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**Successful Transition among African Americans:  
Developmental Similarities between College and the Workplace**

Graduation from high school is often considered a marker of transition from adolescence to adulthood. Upon this transition, adolescents must make a decision about their next step. Two paths are probable: college or the workforce. This study acknowledges that college and the workplace are very different environments. However, they are quite similar developmentally. While young people in the workplace do not go to class and earn grades, they are being evaluated in ways similar to their counterparts attending college. This is especially true for minority adolescents who have to deal with racism and discrimination as well as survival in the mainstream culture while holding to the ideals of their minority status. The purpose of the present study was to investigate this transition from adolescence to adulthood among African Americans. Specifically, this study sought to investigate the role of personality factors and feelings about and perceptions of race in the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

This research question was investigated among a sample of 290 African American college freshmen from two universities. Students were recruited at their respective campuses and asked to complete questionnaires designed to measure racial identity (i.e., feelings about the importance of race), personality traits (i.e., optimism, shyness, and loneliness), and indicators of successful transition to college (i.e., number of friends made since beginning college, involvement in campus activities, and level of psychological distress). It is important to note that these indicators were chosen because of their generalizability to adolescents who begin working immediately after high school. Statistical analyses included hierarchical multiple regression.

Results revealed that shy and lonely individuals were more likely to report having fewer friends and higher levels of psychological distress while optimistic individuals reported being more psychologically healthy. Upon investigating the role of racial identity in these relationships, it was found that optimistic individuals who indicated that being African American was important to their self-concept reported forming more friendships in college. Furthermore, optimistic individuals who reported positive feelings towards African Americans were involved in more community activities. Interestingly, optimistic individuals who felt that society values and appreciates African Americans tended to report higher levels of psychological distress while their more pessimistic counterparts reported lower levels of psychological distress. No further results were found for shyness and loneliness. Findings imply that adolescents with a more positive outlook on life and more positive personal views about being African American will experience a smoother transition to adulthood. However, optimism does not seem to be enough to buffer discordant views about how society perceives African Americans. Implications of findings are important for parents, high school administrators, college administrators, and employers of African American high school graduates. Findings also shed light on the general developmental processes of African Americans.

This research question was investigated using data collected for my master's thesis. I conceived this particular idea and analyzed the data independently. Data was collected at two sites. I coordinated data collection at both sites, one of which was located out of state. Implicit to this was coordination of two Human Subjects Protection Committees, who both required different information in different formats. I applied for and received funding to compensate the 290 participants, travel to the external site, and cover other miscellaneous expenses. Finally, I oversaw several undergraduate research assistants who were involved in data collection.

Attending the Diversity Challenge is a wonderful opportunity for a student at my stage. This conference is hosted by the preeminent racial identity researcher, Dr. Janet Helms, and will be attended by prominent researchers in the field of African American development. I will have the opportunity to collaborate, network, and receive feedback in ways not available here at Purdue. Additionally, the present study represents an area of research that has not been thoroughly studied and I expect it will provoke a lively and fruitful discussion. Finally, I believe that this vein of research represents an area that is often undervalued in research intensive settings. At a university that respects hard science and considers research to be only experimental work, it is so important to consider the importance of studying topics that are not so quantifiable, such as race and culture.