical and psychological aspects of the school that are most susceptible to change and that provide the preconditions necessary for teaching and learning to take place” (Tableman & Herron, 2004, p. 2). A school climate can be measured by peoples’ feelings about their school environment. In Freiberg’s analysis (1999), school climate is defined as “the heart and soul of a school” (p. 11). Freiberg further states that “school climate is about the quality of a school that helps each individual feel personal worth, dignity, and importance, while simultaneously helping create a sense of belonging to something beyond ourselves” (p. 11). In a healthy school climate, students feel nurtured, teachers feel excited about working, and all members of the school feel empowered (Freiberg, 1999).

Previous research on integrated schools has found that Black children in urban and suburban public schools often feel alienated and that no one cares (Hurley & Lustbader, 1997; Rury & Hill, 2012) due to perceived poor school climate in which they feel disconnected from their environment. Research suggests that students perform better and are more likely to graduate when they have a school support (Hurley & Lustbader, 1997; Wimberly, 2002). A support system not only maintains a level of expectant behavior from the student but also supports the student emotionally to maintain this expectant behavior. The school climate helps to shape the students’ behavior (Bryk et al., 2010; Tillman, 2009; Wimberly, 2002). In a school that fosters a healthy school climate, this support and guidance do not only come from the teachers and administration but fellow peers.

A lack of financial and community resources makes it difficult for schools that serve students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds to adequately address student population needs. Lack of financial resources and support systems impact the school climate (Farkas, 2003). As a disproportionate percentage of Blacks live in low-socioeconomic communities (Orfield & Lee, 2005), Blacks are highly concentrated in the schools labeled as low-performing (Bankston et al., 1996; Orfield et al., 2005). High poverty schools tend to have higher teacher turnover rates and a higher concentration of less qualified teachers (Orfield et al., 2005); both factors impact the quality of school life. For Black youth, positive school climates are important in supporting successful academic achievement and feelings of belongingness (Hurley, 1997; Tillman, 2009; Wimberly, 2002). Research has also shown that supportive school climates can off-set the potentially negative factors of students’ home lives (Gottfredson, 2006; Orfield et al., 2005). A review of school climate research typically cites the school’s racial composition as a significant variable in student academic outcomes. However, a lack of research on high school environments and Black long-term outcomes makes it difficult to determine whether a distinction needs to be made between the HBHSs, HWHSSs, and PBHSs high schools when looking at Black long-term outcomes across generations. Furthermore, American schooling’s racial history makes it difficult to discuss the relationship between school climate and racial concentration of

schools without acknowledging the history of oppression within American schools for ethnic minorities. Therefore, research evaluating the effects of Blacks' perceptions of oppression within the school climate and racial concentration of the school on Black American outcomes needs to be explored.

1.4 Racial Concentration and School Climate

Historically, schools exist for two primary purposes in a democratic society: 1) to facilitate the redistribution and access of resources (Bankston & Caldas, 2002) and 2) to promote national civic responsibility (Balsano, 2005). The goal of promoting social equality of opportunity can conflict with that of the family and individual. This sometimes dichotomous relationship between school goals and individual goals of the family impacts the racial concentration and climate of a school.

People who avoid or discredit predominantly Black schools may perceive Blacks as lacking educational, social, and economic resources necessary to promote a healthy academic environment, particularly Blacks from low socio-economic backgrounds (Orfield et al., 2005). Some Whites and Blacks may view Blacks' presence as a negative regardless of their socio-economic status and do not perceive predominantly minority school environments as having a school climate conducive to promoting positive outcomes for their children (Bankston et al., 1996).

When examining the second historical goal, schools have been traditionally responsible for providing students with skills necessary to become productive citizens that give back and foster the well-being of their communities (Tillman, 2009; Flanagan et al., 2007; Balsano, 2005). Regardless of ethnicity, civic engagement is an essential tool that promotes positive development among students and "represents an avenue for youth to get involved in the preservation of their own and their communities' positive development over time" (Balsano, 2005, p. 189). The school climate will determine how students learn about and carry out their civic responsibility (Flanagan et al., 2007). Civic responsibility could come in implicit forms of stating the pledge or explicit forms of learning about the city, state, or national history and governmental expectations that a student lives. Developing civic responsibility in the school setting may be even more important for Blacks, as minority populations tend to be more skeptical of government, more aware of discrimination, and less likely to believe that the "American Dream" will happen for them (Flanagan et al., 2007, p. 424).

In the long-term, a lack of civic engagement may impact an individual's sense of self-advocacy within their community on local and global levels (Flanagan et al., 2007; Balsano, 2005). "Civically engaged youth tend to have an increased sense of their own competencies, be more internally driven to get involved in prosocial activities and have higher self-esteem" (Balsano, 2005, p. 188). The difference in how schools frame and make relevant historical references to student experiences for their civic duty and the effectiveness of schools in producing civic leaders may be related to the historical foundation and resources of the school, which impact the school's ability to meet the needs of the student population that it was designed to serve (Balsano, 2005).

When the needs of the total student population are not taken into account, particularly for minority students, feelings of marginalization leave some minorities viewing the academic setting as just one of

several aspects of the social system created to privilege certain groups of people and oppress other groups (Hillard, 1988). Therefore, a respectful and fair school climate is important in fostering civic responsibility for Black Americans. Research by Ogbu (1990; Ogbu & Simons, 1998) on “involuntary minorities” has demonstrated that the historically oppressive context of the academic setting can complicate the academic achievement for Blacks (Nasir et al., 2006, p. 456). Black students often come from circumstances in which the home culture does not match that of the mainstream school culture; a culture that values independence, working on tasks that do not interest students, restraint in one’s actions, and rational thinking over emotional expression (Hollins et al., 1994). Boykin’s research focuses on changing the school climate to view the culture that Black children bring to school as a benefit and not a deficit (Boykin, 1978, 2000). Studies that focus on teaching Black students in ways that allow them expression, align with their interests, offer flexibility, and are supportive; Blacks have succeeded academically (Allen, 1992; Boykin, 2000; Davis, 1994).

In an oppressive or non-nurturing environment, when students encounter hardships academically or socially, they typically have no support. Black students’ perceptions of deliberate and unintentional racial stereotype threats may “depress academic performance, through their anxiety-inducing effects on thought and problem-solving” (Nasir et al., 2006, p. 457). Most students want to succeed and know the importance of academic success; however, some may not see this goal being within their grasp because they feel marginalized within the school environment and do not perceive their school climate to be positive or supportive.

At the secondary level, research (Mickleon, 2003) that specifically investigated the relationship between the racial composition of a school and academic outcomes, found predominantly Black environments to be disadvantageous for Black students’ academic success. Mickleon (2003) reaffirmed that desegregation is significantly beneficial for Blacks and looked at the history of the school system and discussed the consequences of desegregation. When investigating the short-term effects, Mickleon reported that predominantly Black schools and classrooms had significantly adverse effects on Black and White student academic outcomes. However, Mickleon did acknowledge that tracking in schools limited Blacks’ access to better teachers and resources in desegregated schools, a finding consistent with other research (Moller & Steams, 2012). Regarding long-term effects, Mickleon (2003) found that Black Americans attending desegregated environments tended to obtain higher educational and occupational levels than those who did not.

An earlier study by Allen (1992) indicated HBIs are beneficial for Black American college students. Allen found that Black students who attended PWIs reported lower academic achievement, lower levels of social involvement, lower college grades, higher grades in high school, and less favorable relations with their professors than those who attended HBIs (1992). Allen attributed the academic success of Black American students that attended HBIs to their characteristics and quality of social and academic life on the campus (1992). A review of Black American outcomes based on the racial history of the schools suggested that Black American students at HBIs reported better academic performance, greater

social involvement, and higher occupational aspirations than students at PWIs. Furthermore, Black American students at HBIs reported feelings of engagement, connection, acceptance, and extensive support and encouragement. The presumed positive correlation between high social integration and high academic performance is not necessarily true for Black Americans at PWIs. Black American students that attend PWIs may express high levels of social alienation and disconnection, but they are often able to maintain high academic performance levels despite these feelings (Allen, 1992).

The history of American schools makes it difficult to analyze the relationship between the racial concentration of a school and Black outcomes without addressing potentially oppressive school practices and climates. The emphasis of civic responsibility within the school climates can help to reinforce Black students' sense of belonging, increase feelings of competency, and levels of self-esteem (Balsano, 2005). Moreover, school climates that do not emphasize civic responsibility or teachers who do not take a culturally sensitive approach to relaying information can create academic environments that further isolate and oppress Black youth and impact their academic performance (Balsano, 2005).

An investigation of outcomes for Black students based on racial history and racial concentration of the schools produced mixed findings. Some researchers (Mickleston, 2003; Bankston et al., 1996) have identified minority concentrated school climates as negatively impacting Black students' academics at the secondary level. However, other researchers (Bankston & Caldas, 2002) have found that the students' family structure was more predictive of school achievement. At the college or university level, racially concentrated environments have proven to be academically and socially nurturing for Black students (Chavous et al., 2004). Some studies (Rury & Hill, 2012; Shircliffe, 2006) have researched the history of integration for historically Black high schools using the experiences of Black leaders, teachers, students, and activists that were born before and after integration. This information is important in describing how and why some Black Americans perceive historically Black high schools to be important school climates for the Black community (Rury & Hill, 2012; Shircliffe, 2006). The differences in studies finding predominantly Black environments as negatively or positively impacting the academic achievement of students may be in the students' perceptions of their school. Therefore, a critical dimension to study would be school pride.

1.5 School Pride and School Climate

A critical dimension of school climate is its contribution to the sense of school pride. Clark defined school pride as "the amount of personal pleasure or satisfaction that a person feels in the achievements, accomplishments, or successes of their school environment" (2003). In a healthy school climate, everyone takes pride in working together to accomplish school goals (2003). A school climate that allows for positive social interactions in which friendships can develop between students, faculty, and staff, can lead increased school pride (Garrido et al., 2004).

Research by McPartland and colleagues (1998) of a Talent Development Program found that as perceptions of school climate improved in addition to students' feelings of pride in telling others about their school. When the academic and social aspects of student life merge to create a school climate

emphasizing learning, high academic achievement can occur (Cook et al., 2000). The research has shown that positive school pride is related to positive perceptions of school climate and increased graduation rates (McPartland et al., 1998). However, there is limited research investigating differences in school pride amongst Blacks based on the schools' racial concentration and history. During times of segregation, Blacks may have had a different level of school pride for a school climate that was established for Blacks by Blacks. During segregation, HBHSs were the only options for Black students (Rury & Hill, 2012; Tillman, 2009; Hillard, 1988), with more school choice coming by way of public, private, and charter schools after integration. Overall, there is a gap in research exploring the generational changes in Black students' levels of school pride and school climate perceptions based on the high school environment.

1.6 Role of School Climate on Black Outcomes

During the time in which the United States is becoming more of a global community, some researchers may question the relevance of studying historically Black high schools. However, some of the greatest Black leaders and professionals have a foundation in the Black community and have graduated from a historically Black high school. Although there are a limited number of historically Black high schools in existence, historically Black high school graduates may contribute more to the Black community on average compared to Black graduates of other high school environments.

This review of the literature has identified various factors impacting Black American high school graduates' long-term outcomes. Racism, financial strain, social support, cognitive engagement, and psychological well-being are factors related to Blacks' quality of life outcomes (Lincoln & Chae, 2010; Yap et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2011; Utsey et al., 2002). The contributions of Ogbu (1990), Flanagan et al. (2007), and Boykin (2000) demonstrate that the historically and potentially oppressive context of the academic setting can complicate the academic achievement of Blacks. Supportive school climates can increase a person's school pride by cultivating a nurturing, fair, and supportive environment that protects students from potentially negative factors in the school environment, home life, and community. Additionally, civic responsibility fostered within the high school can lead to civic engagement and self-efficacy within the community after graduation.

Environmental factors strongly influence individuals (Kao, 2000); therefore, the history of oppression within American schools makes it very important to surround Blacks by examples of relatable success. Research on Black students in predominantly and historically Black colleges has shown that these school climates are beneficial for Black students (Allen, 1992; Davis, 1994), but there is a need to replicate findings on the impact of historical Black schools on high school outcomes. Furthermore, there is minimal research exploring the dynamics in relationships between Black graduates' long-term outcomes, perceptions of racial identity, school pride, and school climate based on the historical background of the high school environment. Therefore, this research will specifically look at the relationship between the perception factors (racial identity, school pride and school climate) and Black students' long-term outcomes (academic attainment, and community investment) based on graduation

status (HBHS graduate or Non-HBHS graduate) across three time periods (1990-1999, 1980-1989, 1970-1979).

Conducting this research is essential in determining whether current methods of using standardized test scores to measure school performance translates to positive life outcomes for Black graduates. The results of this research can help understand any potential relationships between racial concentration and school history to those Black graduates that demonstrate civic responsibility and promote the Black community's betterment. Lastly, by looking at the school's historical context and Black graduates' views of the schools, this research is designed to identify significant differences between school climates that were historically founded for Blacks and those that changed to predominantly Black schools due to middle-class and white-flight.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

To understand the influence of race-related attitudes upon Black American students' educational attainment and civic engagement across the lifespan and differences in students' perceptions of school climate, both a correlational and mean difference design were employed.

2.2 Participants

A sample of high school graduates who self-identified as Black were recruited from two high schools located in a central urban city within North Carolina. The HBHS was selected in that it had always been a predominantly Black American school. The HBHS identified as "historically Black" because it was established to educate Black students in 1887 and has continued to educate primarily Black students. The HWHS-PW, defined as "historically White," was selected due to the establishment in 1963 as an all-white high school. After integration, the population of the school has continued to remain predominantly White.

Participants in this study were post-segregation (1970-1999) graduates from the selected schools in the district. By controlling for the period of graduation, the study was designed to capture persons who had time to finish any postsecondary training and establish themselves within their community. The study was also designed to eliminate any environmental factors of school climate that may impact the self-reports of individuals who graduated from a school when the selected schools were still legally segregated.

Participants from the selected schools were invited to participate in the study through various solicitation methods (i.e., Facebook, email, alumni events). The recruitment procedures resulted in data that included a sample of 35 graduates from the HWHS-PW (9 male and 26 female) and 83 graduates from the HBHS (31 male and 52 female). From the HWHS-PW, 17.1% graduated between 1970-1979, 51.4% graduated between 1980-1989, and 31.4% graduated between 1990-1999. From the HBHS, 56% graduated between 1970-1979, 14.3% graduated from 1980-1989, and 29.8% graduated from 1980-1989. Demographics for each school environment are visually represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Black American Graduate Sample Demographic Characteristics

High School Environment/Type	HWHS-PW	HBHS	TOTAL			
Variable	N	Percentage	N	Percentage	N	Percentage
Total Sample	35	29.4%	84	70.6%	119	100%
Gender						
Male	9	25.7%	31	36.9%	40	33.6%
Female	26	74.3%	52	61.9%	78	65.5%
Graduate Year						
1970-1979	6	17.1%	47	56%	53	44.5%
1980-1989	18	51.4%	12	14.3%	30	25.2%
1990-1999	11	31.4%	25	29.8%	36	30.3%
HS Family SES						
Lower-class, Not working	2	5.7%	1	1.2%	3	2.5%
Lower-class, Working	4	11.4%	26	31%	30	25.2%
Middle-class, Not working	--	--	1	1.2%	1	0.8%
Middle-class, Working	27	77.1%	53	63.1%	80	67.2%
Upper-class, Not working	--	--	1	1.2%	1	0.8%
Upper-class, Working	2	5.7%	2	2.4%	4	3.4%
HS Gov Assistance						
Yes	3	8.6%	2	2.4%	5	4.2%
No	31	88.6%	76	90.5%	107	89.9%
Not Sure	--	--	4	2	4	3.4%
Unanswered	--	1	--	2	3	2.5%
HS GPA						
Mostly A's	4	11.4%	10	11.9%	14	11.8%
Mostly A's & B's	12	34.3%	31	36.9%	43	36.1%
Mostly B's	6	17.1%	15	17.9%	21	17.6%
Mostly B's & C's	9	25.7%	20	23.8%	29	24.4%
Mostly C's	4	11.4%	5	6%	9	7.6%
Mostly D's	--	--	3	3.6%	3	2.5%
Current Academic						

Attainment Post HS

High School Graduate	1	2.9%	4	4.8%	5	4.2%
Some Community College	2	5.7%	2	2.4%	4	3.4%
Community College						
Grad./Assoc. Degree or Certificate	1	2.9%	2	2.4%	3	2.5%
Some College	5	14.3%	10	11.9%	15	12.6%
College Graduate	9	25.7%	24	28.6%	33	27.7%
Some Post-Graduate hours	1	2.9%	12	14.3%	13	10.9%
Master's Degree/Physician Assistant	12	34.3%	19	22.6%	31	26.1%
Professional Degree (Ph.D., MD, JD)	3	8.6%	10	11.9%	13	10.9%
More than one Professional Degree	1	2.9%	1	1.2%	2	1.7%

N = 119.

2.3 Measures

The data collection process involved five different instruments to assess the dependent variables of academic attainment, school climate, school pride, racial identity, and civic engagement. A self-report survey was developed to secure information on high school grades, academic achievement level after high school graduation, household pre-tax income (during high school), and whether or not the graduate received free-or-reduced lunch while in school.

2.4 Civic Engagement

To assess the relationship between civic engagement and research variables, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) Civic Engagement Quiz was administered. Items were modified into a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4, allowing participants to indicate the extent to which they participated in each civic activity within the past five years. The Cronbach Alpha Internal Consistency Coefficient for the measure was $r = .90$.

2.5 School Climate

To assess the relationship between school environment and research variables, 4 items from two subscales on The Quality of School Life Scale (Epstein & McPartland, 1976) were used: Satisfaction with School and Reaction to Teachers. The reliability of the original Satisfaction with School scale is .79 for secondary and .81 for elementary. The Reactions to Teacher original subscale has a reliability of .73 for secondary and .64 for elementary. For this study, original questions were phrased for students currently enrolled in school and modified to fit the context of this study population (high school

graduates). Also, the scale was modified to a five-point Likert scale to allow for more specificity in participant responses and to increase the chances of finding differences between groups. The Cronbach Alpha Internal Consistency Coefficient for the measure was $r = .55$.

2.6 School Pride

To assess the relationship between school pride and school climate, selected items from The School Pride Scale (Bell Hughes & Livingston, 2008) were used. The School Pride Scale is a 10-item scale that assesses graduates' feelings of school pride expressed by their willingness to donate their time and money to the school, attend school functions, and stay involved with their school upon graduation. Responses to these questions were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Scores for all questions were summed with high scores on these questions reflecting a strong sense of school pride for the high school. The Cronbach Alpha Internal Consistency Coefficient for the measure was $r = .88$.

2.7 Racial Identity

To assess the relationship between racial identity and research variables, two selected scales from the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) were administered to participants: Centrality Scale and Regard Scale. There were 20 selected items total on the two scales with a seven-point Likert scale. The Cronbach Alpha Internal Consistency Coefficient for the 8-item Centrality scale measure was $r = .73$. The Regard scale is divided into two subscales: Private Regard Subscale and Public Regard Subscale. The Cronbach Alpha Internal Consistency Coefficient for the 6-item Private Regard subscale measure was $r = .68$ and $r = .80$ for the Public Regard subscale.

3. Results

3.1 Preliminary Analysis

To investigate associations between race-related attitudes, educational attainment, civic engagement, and differences in perceptions of school climate among Black Americans across the lifespan, Spearman's rho correlations and Independent Samples t-test were run. The correlational analysis revealed significant relationships between Race-related attitudes (centrality) and Educational attainment ($r = .18$, $p < .05$), and Civic engagement ($r = .39$, $p < .001$), centrality was also positively associated with School Pride ($r = .16$, $p < .05$); however, there was no significant association between centrality and School climate ($r = .11$, $p = ns$) (See Table 2).

Table 2. Correlation Matrix for Primary Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
Centrality	1				
Edu-Attn.	.18*	1			

Civic Eng.	.39***	.38***	1		
School Pride	.16*	-.03	.10	1	
School Climate	.11	-.03	.05	.30**	1

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

3.1.1 Research Question 1: Racial Attitudes and Educational Attainment

To examine the influence of racial attitudes (centrality) on educational attainment standard multiple regressions were run. The model explained 3% of the variance $F(1,117) = 3.52$; $p = .06$, thus indicating that the relationship between racial attitudes and educational attainment were approaching significance ($b = .17$; $p = .06$) (See Table 3).

Table 3. Racial Attitudes and Educational Attainment

Outcome and Predictor	β	b	t	R ²	F
Racial Attitudes	.04	.17	1.8	.03	3.52
Educational Attainment					

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

3.1.2 Research Question 2: Racial Attitudes and Civic Engagement

To examine the influence of racial attitudes (centrality) on Civic Engagement standard multiple regressions were run. The model explained 14% of the variance $F(1,117) = 18.81$; $p < .001$, thus indicating that racial attitudes were positively associated with educational attainment among Black Americans ($b = .38$; $p < .001$).

Table 4. Racial Attitudes and Civic Engagement

Outcome and Predictor	β	b	t	R ²	F
Racial Attitudes	.04	.17	1.8	.03	3.52
Educational Attainment					

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

3.1.3 Research question 3: Differences in Perceptions of School Climate across High School Setting

Are there differences in perceptions of school climate among Black American students who attend historical Black high schools and historical White schools? Independent sample T-test revealed that

there were significant differences in perceptions of school climate between Black American students who attended a Black high school ($M = 15.89$, $SD = 2.79$) and Black American students who attend predominantly white schools ($M = 14.80$, $SD = 2.53$); $t(117) = 2.0$, $p < .05$.

Table 5. Independent Sample T-Test Differences Between HBHS and HWHS

Variables	HSBS		HSWS		<i>t</i>
	M	SD	M	SD	
Centrality	40.24	7.86	38.53	8.79	-1.03
Civic Eng.	28.96	9.28	27.56	7.65	-.781
School Pride	38.29	5.73	34.15	4.98	-3.69***
School Climate	15.89	2.79	14.8	2.53	-2.00*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

4. Discussion

The present study investigated the role of high school environments and long-term outcomes for Black American adults and differences school pride and perceptions of school climate among predominantly white and black high schools. The first two research questions indicated that racial attitudes among Black students were related to educational attainment and civic engagement. The current study found that racial centrality was related to higher educational attainment and Black Americans who reported that race was central to their self-concept attained higher levels of education. This study's findings are consistent with earlier racial identity research demonstrating that levels of centrality were positively related to academic attainment (Chavous et al., 2003).

Racial identity variables have been reported as significant indicators of life outcome variables for Black Americans (Chavous et al., 2003; Chavous, 2004; Eccles, 2006; Neville & Lilly, 2000; Yap et al., 2011) with higher racial identity perceptions being related to academic performance and psychological well-being. Additional research on racial identity has indicated that individuals who believe that race is more central to their self-concept are more active within the Black American community and tend to think critically about race and its impact on everyday activities (Neville & Lilly, 2000). Further, in a study by Livingston et al. (2017) of activist behaviors, researchers found that Black Americans who reported that race was central to their self-concept also reported high activism levels.

The third research question assessed differences in perceptions of school climate for Black American students at historically White and Black high schools. Results indicated that Black American HBHS graduates reported significantly higher perceptions of school climate compared to Black American HWHS-PW graduates. Additionally, Black American HBHS graduates reported significantly higher

levels of school pride than Black American HWHS-PW graduates.

4.1 Limitations

There are several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results of the current study. The first is the method of sample selection. The results of this study are based on a self-selected sample, with participants being those who were willing to describe their high school experience. Therefore, the generalizability of their responses and experiences may be limited with respect to the total population of Black American HWHS and HBHS graduates. With a randomized sample, the demographics may have been more representative of the two school environments in terms of HS SES and HS GPA.

The sample selection method is related to the second major limitation of unequal and small sample sizes across groups. Low response rates from the HWHS graduates may have limited the ability to find statistically significant differences in study variables within groups and between groups. The lower response rate of Black American graduates from HWHS graduates was a limiting factor in analyzing the data. The low response rates of HWHS graduates may be seen as indirect support for the research hypothesis that Black American graduates of HWHSs feel less connected to their high school experience than HBHS graduates. With a larger sample size for the HWHS-PW, finding statistical differences may increase, increasing the generalizability of study findings.

The third limitation of this study is the measurement tool. Overall, the survey took most individuals between 20-40 minutes to complete, but sometimes longer for some respondents. The survey's length appeared to result in high attrition rates and may have discouraged some individuals from participating, particularly if they had less connection to their high school experience or less interest in the research topic. Lastly, the format of the survey required respondents to report retrospectively on their high school experience. This method may have resulted in inaccurate information being reported limiting the generalizability and validity of study findings.

4.2 Implications and Future Directions

The study provides evidence for the critical role of HBHSs as significant in the education of Black American students. Future directions to extend this research should include exploring methods to recruit participants prior to entering high school in a randomized manner. Randomization and increased sample sizes should increase the possibility of finding statistically significant differences between the two school types: HBHS, HWHS. Additionally, sampling participants in a longitudinal manner may help address the issues of retrospective responding, attrition rates, and control for extraneous variables. Developing school climates that foster positive group and racial identity may help school communities develop civically-minded graduates, particularly amongst their high achieving students. This may be particularly important in HBHS's in which students may expect to learn about the accomplishments of other Black Americans being educated in a predominantly Black American environment.

In conclusion, the study results support the significant role that teachers, counselors, and administrators play in cultivating school climates conducive to learning and encouraging civic action. This may imply that what occurs at the school and even at one-on-one levels with student-teacher interactions is much

more important in determining graduates' academic and civic outcomes than academic and institutional policies.

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