Nigrescence Theory: Current Status and Challenges for the Future

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This article raises a number of critical questions for scale development and theorizing in the field of Black racial identity. In particular, the authors suggest that research on Black racial identity would benefit from longitudinal studies and the examination of the existence of overarching racial identity constructs.

Este artículo plantea varias preguntas críticas sobre el desarrollo de escalas y teorías en el campo de la Identidad Racial Negra. En lo particular, los autores sugieren que investigaciones basadas en la Identidad Racial Negra se beneficiarían con estudios longitudinales y la examinación de la existencia de conceptos expansivos sobre la identidad racial.

Nigrescence theory (Cross, 1971) has played a major role in the conceptualization of African Americans’ racial identity for the last three decades. Cross’s original model has been used as the basis for a number of theoretical explications (Helms, 1990b; Parham, 1989) as well as empirical studies in the field (Cross, 1979; Hocoy, 1999; Parham & Helms, 1981, 1985a, 1985b; Plummer, 1995; Thomas & Speight, 1999). In 1991, Cross revised the nigrescence theory. In this revision, perhaps the most compelling idea was the proposal of multiple identity clusters at each stage. The revised theory provided the impetus for the development of the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS; Vandiver et al., 2000), which, in turn, has provided support for the existence of multiple nigrescence identities. In this article, we provide a brief update on the CRIS, discuss some of the theoretical and measurement issues that arose during its development, and make some suggestions for future research. (Reader’s Note: The authors of this article are also three of the authors of the CRIS.)

the nigrescence model and the CRIS

At the end of Phase 4, described in this special issue of the Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development (JMCD; see Vandiver, Hflagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross,
& Worrell, 2001), six nigrescence identities were measured. In two subsequent phases, Phases 5 and 6, measurement of the six identity clusters was refined by using exploratory and confirmatory factor analytic procedures and examining convergent and divergent validity (see Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Phagen-Smith, in press). The current version of the CRIS (Vandiver et al., 2000) is presented in the Appendix. The CRIS measures three Pre-Encounter identity clusters (Assimilation, Self-Hatred, & Miseducation), one Immersion-Emersion cluster (Anti-White), and two Internalization clusters (Multiculturalist Inclusive & Afrocentricity, a form of Black Nationalism). These six identity clusters represent only some of the possible nigrescence identities (see Table 1). Three clusters are not measured at this time: Intense Black Involvement, Biculturalist, and Multiculturalist Racial. Furthermore, the identity clusters listed under the expanded model in Table 1 are not intended to represent all possible nigrescence clusters. The discovery of other nigrescence identities or the removal of some of the identities listed will be determined by ongoing empirical research into nigrescence.

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*Subscale included in the Cross Racial Identity Scale.
scale development and measurement issues

The development of valid and reliable instruments is one of the most critical issues that psychology faces. Without a way to measure a construct validly, there is little that can be done in the way of research. Racial identity research was propelled by the development of the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS-B; Parham & Helms, 1981). The difference in the amount of research on nigrulence from 1971 to 1980 (the pre-RIAS-B decade) and 1982 to 1991 (the post-RIAS-B decade) exemplifies the importance of having a measurement tool. Ironically, the amount of research spurred by the RIAS-B did not result in overwhelming support for the nigrulence model (Cross, 1971), in part because of the low reliability of the scores on the RIAS-B (e.g., Tokar & Fischer, 1998; Yanico, Swanson, & Tokar, 1994). The issue of subscale score reliability was a major concern that we had about the CRIS. Other measurement concerns included time, the selection of what can be measured, psychometric standards for the instrument's scores, and the interpretation of the CRIS scores.

TIME

One of the key variables in the development of a valid measurement instrument is time. The process of writing items, collecting data on those items, examining the data, revising the items, and collecting data on the revised items is tremendously time-consuming. Often items that, on paper, seem to capture the essence of a construct do not result in scores that are reliable. The lack of subscales measuring the Intense Black Involvement and Multiculturalist Racial identities on the CRIS is evidence that some racial identity constructs are not yet fully measurable or understood and presents the first challenge for the developers of the CRIS and for other researchers in the field of Black racial identity. However, the missing subscales do not invalidate the properties of the subscales that are currently included on the CRIS.

ISSUES OF RELIABILITY

The first reliability concern for a scale that purports to measure a single construct is that of internal consistency. It should be noted here that reliability and validity are "properties of the scores obtained from the use of a measure—under certain conditions and with a particular group of participants, rather than the properties of the instruments per se" (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1999, p. 409). Consequently, reliability estimates of CRIS subscale scores were reported for all three data collection phases (Vandiver et al., 2001). Although Goodwin
and Goodwin noted that one might expect and accept reliability estimates of less than .70 "with special groups of respondents, such as young children," they also noted that "very high internal consistency estimates might easily be found for measures of unidimensional constructs used with heterogeneous groups of adults" (p. 415).

In the development of the CRIS, a lower bound reliability estimate of .70 for scores was set for two reasons. First, the proposed identity constructs (e.g., Pre-Encounter Assimilation) were unidimensional, and second we are dealing with relatively ideal circumstances—samples of more than 100 university-educated participants. It is expected that under less ideal circumstances, the reliability estimates of the scores may decrease. Starting with a high lower bound (.70) across the scale-development samples increases the probability that scores from less "ideal" samples will also achieve reliability estimates that are acceptable. Reliability coefficients also served an important theoretical function in this scale-development process. It was the internal consistency estimates based on interitem correlations that first alerted us to the possibility of a Self-Hatred/Miseducation split and, ultimately, led to the separation of these two Pre-Encounter identity clusters. Internal consistency estimates and stability estimates (test–retest reliability) of subscale scores will need to be examined in non-university populations.

**ISSUES OF VALIDITY**

"Validation is the most critical step in test development and use because it is the process by which test scores take on meaning" (Benson, 1998, p. 10). The validity evidence presented in the articles in this special issue of *JMCD* falls primarily in the categories of content validity and factorial validity. The sampling of items to represent the identities at the different stages, with input from experts in the field, is a content validity issue. One example of the difficulty in establishing content validity involved the Intense Black Involvement and Black Nationalist items loading on the same factor (Vandiver et al., 2001). Another example was specific to the Black Nationalist identity. As noted, there are multiple ways to define *Black Nationalism* (e.g., Afrocentric, Black empowerment, separatist). We opted to operationalize Black Nationalism in terms of Black empowerment, but a case can be made for the use of an equally viable form of Black Nationalism (e.g., separatist).

In the process of developing the subscales, we used factor analysis to examine both the unidimensional structure of individual subscales (Comrey, 1988; Floyd & Widaman, 1995; Smith & McCarthy, 1995) and the multidimensional nature of the CRIS. The analyses of the individual subscales confirmed their integrity and assisted in the choice of robust items. Factor analyses in Phase 4 also led to the decision to exclude the Intense Black Involvement subscale from the CRIS. At the end of Phase 4, six factors were extracted on the basis
of multiple criteria that are used in this area of measurement (e.g., parallel analysis, theoretical underpinning), and these factors matched the CRIS subscales as theorized.

Cronbach and Meehl (1955) argued that, in essence, everything leads back to construct validity: "content validity, interitem correlations, intertest correlations, test-'criterion' correlations, studies of stability over time, and stability under experimental intervention" (p. 300). Benson (1998) proposed an equally comprehensive list for a "strong program of construct validation" (p. 14). Findings based on reliability and correlational analyses and factor analyses from Phases 2 to 4 contribute to the construct validation of the CRIS scores. However, the process of construct validation is ongoing, reinforcing the need for evidence to support the CRIS constructs. Subscale scores on the CRIS need to be examined for convergent and discriminant validity, using other measures that are available and with a priori hypotheses on the pattern of relationships that should be found. Some of this work has already begun (see Vandiver et al., in press). The psychometric properties of CRIS scores also need to be examined in samples from nonuniversity settings, from other geographic settings, and across demographic groups (e.g., gender).

As the list discussed in the previous paragraph demonstrates, the process of construct validation is an ongoing process, and this leads back to the issue of time. McDermott (1999) released the Learning Behaviors Scale, a nationally standardized teacher-rating scale that measures basic learning-related behaviors. He reported on research versions of the scale dating back 16 years (e.g., McDermott & Beitman, 1984; Stott, Green, & Francis, 1983). In one sense, academia is in part responsible for the dearth of validity evidence on many of the scales that are in use. Many doctoral dissertations are scale-development exercises that take place over a 1-to-2-year time frame. Students complete the degree and believe that the doctoral thesis represents the culmination of the scale-development process. The theories on which these scales were developed are not revisited, the scales are often used as they were at the completion of the degree, and no further attempts are made to refine the scales or the theories on which the scales were based. In essence, scale development becomes a short-term exercise, and the scales are seen as end products rather than as works in progress. From our perspective, the CRIS is a work in progress and, like all scales, should remain a work in progress over several years until the preponderance of the evidence is favorable. Moreover, to the extent that theorizing on nigrerence continues to evolve, in part due to data collected using the scale, the CRIS will continue for some time to be a work in progress.

In case the wrong impression has been conveyed, the preceding argument in not intended to indicate the CRIS is not ready for use. In the course of developing the six subscales, evidence of content, convergent, discriminant, and factorial validity, as well as internal consistency, has been provided (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver et al., in press; Vandiver et al., 2001). Studies on the
CRIS by researchers other than the scale’s authors are certainly the next step. We and the other authors of the CRIS will also continue to gather evidence on the instrument and work on the development of subscales to measure identities that have not yet been successfully operationalized.

SCORING ISSUES

The ultimate goal of scale development is to obtain a measurement of some particular construct of interest. In the case of the CRIS, the constructs are Black racial identity clusters. Two questions arise with the CRIS. The first question focuses on how the instrument is scored. Many scales of social attitudes, including the CRIS, use raw scores. Scores are obtained by summing the items that make up each subscale and using either the total score or the mean of scores on that subscale. The current version of the CRIS (see Appendix) has equal numbers of items on each subscale to allow for both possibilities. One option under consideration involves using some kind of standard score based on a linear transformation. These kinds of standard scores have the advantage of putting all of the subscales’ scores on the same measurement scale while retaining the properties of the original distributions (Anastasi, 1988). However, this option requires collecting data from a representative sample of the population to enable statements to be made about the levels of scores that are meaningful as indicators of particular identities.

The second question focuses on identifying identity types or clusters. The CRIS is a multiple-factor scale, and respondents obtain scores on all of the subscales. Multiple scores for each individual create a potential classification dilemma. Helms (1990a) raised a similar concern about RIAS–B (Parham & Helms, 1981) scores. For example, how does one decide that a particular individual is in the Pre-Encounter stage and, more specifically, that the person is mis-educated as opposed to self-hating? This question requires empirical analyses that allow for the grouping of individuals (e.g., cluster analysis, discriminant analysis, profile analysis) to see if the scores do allow the accurate classification of individuals, on the basis of the identities proposed in nigrulence theory (Cross, 1991; Cross & Vandiver, 2001). The empirical identification of nigrulence identities represents a fruitful area of research with the CRIS and with other measures of Black racial identity.

Theoretical Concerns

Several theoretical questions also arise from the current findings. To borrow the metaphor used by Vandiver et al. (2001) will the Mariska [Matryoshka] doll reveal other nigrulence identities, or have they all been discovered? With regard to Internalization identities, Vandiver et al. (2001) suggest that there
are multiple nationalistic identities, and this area deserves further exploration. Finally, one of the most compelling questions that arose in the current scale-development process focuses on the area in which success was not achieved: Can independent Intense Black Involvement and Multiculturalist Racial be measured directly, or will indirect methods be needed? We and the other authors of the CRIS believe that these identities can be measured and intend to add them to the CRIS at a future date.

THE INTENSE BLACK INVOLVEMENT AND MULTICULTURALIST RACIAL IDENTITIES

Cross (1991) noted that demonizing Whites and White culture often preoccupies people entering Immersion-Emersion. Pro-Black attitudes are one aspect of the Immersion-Emersion stage, and anti-White attitudes are another aspect. The question that some researchers may raise is, “Is it possible for an Encoun-
ter to lead to Intense Black Involvement without anti-White sentiment develop-
ing concomitantly?” One outcome of this ongoing research endeavor may be a strong argument for creating a unitary scale of Immersion-Emersion as Parham and Helms (1981) opted to do.

However, an alternative perspective exists. As Helms (1990a) clearly articulated, whereas “generalized anger . . . appears to characterize Immersion” (p. 27), “participation in the Emersion Phase . . . allows the person’s emotions, particularly anger, to level off and her or his cognitive strategies to become more flexible” (p. 28). In other words, the person entering Immersion-Emersion may well be high on both the Intense Black Involvement and Anti-White subscales, whereas the person near the end of this stage is high only on the Intense Black Involvement subscale. To adequately demonstrate the movement through Immersion-Emersion, two independent subscales are necessary. Furthermore, being able to map the movement of one’s identity development is of even greater importance if future encounters produce recycling through the nigrescence stages as Parham (1989) contended. From this perspective, the relationship between the Intense Black Involvement and Anti-White subscales is not solely a theoretical problem; it is also a measurement issue. Our ability to mute the relationship between the two Immersion-Emersion subscales in Phase 2, albeit with a loss of reliability of Intense Black Involvement subscale scores, offers hope that, with continued attention to this problem, two relatively independent scales can be developed.

The discovery of a Multiculturalist Racial identity also raises several ques-
tions. In the original nigrescence model (e.g., Hall, Freedle, & Cross, 1972), the “internalized” individual was described as focusing on “things other than himself and his own ethnic or racial group” (p. 7). In the revised model (Cross, 1991), this stance is modified. The internalized individual “gives high salience to Blackness,” and this salience can leave “little room for
other considerations” as in the case of Black Nationalists or it can become one of “many saliences” (p. 210) as in the case of Multiculturalists. The Multiculturalist Racial identity falls somewhere between these two and was not hypothesized in the 1991 model. Is an identity that is based on accepting other oppressed minorities a steppingstone to an inclusive identity, or is it an end point? In addition, can a viable subscale be created to measure this identity, and if not, can it be identified by using profiles on other subscales (e.g., low scores on the Assimilation subscale, high scores on the Anti-White subscale, and moderate scores on the Multiculturalist Inclusive subscale)?

THE NEED FOR LONGITUDINAL STUDIES

Parham (1989) articulated a number of ideas about nigrescence that extended the theory proposed by Cross (1971). Two arguments are of particular relevance to the development of the CRIS. First, Parham argued that adolescents from different home environments would start nigrescence at different places. Specifically, he stated that an adolescent “whose parents have more Afrocentric racial attitudes, and who lives in a predominantly Black environment, may view the world from a pro-Black-oriented perspective” (Parham, 1989, p. 195). However, Cross’s (1971, 1991) definition of Pre-Encounter precludes a pro-Black identity. Do some adolescents begin the nigrescence journey in the Immersion-Emersion stage, and, if so, are they immersing or at the point of emerging? The second idea—Parham’s concept of recycling or repeating the nigrescence process—was echoed by Cross in 1991. Both of these ideas require prospective, longitudinal, empirical examinations, and it is hoped that the CRIS will provide one means of investigating these questions.

NIGRESCENCE: STAGES, ATTITUDES, OR IDENTITIES

Although nigrescence theory has some of the components of stage theories—nigrescence theory predicts qualitative differences in behavior over time, and the nigrescence stages share a common conceptual base—it is not clear that other stage-theory components are present (i.e., invariance of sequence of stages, incorporation, expansion of the earlier stages into the later ones). The concept of recycling (Parham, 1989) raises questions about the invariance of the stage sequence, especially if, in fact, recycling is demonstrated empirically. Cross (1971, 1991) referred to the nigrescence components as identities and the nigrescence process as “a resocializing process” (Cross, 1991, p. 190). As such, nigrescence identities describe frames of reference or identity clusters through which the world is viewed, and they are exemplified by particular attitudes. Cross and Vandiver (2001) address this question in some detail.
OTHER BLACK IDENTITY THEORIES

Attention and consideration need to be given to the proliferation of other Black identity theories—for example, Baldwin’s (1981) African self-consciousness and Seller and his colleagues’ Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Are the Assimilation and Black Nationalist subscales on the CRIS measuring the same constructs as the Assimilation and Nationalism subscales on the MMRI? Is Baldwin’s African self-consciousness another Black Nationalist perspective? In other words, how close is this field to achieving an overarching theory of Black racial identity? Pope-Davis, Vandiver, and Stone (1999) demonstrated that the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Helms & Carter, 1990) and the Oklahoma Racial Attitude Scale—Preliminary Form (Choney & Behrens, 1996), two scales measuring White racial identity, overlapped on two factors. The presence of all these instruments makes the current climate fertile for research on higher order factors of Black racial identity.

conclusion

Cross (1991) commented that theorists and researchers on nigrescence seek “to clarify and expand the discourse on Blackness by paying attention to the variability and diversity of Blackness” (p. 223). This quote summarizes the overarching goal of the articles on the development of the CRIS (Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver et al., in press; Vandiver et al., 2001). It is hoped that the CRIS will prove a useful tool to researchers examining nigrescence theory, and we look forward to critiques of the instrument from other researchers as they use it in their work. It is also hoped that this overview of the process of developing the CRIS will assist others who are developing scales on identity and other social attitude measures. Finally, we hope that the suggestions for future research, both measurement and theory oriented, will add to the discourse in an already vibrant area of scholarship.

references


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**appendix**

**ITEMS ON THE CROSS RACIAL IDENTITY SCALE**

1. As an African American, life in America is good for me. (Filler)
2. I think of myself primarily as an American and seldom as a member of a racial group. (PA)
3. Too many Blacks "glorify" the drug trade and fail to see opportunities that don't involve crime. (PM)
4. I go through periods when I am down on myself because I am Black. (PSH)
5. As a multiculturalist, I am connected to many groups (Hispanics, Asian-Americans, Whites, Jews, gays & lesbians, etc.). (IMCI)
6. I have a strong feeling of hatred and disdain for all white people. (IEAW)
7. I see and think about things from an Afrocentric perspective. (IA)
8. When I walk into a room, I always take note of the racial make-up of the people around me. (Filler)
9. I am not so much a member of a racial group as I am an American. (PA)
10. I sometimes struggle with negative feelings about being Black. (PSH)
11. My relationship with God plays an important role in my life. (Filler)
12. Blacks place more emphasis on having a good time than on hard work. (PM)
13. I believe that only those Black people who accept an Afrocentric perspective can truly solve the race problem in America. (IA)
14. I hate the White community and all that it represents. (IEAW)
15. When I have a chance to make a new friend, issues of race and ethnicity seldom play a role in whom that person might be. (Filler)
16. I believe it is important to have both a Black identity and a multicultural perspective, which is inclusive of everyone (e.g., Asians, Latinos, gays & lesbians, Jews, Whites, etc.). (IMCI)
17. When I look in the mirror at my Black image, sometimes I do not feel good about what I see. (PSH)
18. If I had to put a label on my identity, it would be “American” and not African American. (PA)
19. When I read the newspaper or a magazine, I always look for articles and stories that deal with race and ethnic issues. (Filler)
20. Many African Americans are too lazy to see opportunities that are right in front of them. (PM)
21. As far as I am concerned, affirmative action will be needed for a long time. (Filler)
22. Black people cannot truly be free until our daily lives are guided by Afrocentric values and principles. (IA)
23. White people should be destroyed. (IEAW)
24. I embrace my own Black identity, but I also respect and celebrate the cultural identities of other groups (e.g., Native Americans, Whites, Latinos, Jews, Asian-Americans, gays & lesbians, etc.). (IMCI)
25. Privately, I sometimes have negative feelings about being Black. (PSH)
26. If I had to put myself into categories, first I would say I am an American, and second I am a member of a racial group. (PA)
27. My feelings and thoughts about God are very important to me. (Filler)
28. African Americans are too quick to turn to crime to solve their problems. (PM)
29. When I have a chance to decorate a room, I tend to select pictures, posters, or works of art that express strong racial-cultural themes. (Filler)
30. I hate White people. (IEAW)
31. I respect the ideas that other Black people hold, but I believe that the best way to solve our problems is to think Afrocentrically. (IA)
32. When I vote in an election, the first thing I think about is the candidate’s record on racial and cultural issues. (Filler)
33. I believe it is important to have both a Black identity and a multicultural perspective, because this connects me to other groups (Hispanics, Asian-Americans, Whites, Jews, gays & lesbians, etc.). (IMCI)
34. I have developed an identity that stresses my experiences as an American more than my experiences as a member of a racial group. (PA)
35. During a typical week in my life, I think about racial and cultural issues many, many times. (Filler)
36. Blacks place too much importance on racial protest and not enough on hard work and education. (PM)
37. Black people will never be free until we embrace an Afrocentric perspective. (IA)
38. My negative feelings toward White people are very intense. (IEAW)
39. I sometimes have negative feelings about being Black. (PSH)
40. As a multiculturalist, it is important for me to be connected with indi-
Note. Abbreviations in the parentheses after each question indicate the subscale to which the item belongs. Filler = Item not associated with any subscale; PA = Pre-Encounter Assimilation; PM = Pre-Encounter Miseducation; PSH = Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred; IMCI = Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive; IEAW = Immersion-Emersion Anti-White; IA = Internalization Afrocentricity (formerly Black Nationalist [IBN]).

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