RACIAL IDEOLOGY AND BLACK COLLEGE STUDENTS' LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES AT A HISTORICALLY WHITE INSTITUTION

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Abstract

Within this study, we explored the relationship between racial ideology and leadership experiences of Black college student leaders at a historically white institution. Using a phenomenological approach, we sought to delineate the leadership experiences of Black college students as related to their racial identity. We provide evidence that racial ideologies influence the ways Black students express their leadership experiences. We close with recommendations for practice and future research.

Keywords: Black college students, racial ideology, student leadership

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Black college students are not a monolith and differ in how they think and feel about their racial identities. One measure for understanding these differences is *racial ideology*. Racial ideology is the meaning a person associates with their race (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). Racial ideology, and its influence on student experiences, particularly at historically white institutions[1] (HWIs), is not well researched. Though there is a growing body of research on Black students who attend HWIs, researchers often examine Black students as a demographic group without much attention to within-group characteristics such as racial ideology (Sellers, Chavous, et al., 1998). Additionally, researchers who have explored racial ideology have not given much regard to understanding the essence of Black student experiences. Instead, researchers have primarily studied quantitative factors such as grade point average (GPA), involvement levels, mental health scores, and self-esteem scores (e.g., Anglin & Wade, 2007; Byars-Winston, 2006; Chavous, 2000; Sellers, Chavous, et al., 1998).

One type of engagement that shapes Black college students' experiences is their leadership involvement. Black students' involvement in leadership positions on campus has proven valuable for their development. Leadership positions can positively influence social integration, sense of belonging, development, career aspirations and outcomes, and mental health (Greene & Winter, 1971; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Oaks et al., 2013; Strayhorn, 2012). Still, little is known about how Black students' beliefs and attitudes toward race influence their motivations to be involved with certain types of leadership positions, how they make meaning of being in a leadership role, or their perceptions of how leadership may influence their lives and futures.

The purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between racial ideology and the leadership experiences of Black college student leaders at an HWI. The following research questions guided the study: 1) What racial ideological philosophies do Black student leaders hold at an HWI? 2) How does racial ideology affect the leadership experiences of Black students at an HWI? 3) How does racial ideology shape how Black students perceive the role student leaders play on campus? 4) How does racial ideology inform Black students' decisions about leadership (i.e., type of leadership positions)?

Racial Ideology

Scholarship on racial ideology stems from scholarship on *racial identity*, which can be defined as "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that [they] shares a common heritage with a particular racial group" (Evans et al., 2009, p. 254). While the literature base on college students' racial identities has grown, literature regarding racial ideologies of Black college students warrants further study. Nevertheless, the current literature on Black students' racial ideologies points to a consistent theme—their racial ideologies shape their college experiences.

When examining thoughts about campus climate and its relation to racial ideologies, Chavous (2000) found that the meaning and importance of race influenced fit on campus. Black college students who emphasized race had the lowest perceptions of fit at HWIs. Thelamour et al. (2019) also found statistically significant relationships between strong racial identities and feeling less connected to campus for Black American students. In terms of specific experiences influencing their experiences, Chavous and colleagues (2018) found that as Black students emphasized race, they experienced more discrimination, microaggressions, and race-related negative incidents.

The literature suggests racial ideologies also influence college outcomes (e.g., grade point av-

[1]Historically white institutions are defined as institutions with "a history, demography, curriculum, climate, and a set of symbols and traditions that embody and reproduce whiteness and white supremacy" (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022, p. 2).

erage, career outcomes). Sellers, Chavous, et al. (1998) found GPA differences for students across racial ideologies, with students minimizing race or overemphasizing race having lower GPAs. In terms of career outcomes, Byars-Winston (2006) found that students who center race perceive more career barriers, and their emphasis on race influences career choices.

The findings of prior research on Black students' racial ideologies illustrate the influence that students' beliefs and attitudes regarding race can have on their college experience and warrant further investigation, and again, within this study, we explore their leadership involvement.

Black Students' Leadership Experiences

Exploring Black college students' leadership experiences at HWIs can be complex, given that their experiences are often influenced by racism, among other forms of oppression (Beatty & Lima, 2021; Domingue, 2015; Hotchkins, 2017a; Jones, 2020). For example, in Armino and colleagues' (2000) study, some Black participants noted that the leadership label separated them from their racial group or helped oppress their racial group. In more recent studies, terms and phrases like "false sense of normalcy" (Beatty & Lima, 2021, p. 5), oppression (Domingue, 2015), *buffered leadership* (Hotchkins, 2017a), and self-sacrifice (Hotchkins & McNaughtan, 2021) were used to explain Black students' leadership experiences, highlighting the struggles, responsibilities, and negotiations that come with their leadership involvement.

Extant literature also suggests that exploring Black students' leadership experiences at the intersection of gender is fruitful in understanding Black student leadership. For example, for Black women college student leaders, negotiating identity, navigating when to use their voice, and finding safe spaces and avenues for replenishment are themes (Domingue, 2015; Hotchkins, 2017a). For Black college men, findings include the benefit of same-race, same-gender groups in leadership development, how and why they persist as leaders when facing racial oppression, and how they use their leadership positions to advocate for the Black community (Collins et al., 2017; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).

Scholars have also explored how race salience and racial ideologies shape Black students' leadership experiences. Black cultural beliefs, racial socialization, and race consciousness influence Black students' participation in leadership experiences (Hotchkins, 2017b; Hotchkins & McNaughtan, 2021; Jones, 2017a). Considering racial ideologies, Jones (2017b) found that Black student leaders' racial ideologies made them more aware of racial attitudes toward them. Later, Jones (2020) noted that racially salient leadership shows up more in Black spaces versus race-neutral spaces as Black students navigate campus, reinforcing Black student leaders' constant negotiation as leaders in historically white spaces.

Given the role racial ideology can play in students' lives, more analyses of Black students' ideologies are warranted. Exploring Black students' leadership experiences as it relates to racial ideology can help higher education and student affairs professionals further understand and support Black students, particularly regarding their leadership involvement.

Theoretical Framework

The framework that undergirds this study is the multidimensional model of racial identity (MMRI). This model, developed by Sellers, Smith, and colleagues (1998), delineates both stable and situational constructs related to racial identity and provides a momentary snapshot of how one feels, acts, and interacts because of their race. The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) is the instrument used to measure the constructs of the MMRI (see Sellers et al., 2017). One of the primary constructs embedded within the model is *racial ideology* (see Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998 for full framework). Racial ideology seeks to explain an individual's ideas about what African Amer-

icans should believe and how they should act or behave. Sellers, Smith, and colleagues explain this concept through an individual's attitudes and thoughts about political/economic development, cultural/social activities, intergroup relations, and perceptions of the dominant group. The MMRI delineates four ideologies: 1) the *nationalist* philosophy, 2) the *oppressed minority* philosophy, 3) the *assimilationist* philosophy, and 4) the *humanist* philosophy.

The Nationalist Philosophy

The nationalist philosophy stresses the uniqueness of being Black (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). It is associated with engaging in Black-specific social and cultural activities and believing that Black people should control their own economic and political development. The nationalist philosophy can stem from a need to resist the oppression that Black people face in the United States or from a deeper appreciation of the cultural accomplishments of Black people. A student whose MIBI scores indicate a preference for a nationalist philosophy is more likely to join Black organizations and prefer to spend time in campus spaces specifically created for Black people (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). For example, they may feel more connected to a Black Cultural Center or an African American studies department.

The Oppressed Minority Philosophy

The oppressed minority philosophy emphasizes the connection between other oppressed groups and the Black experience (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). It is associated with coalition building, attending multicultural or diverse community activities, and encouraging collective economic and political development to enhance the most vulnerable communities in society. It is also associated with an acute awareness of the oppression faced by Black people and a deeper understanding of Black culture. A student whose scores indicate a preference for the oppressed minority ideology is more likely to explore and learn about other cultures, identities, and the nature of oppression in society (Sellers, Smith et al., 1998). For example, they may explore classes in disciplines such as women and gender studies or explore multicultural groups on campus.

The Assimilationist Philosophy

The assimilationist philosophy emphasizes a connectedness to being a citizen or a part of the larger general society. However, it does not necessarily de-emphasize the importance of race or the oppression faced by Black people (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). A person who falls within this philosophy can fight for social change but will emphasize using the current systems to achieve their goals or suggest working with the white majority to change. The general view of this philosophy type has been that it is symptomatic of an unhealthy Black identity (Gaines & Reed, 1995); the MMRI does not make this assumption. A student whose scores indicate a preference for the assimilationist ideology is more likely to desire involvement in broad activities not specific to racial identity (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). For example, they may enjoy political science courses that focus on creating change, or they may feel empowered to run for student government positions.

The Humanist Philosophy

The humanist philosophy emphasizes the shared experience of all humans. This philosophy is associated with attempting to solve all humans' issues, such as issues of the environment, peace, and hunger (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). It is associated with actively wanting to socialize and interact with all humans regardless of race. The humanist philosophy is most associated with de-emphasizing difference. A student who scores high in this ideology is more likely to be connected to causes they believe have no connection to race (Sellers, Smith, et al. 1998). For example, they may be more inclined to join a campus organization fighting for climate change or volunteer at a local food bank.

Racial Centrality

In addition to racial ideology, the MMBI includes another construct called *racial centrality*. Racial centrality refers to the importance people place on their racial identity (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). Racial centrality matters when discussing racial ideology because studies have shown that it plays a moderating role in the influence of racial ideology (e.g., Byars-Winston, 2006). The amount of influence a person's ideology has on their experiences or outcomes is often linked to how central they believe race is in their lives (Bryars-Winston, 2006). Therefore, it is easier to see the influence of racial ideology on Black students' experiences with higher centrality scores. Within this study, we used centrality only for its moderating properties.

Method

Research Design

We used a qualitative, phenomenological approach for the study. Phenomenological research designs are appropriate when researchers are exploring how humans make meaning interacting in the world (Moustakas, 1994). Using a phenomenological approach allows researchers to focus on exploring the context, events, and lived experiences of the participants using thick, rich descriptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While phenomenology highlights commonalities of a phenomenon across lived experiences, it also allows for divergent views (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Setting

The setting was a mid-sized, Midwestern, public four-year university. The institution's total enrollment was just over 25,000 students. Approximately 1,300 students identified as Black, accounting for 5% of the student enrollment. The institution had over 400 registered undergraduate student organizations, and just under 20 organizations were designed for Black students.

Sample

A purposive, criterion-based approach guided the selection of participants in the study. In criterion-based sampling, those selected to participate directly reflect the study's purpose (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Beyond self-identifying as Black, other criteria for inclusion included being classified as a junior or senior and holding at least one leadership position in a student organization or campus program. To arrive at the final sample of seven participants, we took an extensive two-phase approach to have participants with high racial centrality represent each of the racial ideologies in the MMRI. All participants were multigenerational African Americans.

During phase one of sampling, we used an online survey to gather data about students' racial ideologies, racial centralities, and student leadership involvement using the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; Sellers et al., 1997). The MIBI is written as a set of 56 statements using a Likert scale, where one reflects *strong agreement* and seven reflects *strong disagreement*. The MIBI has reliability coefficients reported from $\alpha = .70 - .79$ (Sellers et al., 1997). The 56 statements are divided into seven subscales: *centrality, private regard, public regard, assimilationist, humanist, oppressed minority*, and *nationalist*. A composite score is drawn for each ideological philosophy and for the centrality subscale.

For the present study, only the centrality subscale and the four ideology subscales were used. In addition to the statements from the MIBI subscales, students who participated in phase one of sampling also provided basic demographic information (e.g., gender, classification [i.e., junior, senior], major, etc.). All students were informed of their rights as participants and provided information about confidentiality. The study was conducted with Institutional Review Board approval. Of the 132 students who began the survey, 91 students completed the full survey.

As noted before, high racial centrality allows for the influence of racial ideology to be more vis-

ible. Therefore, only students with high centrality were considered for the second phase of sampling. Within the present study, "high race centrality" was defined as a score above the median score for all survey participants in phase one. The median racial centrality score for all participants was 5.25 on a 7-point scale. Of students in the assimilationist category, six respondents met this criterion. In the humanist category, eight respondents met this criterion. In the oppressed minority category, 26 students had scores above the median. In the nationalist category, six had scores above the median. Of this pool, 39 students agreed to move to the second phase of sampling.

In addition to having a racial centrality score at or above the median, two other criteria needed to be met: participation in one or more student leadership positions and agreeing to share contact information for an invitation to participate. A total of 19 students met all the criteria for the second phase of sampling, and eventually, seven students participated in the second phase.

Data Collection

We collected data through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews consisting of questions regarding student leadership experiences, beliefs about leadership, and beliefs regarding racial identity. One participant scored in the assimilationist ideology, while each of the other three ideological categories had two participants (see Table 1). Five students identified as women, and two identified as men. Three of the participants were in their junior year, and four were in their fourth year or more. One participant held three leadership positions, while another held one leadership position. The other five students held two leadership positions. We assigned each student a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the interview data utilizing open and analytic coding as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Open coding is the process of noting comments, notations, or queries next to bits of data from interview transcripts or documents. Analytical coding refers to the process of clustering open codes into groupings that reflect interpretation or meaning. The analytical coding process helped us develop the final themes. The processes of open and analytical coding were done iteratively throughout the data analysis process. The coding processes were done once for each interview, then done collectively for all interviews, and then done separately for each ideology classification. As we coded the data, the racial ideologies of the participants were notated to be able to delineate any salient divergences in their experiences. We also reviewed the data independently to ensure the codes and themes that emerged accurately represented their experiences. This process ensured meaningful analyses from multiple perspectives to understand the data relative to the theoretical framework.

Researchers' Positionalities

In qualitative research, researchers are the primary instrument for making meaning of the data. Therefore, bracketing was necessary. Creswell and Poth (2017) describe the bracketing process as identifying and temporarily setting aside the researcher's assumptions to ensure that the participants' voices are accurately reflected. Still, we brought our positionalities to the study and found it important to share them as they relate to the current study.

> **RP**: I am a Black man who is a doctoral candidate and currently serve as a higher education administrator. My current role seeks to meet the socioemotional and academic needs of Black students at an HWI. In addition, as an undergraduate student, I served as a student leader at an HWI.
>
> **DM**: I am a Black man, and I serve as an administrator in higher education. My research explores race and racism, gender and sexism, and identity intersections

and intersectionality in higher education settings. I was a student leader in several organizations during my undergraduate experience; however, I pursued my undergraduate education at a historically Black institution.

JM: I am a Black American scholar who strives to highlight the experiences of African people on a global scale. I was a student leader at an HWI, and these experiences have led to my pursuit of nuancing racialized experiences and ideologies among diverse communities of African descendants.

Collectively, our positionalities shaped our interests in the study, our design of the study, and ultimately, how we made meaning of the data. For instance, we all acknowledge race and racism have influenced our lives, all served as student leaders, and currently work in spaces that center race, which we believe gave us unique insights into the study even as we attempted to set aside our experiences to honor the voices of the participants.

Findings

The findings are grouped into four themes: (1) leadership experiences, (2) leadership beliefs, (3) beliefs about race, and (4) decision-making, and each of these themes has subthemes associated with certain ideological viewpoints.

Leadership Experiences

All seven of the participants spoke about their experiences as student leaders and how they engaged as students generally. Though many of them shared similar backgrounds, they had varying perspectives about their leadership experiences, given their racial ideologies.

De-emphasizing racism. One of the subthemes that emerged is the idea that, though racism exists, and discrimination and prejudice may occur, they have not been extreme barriers to success. This subtheme emerged from the interview with Ace, who scored the highest on the assimilationist ideology scale. He articulated how he recognizes that race is a barrier, however, he does not let that barrier divide himself and his peers:

> [Race] is technically a barrier, but it's not this great wall; Trump pun (laughs). It's not this great wall that's dividing us, it's more so something we [in student organizations] recognize our differences and build harmony through those differences....History is history, things have happened. Don't forget, but it happened. There is nothing we can do about it. If I walk to shake your hand and I sneeze on your hand, it happened. While it's gross, there's nothing we can do about it now. It happened we have to move past the past things that have happened and emphasize the present and the future.

This quote shows an acknowledgment of race and racism but an interest in deemphasizing the past to build harmony and emphasize the future. This deemphasis aligns with Sellers, Smith, and colleagues (1998) description of the *assimilationist* ideology. They state that those who embrace this ideology recognize the significance of the *Black* experience yet are more inclined to consider how Black people can fit into mainstream society.

Isolation. The next subtheme regarding leadership experiences was associated with four participants. These four participants—Sandy, Alex, Traci, and Alissa—all scored highest in either the *humanist* or *oppressed minority* ideologies. They discussed how being Black student leaders led to feelings of isolation or the necessity to participate in Black organizations. Traci (*humanist* ideology), a member of an organization for queer and trans students of Color and a national organization that combats relationship violence, spoke about how when interacting with white peers in the organization that combats relationship violence, she felt as though she had to speak for all Black people:

> [The organization] is not predominantly Black. In terms of [the organization for queer and trans students of Color], I mean, kind of like I said before, it's not often that students of Color and minority students have

> those safe spaces on campus to have those conversations. And so, I feel like it's more of a community feeling… Whereas like in [the organization]…When you're talking about Black people… I feel as if I have to speak for—and I don't like that feeling—but speak for Black people… It's just a lot of excusing and explaining… I feel like I'm doing for people of my race, whereas I don't get that in [the organization for queer and trans students of Color].

Alex, who scored highest on the *oppressed minority* ideology also expressed feeling the need to be in isolation with other Black students and discussed how as a leader in a student organization, she is forced to isolate events to the Black community on campus:

> Well there's always a saying, "You always have to be twice as good to be just as good as other races." So being on [the executive board] of other Black groups it shows all the effort we must put in to get a turnout and how we must target a certain group when, other groups, they just kind of target everybody and they can have a good turnout because it's predominantly white. So, when they target so many people, they can have good turnouts, but we're targeting such a small aspect of people because no one else will come to our events. So, this is why we target the people that we do, because if we have an event that's like, "Oh, we're having soul food," you'll see only one white person. So it's like, we just have to publicize so much more.

These interview excerpts emphasize the underlying idea that being on a predominantly white campus can lead some Black students to feel as though they must socialize, plan events for, and act as student leaders for other Black students.

Underrepresentation. Most respondents across all four ideological categories expressed concern about the representation of Black students in leadership on campus. Many of them expressed being the only Black person in a student organization, or generally not seeing many students who look like them in roles on campus. Drew, who scored highest in the *nationalist* ideology, expressed how this can affect Black students and the role he plays in helping to solve this problem:

> That's one reason I took the role of an orientation assistant. I remember on my first day at summer orientation. There were about 120 students attending, and I was the only Black male. So, I was uncomfortable until I talked to another Black orientation leader. So, I feel like from the start, for every Black student that comes in after me, my job is to make sure that their first time coming on campus as a [names institution] student, whether its summer or during [orientation], that they feel comfortable and that they feel welcomed.

This excerpt highlights the common thread that underrepresentation is a problem on campus as expressed by the participants; it also highlights student leaders' feelings that they have a responsibility to make change happen on campus. The excerpt also shows the underrepresentation of Black students in leadership on campus can influence Black students' experiences.

Leadership Beliefs

Several of the participants held beliefs that, as student leaders, they must be the ones to create change on campus. Still, how these students perceived that change or what change should look like varied.

Empowerment. The two students who embraced the *nationalist* ideology were intent on believing that role of a student leader begins with empowerment. Drew stated,

> A student leader's responsibilities are to take into account what's going to be best for the students here. What's going to be best for them isn't always what they want. If there is going to be a Black event on campus and all the Black students want this big rapper but this big rapper isn't talking anything about Black identity or how to help us. He's not talking about what's going to help us. But instead, there's a motivational speaker,

> and a financial education workshop. That's more important. Part of being a student leader is to help people navigate what's really going to help them and empower them.

Nicole added, "I definitely think more unity is necessary. I always go back to empowerment and unity; I think that needs to happen. Nobody else can tell us except ourselves, and nobody else can make us believe except ourselves."

These excerpts align well with the description of the *nationalist* ideology. They show a centering on the Black experience and determination for self-improvement and Black people controlling their own destinies. Sellers, Smith, and colleagues (1998) note the *nationalist* ideology posits that Black people should be in control of their own destiny with little input from other groups. The two students who scored highest in this ideology emphasized that Black students had a responsibility to lead initiatives for change and to unite with one another to influence the campus community.

Branding and image. The two students who embraced the *oppressed minority* ideology had a different perspective and belief on the role of student leaders. Alex and Sandy discussed how leaders are a representation of Black students and sometimes Blackness generally. For instance, Alex describes having to be intentional in paying attention to how her actions may be perceived as a student leader:

> So, when maneuvering through life, it's always in the back of my head how I regard myself or how I uphold different things or how it would interpret [reflect] not just on me but us [Black people] as a group. I've never felt like an individual on this campus; I've always felt like I'm a representation.

Sandy described a similar feeling: "So it's like you are expected to kind of hold yourself up to a higher standard than just regular students and just that you represent something more than yourself. You represent your organization."

These statements demonstrate a heightened awareness of stereotypes and assumptions about Black students/people. Because both students scored within the *oppressed minority* ideology, they were more acutely aware of how any action or misstep could cause them and fellow Black people to experience more racial oppression. They expressed a need to counter racism by eliminating any opportunity for stereotypes or negative portrayals to be perpetuated.

Importance of involvement. Across all ideologies, there was one belief about student leadership and involvement that arose from the student narratives—involvement is important to self-improvement and campus improvement. When asked why she was involved, Alissa noted, "Being involved on my campus is just as important as going to class, because as long as you're involved, you make connections, you know people, and it helps you in bigger ways than you can imagine." Most participants described how involvement helped them to become better, more well-rounded students. Several of them discussed how involvement was so essential that they felt obligated to get their younger peers involved. They also described feeling a stronger sense of belonging from being involved as student leaders. This seems to suggest that *racial ideology* does little to influence students' feelings about the value of involvement.

Beliefs about Race

The third theme was their beliefs about race. The students discussed what they believed about race and about being Black. Ideological differences were emphasized within this theme.

Emphasizing cross-racial similarities. Ace, who scored within the *assimilationist* ideology, had a unique perspective when it came to the topic of race. While he acknowledged the presence of racism and discrimination in multiple contexts, his beliefs about how these could be addressed were in stark contrast with those holding other ideological perspectives. Ace stated:

> It's [racial oppression] definitely here; I wouldn't say it's not here. But we need to stop focusing on it as much. We overemphasize racial oppression to the point where we oppress ourselves. We need to stop focusing so much on racial oppression and focus on how we are alike as people, Black, white, or otherwise.

Considering the description of the *assimilationist* ideology, Ace's perspective is somewhat surprising and would seem to be more fitting to the *humanist* ideology. According to the model, this discrepancy could be attributed to the fact that the ideology scales are fluid and not mutually exclusive. The MMRI recognizes that individuals' racial ideologies may vary across different life domains. For instance, a person may be *nationalist* in their political views but possess a more *humanist* view of their relationships (Sellars, Smith, et al., 1998). This may explain why Ace's perspective may take on a *humanist* ideological viewpoint when asked about how to end racial oppression.

Empowerment. In contrast to Ace's perspective, the two students who embraced the *nationalist* ideology were not interested in emphasizing racial similarities. The participants discussed empowering Black people to end racial oppression. Drew discussed how, overall, solutions to racial oppression might be in controlling the narrative around Blackness, building and establishing wealth, and keeping money within the Black community. This is not surprising given the MMRI model; Sellers, Smith, and colleagues (1998) describe the *nationalist* ideology as having the belief that Black people should control their own destiny. Nicole also discussed empowerment; however, she discussed empowerment through unity and cooperation. Nicole stated:

> If not for anything else, but the progression of our race. We need to be together because I believe that once we all stand together and empower each other, there's nothing that anybody else can do to try to or continue to oppress us.

This message also aligns with Sellers, Smith, and colleagues' (1998) description of the *nationalist* ideology, which posits that regarding social change, a person who espouses the *nationalist* ideology is more likely to seek solutions that only involve other Black people.

Education and self-examination. The last subtheme in this theme was shared by those who scored within the *humanist* and *oppressed minority* ideologies. In this case, the four students who espoused these ideologies had similar perspectives about race. They addressed the need for education and self-improvement to improve racial divisions. Traci and Alex, who scored within the *humanist* and *oppressed* minority ideologies, respectively, discussed how the first step towards improving race relations is education. Traci stated:

> So, part of it is just kind of educating themselves on the history of racial oppression. And just like race relations in the United States in general that education could go far. And so definitely educate. We need to educate ourselves about that.

Sandy, on the other hand, discussed improving race relations by first having Black people heal themselves:

> Black people must first heal themselves before they can begin to. It's like… if you heal yourself, you can begin to fight oppression because there are so many things that have been done to Black people throughout history that you need mental healing from. And if you don't do that healing there is no way you can begin to address not only the oppression in America but elsewhere with other people in the African Diaspora. There is so much to be done, but we cannot do anything unless we begin to heal our minds.

Both excerpts stress a need to improve one's own condition, separate from fighting racism directly. These sentiments speak to addressing negative feelings about Black people that must be

improved before Black people can address larger issues. The perspective on education presumes a lack of accurate education among Black people, while the perspective on healing presumes a level of damage Black people inherently have based on oppression.

Decision-making

The final theme that arose was decision-making. The participants were asked why they made the decisions they did to join organizations and take on leadership positions.

Personal/professional growth. The two students who espoused the *humanist* ideology shared similar sentiments around their decisions to join various organizations and become student leaders. Both participants discussed how their involvement in the student organizations was led by their desire to improve their professional development for their future careers. Both were interested in careers that deal with supporting and advocating for people and both students discussed the desire to specifically help minority populations. Therefore, they joined minority organizations which would expand their skills to help those (and their own) communities. Alissa shared:

> I want to go into higher education because I want to mentor Black students in colleges and stress the fact that they need to get out of that shell and be student leaders, be independent, go join organizations, and do those things because it makes a difference.

This excerpt speaks to a desire for a larger impact on society and a desire to create change within one's own community. Alissa's involvement in a Black women's empowerment organization gave her skills to empower college students. She planned on using these skills to serve future generations of college students as a higher education professional. At first, Alissa's excerpt does not seem to be parallel with Sellers, Smith, and colleagues' (1998) description of the *humanist* ideology because she is thinking in terms of Black identity rather than one "human race." However, a closer examination of the statement highlights Alissa is placing importance on larger social issues that all humans might face—sense of belonging in higher education settings.

Sense of community and belonging. The four students who held the *nationalist* and *oppressed minority* ideologies also shared a common theme—they all spoke to the fact that their decisions were made through a desire to belong and have a sense of community around them. For Nicole and Alex, *nationalist* and *oppressed minority* ideologies, respectively, it was important because they initially joined organizations where they did not feel a sense of belonging. Those experiences led them to seek out organizations with which they could identify.

For Alex, there was a transition from a white sorority into organizations like the Black Student Union. Alex stated:

> I chose to join BSU and NAACP because… when I first got here, I knew I wanted to be Greek, and with our Greek life on campus, it's very non-existent, and so I didn't like the process that you had to go through to be in the Divine Nine [Black Greek-letter Organizations], so I decided to go to Pan Hell, which is the white sororities. So, I went there, and I wasn't really in the Black community my first couple of years here because I was there. But, I realized the sorority wasn't for me because of the way it was structured, and the people involved, so I disaffiliated last spring, and then when I came back to school my junior year… I got really involved in other things on campus, such as BSU and the NAACP, because I felt like I was detached from them when I was in the white sorority and that I wanted to be more involved with people who I could identify with.

Alex's narrative speaks to a desire of many Black students to belong on their campus and to feel like they have a place in the campus community. Her narrative aligns with the work of Strayhorn (2012), who discussed sense of belonging as paramount to students' success.

The influence of others. Finally, all the participants discussed how an administrator or peer suggested they participate in an organization in which they were involved. For example, when Alissa was asked why she joined her organizations, she said, "I knew someone beforehand who reached out to me and invited me to the organization. And then I stayed by choice." This subtheme speaks to the importance of relationship building and early involvement that creates more opportunities for involvement later down the line. The fact that this theme resonates across all four ideologies suggests that ideology may not have a significant influence on students' acceptance of others' suggestions or ideas when making decisions about organizational involvement.

Discussion

While scholars have explored racial ideology amongst Black college student leaders, they have primarily focused on racial consciousness or how racial ideology influence Black students' college experiences (e.g., Hotchkins, 2017b; Hotchkins & McNaughtan, 2021; Jones, 2017a, 2020; Thelamour et al., 2019). Within this study, we highlighted how racial ideology influences how African American students perceive their leadership experiences, their beliefs about leadership, how they think about race and racism, and how they make decisions about leadership. While much is written about how Black students experience college because of their racial ideologies, less has been explored about how Black college student leaders, themselves, shape their own college experiences and peers' experiences based on their racial ideologies as they move through college.

Further, the present study adds to what we know qualitatively about the racial ideologies introduced by Sellers, Smith, and colleagues (1998). As noted previously, many scholars have explored the MMRI using quantitative constructs (e.g., Byars-Winston, 2006; Chavous, 2000; Chavous et al., 2018), but the present study explored the essences of Black students' leadership experiences by coupling an interview protocol about student leadership and their views about race with their results from the MIBI. By doing this, students were able to articulate first-hand the way their racial ideologies influence their leadership and college experiences.

We want to acknowledge some limitations of our study. While we did not intend to generalize, the participants were from all one institution which may limit the transferability of the findings to other institutional contexts. Another limitation of the study was our inclusion of students with "high race centrality" scores based on them scoring above the mean centrality score for our sample population. Mean centrality scores might shift with different sample populations and sizes. Finally, the MMRI emphasizes race without any meaningful analysis of how intersecting identities might influence racial ideology. Despite these limitations, we remain confident that our findings contribute to scholarship concerning Black students' leadership involvement and racial ideologies. As such, we offer the following recommendations for practice and future research.

Recommendations for Practice

Our findings highlight the various racial ideologies Black student leaders displayed during their college experiences. While the participants displayed various racial ideologies, they were often not aware of their ideologies and how they shaped their worldviews, and ultimately, how they navigated campus. An immediate recommendation for higher education and student affairs practitioners is for offices and departments that serve Black students might keep and use surveys and assessments, particularly the MIBI, to help students reflect on their racial ideologies and how their beliefs might influence their college experiences.

To do this, higher education and student affairs practitioners must be equipped to have conversations about racial ideologies with Black students. Ultimately, if practitioners do introduce

the MMRI and MIBI to their Black students, they should familiarize themselves with the literature base on racial ideologies, assess themselves if they identify as Black, and develop various activities to help Black students meaningfully reflect on their racial ideologies. For example, a Black student who attended a predominantly Black high school may struggle to make sense of other Black students navigating their HWI differently. Introducing the student to the MMRI and MIBI, having the student complete the MIBI, and then discussing the results might help the student more meaningfully reflect on their experience and peers' experiences and assist them in navigating campus because of the meaningful reflection.

Another recommendation is for practitioners to have Black student leaders to complete the MIBI as part of a leadership development, particularly when they lead organizations like the Black Student Union and historically Black fraternities and sororities. Having Black student leaders reflect on their racial ideologies as well as the other racial ideologies might be beneficial as they lead within Black student groups, in particular, as it will call them to reflect on the diversity of attitudes and beliefs among Black students, help them build diverse teams within their organizations, and reflect on how their racial ideology influences their leadership style, which may or may not resonate with the peers they serve. Again, practitioners must be equipped to have these conversations if the recommendation is implemented.

Finally, the study highlights a longer-term and more holistic goal—higher education and student affairs practitioners prioritizing supporting, engaging, and creating interventions for Black students based on individual needs rather than generalizations. The data highlight the differences among Black students' perceptions, beliefs, and ideas. Thus, it is important that practitioners not gloss over these differences. Black students are not a monolith and require individualized care and attention, and until institutions and practitioners develop their services to recognize this, the negative experiences Black students have at HWIs will be slow to change.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was qualitative; therefore, this study does not fully analyze or explore statistical relationships between racial ideology and student leadership. Quantitative studies on racial ideology and student leadership may also clarify the relationships. Further, the intersections of multiple other identities (e.g., gender, social class, sexual orientation) that shape ideologies should be explored. Studying intersecting identities would provide even deeper insights into the development of Black college student leaders.

Lastly, this study used students with high centrality scores and found few meaningful differences in students' perceptions and beliefs based on their racial centrality. Further research analyzing a broader distribution of racial centrality scores is warranted. Exploring Black college student leadership across centrality scores may show contrasts that are not readily visible in this study's findings.

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Table 1

Interview Participant Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Racial Ideology[a]	Gender	Year	No. of Leadership Positions	Organization(s)	Role	Racial Centrality Scores[b]
Ace	*Assimilationist*	Man	Junior	1	Campus Tour Guide	Tour Guide	5.85
Alissa	*Humanist*	Woman	Senior	2	Multicultural Affairs; Black Women's Empowerment Group	Ambassador; President	6.28
Traci	*Humanist*	Woman	Senior	2	Queer and Trans People of Color group; Domestic Violence Intervention Group	Secretary; Facilitator	6
Sandy	*Oppressed Minority*	Woman	Senior	2	Dance Team; Dance Team	Secretary; Vice Present	6.14
Alex	*Oppressed Minority*	Woman	Junior	3	Black Student Union; NAACP; College Democrats	Vice President; Committee Chair; Committee Chair	6.28
Nicole	*Nationalist*	Woman	Senior	2	Dance Team; Women's Center	President; Ambassador	6.14
Drew	*Nationalist*	Man	Junior	2	Black Men's Group; Multicultural Affairs	President; Ambassador	6

[a] MIBI (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998)
[b]Racial centrality was used for its moderating effect on racial ideology. For participants to qualify for phase 2 of the study, they needed a score 5.25 or higher on the centrality subscale of the MIBI.