Using Outgroup Comfort to Predict Black Students’ College Experiences

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This study investigated whether Black students’ social comfort with Whites, termed outgroup comfort (OC), predicted outcomes related to academics and mental health. Surveys administered to Black college students near the beginning and end of their first year showed OC measured in the fall predicted outcomes assessed in the spring, including contact with other races, academic concerns among men, and psychological well-being among women. A subsample selected on the basis of high or low OC scores participated in two weeks of experience sampling, revealing students high in OC reported less state anxiety than those low in OC when in academic settings; in nonacademic settings, anxiety did not differ by OC. System-justifying ideology favoring the outgroup was controlled, thus OC is distinct from internalized oppression. Results are discussed in relation to gender differences in racial identity and college student development.

Keywords: outgroup comfort, intergroup anxiety, Blacks, college students, experience sampling, intersectionality

The college student development literature suggests that in addition to the challenges all students face as they transition to college, Black students also confront specific developmental tasks, such as racial identity development and negotiating interactions with the dominant culture. This transition may be particularly difficult at schools where Blacks represent a minority. In these settings, they report higher levels of alienation (Loo & Rolison, 1986), lower levels of general well-being (D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993), and underperformance relative to their SAT scores (Nettles, Thoeny, & Gosman, 1986; Steele & Aronson, 1995) compared with their White peers. Indeed, race-related stress has been shown to account for more variability in Black students’ first-year grades than ACT scores (Neville, Heppner, Ji, & Thye, 2004). Clearly, further research is necessary to understand the phenomenology of Black students’ experiences on predominantly White campuses. This article investigates one aspect of this question: for Black students making the transition to college, does comfort in interactions with Whites predict outcomes related to academics and mental health?

Stephan and Stephan (1985) argued that anticipation of negative consequences in intergroup encounters can lead to affective arousal that may result in biases in information processing. They asked respondents to imagine themselves as the only member of their racial/ethnic group and to rate the extent to which they would feel awkwardness, suspicion and so forth. This measure showed minority group members’ intergroup anxiety (IA) was related to low levels of contact with, and negative attitudes toward, outgroup members (Stephan & Stephan, 1985, 1989). Later research found Whites high in IA anticipated interactions with Blacks would be difficult and chose to avoid such situations (Britt, Boniecki, Vescio, Biernat, & Brown, 1996; Plant & Devine, 2003). However, because race and ethnicity designate groups with different levels of status and power, experiences of contact with outgroup members are not symmetrical for Whites and Blacks (Levin, van Laar, & Sidanius, 2003). Avoidance of intergroup interaction may be a viable strategy for members of majority groups, but is less feasible for groups constituting only a small proportion of the population (Swim, Cohen, & Hyers, 1998). Thus, there has been growing interest in the experience of contact with outgroup members among Blacks and other minority groups, with attention to experiences of comfort and anxiety. Thompson, Anderson, and Bakeman (2000) found African American students who reported a less secure and less tolerant racial identity also reported more discomfort interacting with Whites; Rollock and Vrana (2005) found a similar relationship for Black male college students, but not Black females.

Clearly, there are reasons for Blacks to experience IA or discomfort with Whites: despite the gains made since the civil rights movement, anti-Black racism continues to be prevalent on college campuses, albeit in sometimes subtle forms (Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, & Embrick, 2004; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fisher & Hartmann, 1995); Black students are aware of, and negatively influenced by, the stigma placed on their intellectual abilities by Whites (Steele & Aronson, 1995), and racism is a stressor with negative biological and psychological effects on Black Americans (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999). Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that Blacks would experience discomfort in intergroup settings. Mack, Tucker, Archuleta, DeGroot, & Oh Cha (1997) found that Black students reported less comfort in dealing with members of other racial/ethnic
groups than either White or Hispanic students. Levin et al. (2003) showed that Black first-year college students high on IA had more ingroup and fewer outgroup friends during the two subsequent years.

In this article, we explore the relation between outgroup comfort (OC), that is, social comfort with Whites, and Black students’ sense of well-being, academic concerns, and daily affective states. We refer to “outgroup” rather than “intergroup” comfort in recognition that for Black students on the campus of a predominantly White institution (PWI), Whites represent not only a different racial/ethnic group, but one that constitutes a striking numerical majority among students, faculty, and administrators. Although our concept of OC is closely related to IA, we scale our variable with high scores indicating comfort (or lack of anxiety) because in keeping with the critique of deficit models in the psychology of racial and ethnic minorities, we conceptualize OC as a strength, or a resource in a multicultural society (Smith, 2006). Some studies conceptualize IA as a person variable (e.g., Levin et al., 2003) and others as a function of person × situation (e.g., Plant & Devine, 2003); we examine both. Our sample was composed of Black students in the first two years of study on the campus of a large, predominantly White urban university. We speculate that OC may be important during the transition to college, a time when many young people first experience living and learning in proximity to peers of different races. At a PWI, this type of social comfort may be essential to the success of minority group members because most academic settings are likely to be predominantly composed of outgroup members.

Several lines of research suggest OC should be related to students’ academic self-confidence and performance. First, Steele and Aronson (1995) found that when stigmatized group membership is made salient, members of that group perform poorly compared with neutral conditions. Their work emphasized the power of situations to evoke stigmatized group members’ fears of confirming negative stereotypes. However, not all members of stigmatized groups are equally vulnerable to the threat posed by stereotypes, and recent research has attempted to identify constructs that might make this distinction. Second, Brown and Pinel (2003) showed that stigma consciousness, a chronic expectation of being stereotyped by outgroup members, predicted underperformance in response to a stereotype threat manipulation. Within the context of Stephan and Stephan’s (2000) integrated threat theory, intergroup anxiety is similar to stigma consciousness: both assess individuals’ expectations of negative outcomes in interactions with the outgroup.

Finally, in group tasks, individuals who are the only members of their social group (tokens/solos) are more likely to suffer memory deficits (Lord & Saenz, 1985) and to be distracted by others’ performances (Saenz, 1994). Saenz and Lord (1989) argued that these deficits may be the result of tokens worrying about how outgroup members are evaluating them. Thus, because they comprise a minority of the student body, when Black students who are low in OC attend a PWI, race is likely to be salient in most academic settings, creating a context similar to a stereotype threat or token status manipulation. These three lines of research converge, leading us to hypothesize that Black students low in OC will report high levels of academic concern, and will experience greater anxiety than their high OC peers when engaged in academic tasks like attending class or studying. We tested the former hypothesis using surveys administered longitudinally, and the later using experience sampling.

Little work has explored the relationship between intergroup anxiety and/or comfort and minority group members’ adjustment to daily life and psychological well-being; however, there is some reason to expect that these variables may be related. Anderson (1991) argued that many Blacks experience acculturative stress as a result of the clash between their culture-specific values and those of the wider American society. Within a stress and coping framework, we would expect that these relatively minor, but frequently encountered stressors can lead to psychological distress. Anderson and colleagues later operationalized acculturative stress in terms of discomfort in interactions with Whites (Thompson et al., 2000).

Thus, we expected that for Blacks at a PWI, comfort with Whites at matriculation would be associated with positive adjustment assessed in the spring of the first year of college.

Gender as a Moderator of Outgroup Comfort

The emerging literature on gender differences among Black students finds important differences in women’s and men’s experiences on White campuses. For example, on average Black men show lower achievement and more adjustment difficulty compared with Black women (Chavous, Rivas, Green, Helaire, & Turner, 2004). These differences can be understood within the framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1994; Settles, 2006; Stewart & McDermott, 2004), an analytic approach that simultaneously considers the effects of multiple categories of social group membership (e.g., race, gender, and class). Recent research based on analysis of media images (Collins, 2004) and survey responses from Whites (Steinbugler, Press, & Dias, 2006) suggest that by virtue of gender, Black men and women suffer different racialized stereotypes. Thus, we might expect that in a predominantly White setting, gender may predict somewhat different experiences and outcomes among Black students.

PWIs typically enroll fewer Black men than Black women; thus, men may feel more isolated and “tokenized” (Engle, 2005). Fleming (1984) found that at PWIs, Black men and women reported comparable discrimination, but women showed better adjustment because the environment was more tolerant of their assertive behavior than men’s. More recent research has shown that variables related to racial identification and climate at PWIs predicted negative academic outcomes for men but not women. Cokley (2001) found that racial centrality was associated with greater academic and intrinsic motivation in Black women, but with (marginally) less motivation among Black men. He argued that the racial environments at PWIs are particularly negative toward men, leading high-centrality men to disengage. Chavous and colleagues found perceived person–environment fit was a stronger predictor of Black men’s academic adjustment than women’s, and that Black men (but not women) who expected their professors to be biased against them had lower grade point averages (Chavous et al., 2004; Chavous, Rivas, Green & Helaire, 2002). Chavous et al. (2004) speculated that although Black men are particularly stigmatized in PWIs, experiencing racialized gender stereotypes and social sanctions for assertive responses to racism, Black women at PWIs may experience more subtle forms of discrimination, such as social “invisibility,” which might be related to global outcomes such as well-being. Similarly, Pinel, Warner, and Chua (2005) reported stigma consciousness was associated with lowered academic performance and disengagement.
for Black men but among women it was related to lower self-esteem. Based on these findings, we hypothesized that at a PWI, comfort with the outgroup would predict greater academic adjustment among Black men. Based on Chavous et al.’s (2004) reasoning, we tested the exploratory hypothesis that OC would predict Black women’s well-being.

Predictive and Discriminant Validity of OC

To measure OC, we used a 16-item scale asking respondents about their preferences and emotions in both general and specific intergroup settings (Arriola & Cole, 2001); this scale avoids the methodological ambiguity inherent in the commonly used Stephan and Stephan (1985) measure (Blair, Park, & Bachelor, 2003). To test the predictive validity of this relatively new scale, in the spring we asked respondents to rate how often they had interacted with Whites during the academic year, expecting that high OC at matriculation would predict more outgroup engagement. Additionally, because we conceptualize OC as a resource that facilitates positive outcomes for minority group members in predominantly outgroup settings, we wished to distinguish our construct from internalized racism, or an ideology favoring outgroup members. Jost and colleagues (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003) have argued that system-justifying ideologies can palliate discontent, increasing positive emotion and satisfaction with one’s lot, and reducing frustration among members of groups at the bottom of social hierarchies. Such beliefs might also protect Black students from anxiety in academic settings, serving to allay fears that their efforts or ambitions could be blocked by discrimination. These mechanisms are separate from social comfort with outgroup members. Thus, we tested whether status legitimating beliefs were associated with OC, and controlled for these beliefs in our analyses in order to partial out the extent to which OC might reflect the belief that the ingroup deserved subordinate status.

In summary, we tested four main hypotheses: (1) OC would be associated with contact with people of other races during the academic year, but not with status legitimating beliefs; (2) OC measured in fall would predict fewer academic concerns among men and greater well being among women in the spring of the first year of college; (3) students low in OC would experience greater anxiety than their high OC peers when engaged in academic tasks; and (4) these associations will be independent of status legitimating beliefs.

Method

Participants

A list of Black freshmen was obtained from the registrar at a large, private university in the northeast in which 5% of the students self-identified Black while 80% identified as White. In the fall, they were mailed invitations to participate in a longitudinal study of Black college students. To generate a sufficient sample, incoming students were recruited in two consecutive years. Of the 143 students who participated in the fall survey, 98 also completed the spring survey. The sample was 67% female with an average age of 18.06 at time 1 (SD = .91). There were no differences in age, gender, parents’ education, or year of data collection between those who did and did not participate at time 2. Participants were compensated $15 and $10 for participation at time 1 and 2, respectively. In the second year of data collection, participants who scored in the top and bottom third of the distribution on OC were invited to participate in an experience sampling study. A total of 44 (19 male, 25 female) individuals participated in this phase; they were compensated $75 for their participation.

Survey Measures

OC, academic self esteem, and demographic information were measured in the fall, and student adjustment outcomes were assessed near the end of spring term. Means, standard deviations, and alphas for these measures are presented in Table 1.

Outgroup comfort. At time 1, a 16-item scale assessed the extent to which Black respondents feel comfortable with Whites. It was developed based on samples of Black college students attending PWIs (see Arriola & Cole, 2001 for its adaptation in a White sample), has shown good internal consistency, and is positively correlated with the Immersion/Emersion and Internalization sub-scales of Helms’ (1990) Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RIAS-B) (Cole & Arriola, in press). Sample items included: “I have close friends who are White” and “I would rather not work in a setting with predominantly White people, even if it meant passing up a more prestigious career opportunity” (reverse coded). Items, rated on a five-point scale, were averaged; higher scores indicate comfort with Whites.

Academic concerns were measured at time 1 and time 2 using the seven-item school abilities facet of Fleming and Courtney’s Self Rating Scale (1984), as well as two additional items about math (e.g., “When you have to do homework for a math class, how concerned or worried do you feel about it?”). A sample item was “When you have to read an essay and understand it for a class assignment, how worried or concerned do you feel about it?” Higher scores indicate more concern.

Status legitimating beliefs. At time 1 the stereotypical beliefs subscale from Arroyo and Zigler’s (1995) Racelessness scale tapped the extent to which participants agreed Blacks are to blame for racial inequality. Participants rated items such as “Most Blacks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Time 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Academic concerns</td>
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<td>0.75</td>
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<td>Status legitimating beliefs</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Time 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>0.30**</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic concerns</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.61**</td>
<td>0.25*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>General well-being</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>-0.23*</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.25*</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 143 for all time 1 variables. N = 99 for all time 2 variables. Figures along the diagonal represent r for each measure. *p < .05. **p < .01.
are no longer discriminated against” using a five-point scale. Two items were dropped from this scale due to low item-total correlations.

Contact. To test the predictive validity of the OC measure, at time 2 five items measuring interracial contact (Brigham, 1993) during the school year were included. Respondents rated items such as “In an average week, how often do you have conversations with people of other races on campus?” on a five-point scale such that higher scores indicate more contact with people of other races.

General well-being. At time 2 well-being was assessed using the 21-item General Well-Being Schedule (Fazio, 1991). Participants rated items such as “How happy, satisfied, or pleased have you been with your personal life?” on a five-point scale and responses were averaged; higher scores indicate more positive well-being.

Demographic information. Participants were asked to report their gender, SAT scores, and parents’ highest level of education.

Experience Sampling Procedures

Each participant carried an electronic pager and paper-and-pencil experience sampling diaries. Participants were prompted at random 5 times a day between 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. for 10 consecutive weeks in the spring term yielding 50 maximum possible data points per person. At each prompt, they were asked to rate items concerning their mood and location. Because students were prompted at random, it was expected that they would not complete all possible prompts. Across the sample, 40 prompts were completed on average (SD = 7.82, range = 19 to 50).

Repeated Situation-Level Measures in Experience Sampling

State anxiety. At each prompt, participants were asked about their current levels of anxiety using Stephan and Stephan’s (1985) Intergroup Anxiety scale. Items included: confident (reverse coded), awkward, suspicious, self-conscious, and accepted (reversed coded). Responses, rated on a semantic differential on a five-point scale, were averaged such that higher scores reflect greater anxiety (M = 3.39, SD = 0.63, α = .79).

School context. Participants were asked to report their location when paged. These open-ended responses were coded into one of seven categories: school/campus, work, home/dorm, en route, parents’ home, church/organizations, and other. For these analyses, school/campus settings were coded as 1 and all other settings were coded as 0 (the ratio of 0:1 was 71:29).

Results

Survey

Preliminary analyses found no significant correlation between OC and SAT scores, one measure of academic preparation (math, r(118) = 0.02; verbal, r(118) = 0.07). There was also no significant relation between OC and parents’ highest level of education (mother, r(140) = 0.14, father, r(129) = 0.10). This suggests OC is not a proxy for academic preparation or social class.

Pearson correlations within and between the time 1 and time 2 variables are presented in Table 1. At entry, high OC was associated with lower levels of academic concerns. Longitudinally, students high in OC reported greater interracial contact at time 2, supporting the validity of the OC measure. Academic concerns at time 1 were associated with academic concerns and lower general well-being at time 2. Status legitimizing beliefs at time 1 were associated with more academic concerns at time 2. Among the time 2 variables, higher levels of academic concerns were associated with lower reports of general well-being.

To test for gender differences in the six predictor and outcome variables, ť tests were conducted. To control the rate of Type I errors, a Bonferroni correction was used; the alpha level was divided by the number of tests (0.05/6 = 0.008). There were no significant gender differences on any of the six variables presented in Table 1.

To examine predictors of academic concerns in the spring (time 2), using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) procedures academic concerns were regressed on academic concerns at time 1, status legitimizing beliefs, OC, gender, and gender by OC interaction (OC was centered and multiplied by gender). As found in the correlations, reports of greater academic concern at time 1 were predictive of academic concern at time 2, suggesting stability during the first year of college (see Table 2). Although gender did not have a significant main effect, there was a significant interaction between gender and OC such that males who entered with high OC reported lower levels of academic concerns in the spring than their classmates who entered with low OC (see Figure 1); for females, OC had no effect on academic concerns at the end of the first year. These effects were independent of academic concerns in the fall.

To examine how the adjustment to a PWI predicted general well-being, an OLS regression was conducted to examine the effects of academic concerns, status legitimizing beliefs, outgroup comfort, gender, and gender × OC interaction. There was a significant interaction between the effects of gender and OC on general well-being; for women, high OC at entry was associated with greater well-being in the spring, whereas for men, OC at matriculation was unrelated to well-being (see Figure 2).

Experience Sampling

The experience sampling data were analyzed to examine the effects of person by situation. Since the experience sampling data are nested within individual (i.e., situations nested within individuals), a multilevel modeling technique was employed for data analyses. Such techniques allow for simultaneous analyses at more than one level; in this case, at the level of the situation as well as the person. As such, analyses examining situation-level anxiety were conducted using Hierarchical Linear Modeling software (Byrk & Raudenbush, 1992). For the situation-level variables, the correlations between anxiety, beep number (i.e., 1–5), and day of study (i.e., 1–10) revealed that anxiety was positively associated with beep number (r = 0.09, p < .01); therefore, beep number and day of study were included as control variables.

To test the hypothesis that anxiety levels differ in academic versus nonacademic situations, levels of anxiety in school versus nonschool settings were examined. Beep and day of the study were included in all analyses to control for methodological artifacts for situational variables. There were no overall differences in anxiety levels in school versus nonschool settings. Person-level values of OC and status legitimizing beliefs were included to test individual
differences in the association between school locations and anxiety. To test for possible gender differences, gender was also included as an individual-level predictor. There were differences in anxiety in school versus nonschool settings by individual differences in OC and status legitimating beliefs (see Table 3). In nonschool contexts, there was no difference in anxiety levels by level of OC; in school contexts, however, students who reported low OC reported significantly higher anxiety than their high OC peers (see Figure 3). A similar pattern emerged for status legitimating beliefs such that students reporting low endorsement reported higher levels of anxiety while in school settings compared to their high endorsement peers (see Figure 4).

Discussion

We theorized OC as a resource that Black students brought with them as they matriculated to a PWI that facilitates their adjustment and positive state affect. Preliminary analyses confirmed that OC measured in the fall predicted self-reported contact with other races during the school year, supporting the predictive validity of

Table 2
Regression Analyses for Predictors of Academic Concerns and General Well-Being at Time 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Academic concerns</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>General well-being</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>R²</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>R²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic concerns (time 1)</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.56**</td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td>−0.17</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>−0.18</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status legitimating beliefs (time 1)</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>−0.12</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>−0.13</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgroup comfort (time 1)</td>
<td>−0.28</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>−0.26</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>−0.20</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>−0.18</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1 = female)</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>−0.17</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>−0.12</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender × Outgroup Comfort</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.31*</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.37*</td>
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</table>

Note. N = 99.
*p < .05. **p < .001.

Figure 1. Differences in academic concerns and outgroup comfort by gender.
In all subsequent analyses, we found OC was related to outcomes independently of status legitimating beliefs. Thus, these results can be interpreted in terms of OC as a strength or resource involving social ease with dominant group members, rather than as a disavowal of the ingroup (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) or an internalization of oppression.

There were no gender differences in mean OC. However, for men, those entering college with high OC reported decreased academic concerns at the end of the year. For women, OC was unrelated to academic concerns in the spring. Because academic concern at entry was controlled, these findings reflect change in academic concerns. This is consistent with findings that variables tapping the importance of race are related to outcomes for Black male students, such as expectations of discrimination and perceived person-environment fit (Chavous et al., 2004).

In contrast, OC at entry predicted women’s general well-being in the spring but no relationship was found between OC and well-being among men. Chavous et al. (2004) argued that Black men and women may face qualitatively different climates at PWIs, with Black men experiencing more frequent (by virtue of their underrepresentation relative to Black women) and more negative attention, and Black women experiencing a lack of attention and feelings of invisibility; this qualitative difference in intergroup contact would lead us to expect gender differences in types of outcomes. The observed gender differences in OC’s relationship to well-being could arise from the fact that Black women must

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation level</th>
<th>Anxiety b (SE)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Intercept (average situation level)</td>
<td>3.14 (0.08)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic concerns</td>
<td>−0.10 (0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgroup comfort</td>
<td>0.00 (0.12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status legitimating beliefs</td>
<td>−0.10 (0.10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.20 (0.13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>School location</td>
<td>0.05 (0.04)</td>
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<td>Academic concerns</td>
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<td>Outgroup comfort</td>
<td>−0.10 (0.05)**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status legitimating beliefs</td>
<td>−0.13 (0.05)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>−0.09 (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beep</td>
<td>0.04 (0.01)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day of study</td>
<td>0.01 (0.01)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Note. N = 44. Analyses based on the subsample that participated in experience sampling. The estimates for the situation-level predictors represent the effects of those predictors across all participants who completed experience-sampling data, and the estimates for the individual-level predictors represent the effects of those predictors on the associated situation-level predictors.

*p < .05. **p < .001.
integrate a stigmatized gender identity into their racial identity as they develop in self-definition (Settles, 2006; Shorter-Goeden & Washington, 1996). In a predominantly White setting, Black women who are low in OC may feel discomfort both as a Black person, and as a Black woman, translating into a generalized sense of unease and jeopardizing their overall sense of wellbeing. The well-being of Black men low in OC might be buffered somewhat by their relatively privileged status as men. Although gender differences have seldom been explored in the literature on racial identity and student adjustment, this work underscores the need for such investigation, particularly in the area of qualitative differences in the experience of discrimination.

Experience sampling data showed that as hypothesized, students high in OC reported significantly less state anxiety than low OC students when paged in class or while studying. State anxiety reported by the two groups when paged in nonacademic settings was not significantly different. This finding suggests that OC could be related to stereotype threat; for Black students low in OC attending PWIs, race may be chronically salient while engaged in academic activities. Thus, OC may be similar to stigma consciousness (Brown & Pinel, 2003). Findings from this study could, therefore, have implications for academic achievement among Blacks. This is supported by Osborne’s (2001) findings that state anxiety can explain a significant proportion of race differences in academic performance. The present study is limited because measures of achievement were not included; this avenue is ripe for future research.

Although status legitimating beliefs were included only as a control variable, results were consistent with the argument that such ideologies serve to palliate discontent and frustration. Our findings suggest these beliefs may protect Black students from state anxiety in academic settings (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost et al., 2003). Future research should explore whether a cost of adopting this ideology is social alienation from other Black students. Gender was not significant in these analyses; however the small sample size prevented us from testing interaction effects in the experience sampling data. Given the results from the longitudinal portion of this study, future research should investigate this possibility.

Much of the literature on intergroup anxiety has investigated its relationship to prejudice, and thus has focused on IA among Whites. Our findings suggest IA and similar constructs are important factors in understanding minorities’ experience of intergroup contact in general, and academic adjustment in particular. Outgroup comfort, a variant of IA with an emphasis on comfort as a social resource, is associated with various positive outcomes for Black students studying at PWIs. These findings also highlight the utility of a person × situation approach to understanding intergroup anxiety (Britt et al., 1996) and underscore the importance of naturalistic studies for understanding how IA and related con-
Structs might predict outcomes in daily life. Future research should take an even more nuanced examination of the impact of students’ day-to-day settings on outcomes like state anxiety. Of particular interest is whether students choose their settings based on OC. If low OC is associated with anxiety, do low OC students study less and skip class more? Or do they develop strategies for coping with OC, and if so, what are they?

In this study, the racial composition of nonacademic settings was not assessed; thus, it is unclear which of students’ nonschool settings were predominantly ingroup and which were mainly composed of outgroup members. The fact that even in comparison to these heterogeneous nonschool settings, distinctive patterns of anxiety were found in the predominantly White school settings is striking. Moreover, this study was based on data collected at an institution which is 80% White; every other racial group constituted only a small minority of the total population. Future studies might explore whether Blacks’ OC in relation to Whites influences outcomes such as those assessed in this study even on campuses with proportionally greater ethnic diversity. Finally, if OC is an individual-level variation that facilitates aspects of Black students’ adjustment to PWIs it would be helpful to know more about the environments and experiences that shape the development of OC prior to college (Nagda, Gurin, & Johnson, 2005). A recent meta-analysis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) supported Allport’s (1954) theory that contact decreases racial prejudice; moreover, this association could be explained by the simple mechanism of familiarity breeding liking. This suggests the hypothesis that simple exposure to Whites may facilitate the development of OC among Black students.

Our research has several limitations. First, because this study limited its focus to Black students’ attitudes toward Whites, the question of how Black students’ interactions with other ethnic minorities may affect their college experiences cannot be ascertained. This is a significant omission because the effects of interracial contact may vary according to groups’ relative status (Lopez, 2004). Moreover, our measure of interracial contact assessed contact with all other races, not Whites specifically, yet this measure was found to be associated with comfort with Whites. Future research should explore whether OC is associated with comfort with diverse groups in general; such a finding would support our conceptualization of OC as a social resource in diverse settings.

Despite the longitudinal design, this study provides only a snapshot of students’ development. Many questions remain about how Black students develop OC and whether OC is related to their experience of higher education as they complete their degrees and launch their careers. Phinney, Ferguson, and Tate (1997) found that ethnic diversity outside of school contexts, including neighborhoods and elementary schools, predicted outgroup friendships among minority high school students, which in turn predicted

![Figure 4. Differences in situational anxiety and status legitimating beliefs by nonschool versus school setting.](image-url)
positive outgroup attitudes. This suggests that residential segregation may be an important obstacle to the development of OC. Moreover, in a sample of college students, Levin et al. (2003) showed that low IA and positive intergroup contact may have a positive feedback loop such that low IA predicts intergroup friendships which in turn predict low IA. These studies, considered together with the present research, illustrate how critically important it is to situate our understanding of the precursors and consequences of OC within a developmental framework. It is particularly important to learn whether intergroup anxiety and the related construct of OC are self-perpetuating because OC appears to be associated with positive outcomes in academic confidence and general well-being. This study did not examine change in OC over time; however, future research should investigate both the precursors of OC and the factors that might enhance its development, such as participation in social networks or extracurricular activities. This research could form the basis for interventions (such as orientation programs) to foster the development of OC among Black students at PWIs (see, e.g., Pinel et al., 2005).

In the current political climate, there is increasing interest in the educational benefits of diversity (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004). This conversation must include attention to the experiences of minority group members within diverse educational settings. Our findings suggest that not all ethnic minority students are equally poised to take advantage of the benefits that diversity may bring. For some, a social and educational environment composed primarily of outgroup members may be associated with decreased academic confidence and well-being and greater anxiety when engaged in academic activities. We call on psychologists, faculty and college administrators to deepen our understanding of the factors that may influence outgroup comfort among minority students, and to institute policies and practices that facilitate the development of outgroup comfort among all students.

References


