

BLACK HONORS STUDENTS IN HONORS SPACES

Honors Thesis

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There are not many studies addressing Black Honors students and their sense of belonging to the Honors program. This study addresses Black honors students in honors spaces. This study examines students' interactions with the honors programs, their racial identity development, and their sense of belonging. To measure racial identity development the Multidimensional inventory of Black identity (MIBI) was used. To measure sense of belonging the Community subscale of the Relational Health Indices (RHI-C) was used. Black honors students (N=26) were surveyed from thirteen different 4-year and 2-year colleges in the United States. Overall, there was a high sense of belonging among participants, though there was little time spent interacting with the program. There was a positive correlation between Humanist and Nationalist ideologies with sense of belonging. Assimilationist ideology had a positive correlation with how often students attend events. There was a positive correlation between Oppressed Minority ideology and time spent interacting with others in the program. These findings can help determine whether honors programs need extra support for Black students.

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College is difficult to navigate for most people. There are many social and academic factors that can make adjusting to college difficult. Campuses have many different organizations students can join which can make adjusting to college and community building easier for students. Some you have to be accepted into, while others you can just join. Though most of these organizations each have their own main commonality. For example, there are Black student unions, Women's groups, gardening clubs, etc. Many campuses have Honors programs designed to challenge students academically and build a sense of community with likeminded people. Being around similar people can help students feel more connected and involved in their college.

Social identities play into the college experience. Race still matters on college campuses. Students of color continue to face racism and acts of discrimination on campus. These experiences can affect their sense of belonging on campus. On top of that, students of color may struggle to find their own space on campus. Joining an organization can help students feel like they belong. Choosing an organization can be difficult, as one must look at the pros and cons of the organization. For Black students, looking at the racial makeup and beliefs of an organization may come into play. This may determine if they will join and how they will participate. The current study looks at how racial identity affects Black honors students' participation within and perceptions of the honors program. Specifically, it looks at a sense of belonging within the program and students' racial identity development.

Student engagement and sense of belonging

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, love and belonging is the third basic human need (1943). Without meeting this need, individuals cannot achieve fulfilling the next two needs, which are esteem and self-actualization. Strayhorn defines college students' sense of belonging as "...students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff and peers" (2018, p. 4). A study by Liang and colleagues (2002) found that community relationships impact an individual's sense of belonging. A student's sense of belonging will influence their campus engagement. Campus or student engagement has many different definitions, but all include emotional and behavioral components (Gillen-O'Neel, 2021). The emotional component involves students' positive or negative feelings of the school and academics. The behavioral component involves students' participation both in and outside of school. For example, completing classwork and studying outside of class. A study done by Gillen-O'Neel (2021) found that students who have a higher sense of belonging tend to have higher levels of engagement. A sense of belonging on campus and engagement is linked to higher academic success. The study found that students with a higher sense of belonging had a higher academic self-efficacy, as well as it being associated with achievement supportive behavior. Another national representative survey found that underrepresented racial minority students at four-year institutions reported a lower sense of belonging than their peers (Gopalan & Brady, 2020). The survey also found that a sense of belonging was positively associated with important outcomes, such as academic success and mental health.

Student organizations and learning communities have been implemented on campuses to increase student engagement as well as a sense of belonging. One learning community that has been implemented on many campuses is an Honors Program. This program creates rigorous course work for high achieving students and offers a sense of community. There are benefits to participating in these programs. For example, freshman students' participation is related to "higher reflective and integrative learning, use of learning strategies, collaborative learning, diverse discussions, student-faculty interaction, and quality of interactions" (Miller & Dumford, 2018). These outcomes from involvement in Honors help students throughout their college careers.

Most surveys on student engagement ask a singular or very few questions about sense of belonging. There really is not much depth to them. American society has an individualist culture. In general, Black people come from a more collectivist culture. There is more value placed upon the community. This study uses the Community Relational Health Indices (RHI-C, Liang et al., 2002). This measures the relationship between the community and the individual, as well as their sense of belonging. It finds whether the individual perceives the community cares about them and they care about the community. Coming from a collectivist culture, it is important to see the relationship Black students have with their honors community.

Racialized experiences

Black students face issues of race on campus including instances of racism and discrimination. During this time period of young adulthood, it has been theorized that Black individuals will tend to take on a more anti-white view and will immerse themselves within Black culture and gravity towards other Black people. On top of that

issues of racism happen on campus whether it be overt or covert. A study done by Mills (2020) looked to see if Black students at a predominately white institutions experienced environmental racial microaggressions and how they described them. Six environmental racial microaggressions were found; they were segregation, lack of representation, campus response to criminality, cultural basis in courses, tokenism, and pressure to conform. On top of academic pressure, Black students are forced to deal with racism on campus, which can make for a more difficult experience.

Race plays a role in overall college adjustment. It has been found that Black students who strongly identify with their race feel less connected to their college campuses and often feel othered (Thelamour et al., 2019). A study done by Griffin and Perez (2013) interviewed nine Black honors students and asked them about their identity and experience as Black honors students. Most of the students often did not factor in race or their own privilege when answering questions. Instead, they accredited their success to hard work. In this study, the participants acknowledge that they did face some stereotypes their white peers did not (Griffin & Perez, 2013). The sample size was small, so it is harder to apply these experiences and findings to all Black honors students.

Racial Identity Development

Throughout a person's life they develop a sense of their social identity. One aspect of a person's social identity is their race. Racial identity development is the awareness of one's race. Black racial identity development is the awareness of one's Blackness and how it plays a role personally and in larger society. A person's sense of their race identity develops over their lifetime. This development is fluent and can fluctuate.

On campus, Black students face many race-related issues which can impact a student's overall experience. For example, Tatum (1997) wrote, "On predominantly White campuses, Black students emphasize feelings of alienation, sensed hostility, racial discrimination, and lack of integration." Today not much has changed. Research is still being done on Black college students' experiences surrounding issues of race. Racial identity and socialization play a role in overall college adjustment. A study found that different ideologies are associated with different college adjustment outcomes (Sellers, Chavous, et al., 1998). Many studies have found that positive messages of racial socialization may serve as buffer when people are faced with acts of discrimination.

There are many different models of Black racial identity development. One model is Cross's Racial Identity Scale (Vandiver et al,2000). This model was built off Cross' Nigrescence model and consists of six identities: There are three Pre-encounter identities, in which all hold a theme of anti-Black ness. There is immersion-emersion identity which has a theme of Anti-Whiteness. Lastly you have two internalization identities, which are Afrocentric and Multicultural inclusive.

Another model is the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI), which consists of 4 dimensions (salience, centrality, regard, and ideology) (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). Salience is how relevant a person's race is to self-image in a particular situation. Regard refers to how a person feels and views about their race. This dimension consists of the private and public regard subscales. The private regard subscale is how a person feels about being Black. The public regard subscale is how a person thinks others view Black people. Within this there are 4 different ideologies including the Nationalist, Oppressed Minority, Assimilation, and Humanist philosophies. Each of these

ideologies take into consideration a person's beliefs on intergroup relations, politics, cultural and social activities, and perceptions about the dominant group. Nationalist philosophy is the belief that Black people should hold Afrocentric views. Oppressed minority philosophy highlights the similarities between Black people and other oppressed groups, for example, Asians, Hispanics, LGBTQ+ community members, etc.

Assimilationist ideology highlights the similarities between Black people and mainstream American society, with an attempt to enter it. Finally, Humanist ideology highlights the similarities of all humans. A person may be categorized by a certain ideology, but most likely possesses multiple, changing depending on the situation.

The present study used MIBI model. It was chosen because it included a measure for racial centrality. If an individual's race is not central to them, then they are less likely to think about how race plays into their social interactions. This model also includes regard, which plays a role in how individuals interact with others around them. Aspects of racial identity have been found to influence academics for Black students. It has been found that racial socialization is a significant positive predictor of academic adjustment (Aglin & Wade, 2018). Research has found that racial centrality and racial ideology are significantly related to Black students' cumulative GPA (Sellers et al., 1998). Specifically Nationalist and Assimilationist ideologies are negatively associated with academic performance, while Oppressed Minority ideology is positively associated.

The goal of the present study was to help further understand why Black honors students choose to engage or not to engage with their Honors program. It specifically examines racial identity development and student engagement within the honors program. Previous literature has shown that Black honors students face issues that their

white counterparts do not. Studies have also shown that racial identity affects Black college students' college experience. It was hypothesized that Black honors students who have a Nationalist ideology or Oppressed minority ideologies would have less of a sense of belonging to the program and have lower engagement. This is due to both ideologies de-centering whiteness. Black honors students who have an Assimilationist or Humanist ideology would have a higher sense of belonging and have higher engagement. This is due to Assimilationist ideology wanting to center whiteness and wanting to assimilate themselves into mainstream white culture. With Humanist ideology, race is not a major factor, so being in a very white space would not bother those with this ideology.

Methods

Participants

Participants were recruited by contacting Honors directors from different four and two-year universities across the United States, posting the survey on multiple social media platforms and recruiting at the Northeast Regional Honors Conference. Thirty-six participants responded, but many did not identify as Black or African American. Six Black students completed the full survey, and seven Black honors students partially completed the survey. We wanted to get a larger sample, but this did not happen. The limited sample size will impact the results and the conclusions that can be drawn. 31% (4) identified as seniors, 23% (3) identified as juniors, 23% (3) identified as sophomores, and 23% (3) identified as freshman. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 36 ($M = 22$). 85% (11) of participants identified as female. 15% (2) identified as male. Participants were able to check off multiple boxes, so there is possible overlap, to include bi/multiracial individuals. 23% (3) of participants were freshman, 23% (3) of participants

were sophomores, 23% (3) of participants were juniors, 31% (4) of participants were seniors.

Measures

General demographic questions were asked regarding race, age, and gender. Questions regarding how much time they spent in designated honors spaces were also asked. An open-ended question about how diverse participants thought their honors program was. There were questions about how much time participants spent in honors spaces such as a lounge space or another designated meeting spot. Participants were asked if they commuted to campus or lived on campus. If they did reside on campus, they were asked if they lived on the Honors floor of their residence hall. Participants were asked how often they attend events hosted by their honors program. They were asked if they had an e-board and if so, were they an officer. Participants were asked how diverse they thought their honors program was asked.

Community relational health indices. To measure feelings of belongingness we modified the Community Relational Health Indices (RHI-C, Liang et al., 2002). This scale measures a person's sense of belonging within a community. We modified the scale to specify the Honors Program Community. This scale is a 14 question self-report measure in which participants are asked to rate how much the statement applies to their relationship or involvement with the community. For example, "I feel a sense of belonging to the honors community" and "Members of the honors community are not free to be themselves". It is a five-point Likert scale (1=never 2=seldom 3=sometimes 4=often 5=always). Higher scores represent a stronger relationship and involvement with the community as well as a stronger connection.

Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity. The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI, Sellers, Smith, et al, 1998) is a 56-item self-report questionnaire. Participants are asked to rate how much they agreed with each statement using a five-point Likert Scale (1=never 2=seldom 3=sometimes 4=often 5=always). The model consists of 3 scales which are centrality, regard, and ideology. For Centrality the higher the score the more race is centered in the Individuals life. The Ideology scale is split into four subscales. These are the four ideologies, assimilate, humanist, oppressed minority, and nationalist. The highest score is what ideology the individual falls under. Regard is split into two subscales (public and private). For private regarded higher the score the more positive feelings towards being Black. Question 4 was left out due to it being slightly repetitive. This question asks if the individual is happy that they are Black. Later question 5 asks if they are proud to be Black. For public regard the higher the score the more positive the individual's perceptions were of other feelings toward Black people.

Procedure

The survey was distributed electronically. All participants were a part of their university Honors program. A link to the survey was given to Honors directors and other faculty from different universities. They sent out an email to students containing the link. The survey was also distributed during the Northeastern Regional Honors Conference. QR codes were distributed to students. They could also scan the QR code off a poster. A disclosure form was given before taking the survey, by continuing they agreed. From there students could take the survey.

Results

Originally, it was planned that the variables would be analyzed using a multiple regression to determine which factors were most related to engagement. Unfortunately, due to the small sample size, these analyses could not be conducted, as the statistical assumptions were not met. Instead, correlations were calculated with the data to test the studies' hypotheses.

Racial identity measures are presented in Table 1. Participants scored moderately on centrality ($M=3.87$, $s=0.81$), Assimilation ($M = 3.23$, $s = 0.60$), Humanist ($M = 3.31$, $s = 0.79$), Oppressed Minority ($M = 3.31$, $s = 1.18$), and Nationalist ($M = 3.33$, $s = 0.65$). Participants scored lower on private regard ($M = 2.92$, $s = 0.56$) and public regard ($M = 2.60$, $s = 0.66$). In general, participants did not think that their program was diverse with 41.7% (5) saying their program was not diverse at all.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Central	8	2.75	4.88	3.87	0.81284
PrivReg	8	2.33	4.00	2.91	0.56344
PublicReg	8	1.50	3.33	2.60	0.66031
Assimilation	7	2.44	4.22	3.23	0.60435
Humanist	6	2.50	4.63	3.31	0.79353
OppressedMinority	6	2.14	5.00	3.30	1.18293
Nationalist	6	2.38	4.25	3.33	0.65032
Valid N (listwise)	6				

Relationships between racial identity measures

We compared the different racial identity scales and subscales. We found that several of them were related to one another. We conducted a Pearson's correlation, but due to the small sample size, we also generated scatter plots to visualize the data. There was a strong positive correlation between nationalist ideology and private regard, $r = .813, p < .05$. The higher a participant scored on the Nationalist ideology the higher the score for private regard. There was a strong positive correlation between Assimilationist ideology and public regard, $r = .766, p < .05$. The higher an individual scored on the assimilation ideology the higher the score for public regard. Interestingly, there was a moderate negative correlation between Nationalist ideology and Racial Centrality $r = -.68$. The higher an individual scored on centrality the lower they scored on the nationalist ideology.

Relationships between racial identity development and Community relational health indices

Table 2

Correlations

		CRHI TAvg	Assimil ation	Hum anist	Oppressed Minority	Natio nalist	Cen tral	Priv Reg
Assimilatio n	Pearso n Correl ation	0.052						

	Sig. (2- tailed)	0.911					
	N	7					
Humanist	Pearson Correlation	0.364	.876*				
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0.478	0.022				
	N	6	6				
Oppressed Minority	Pearson Correlation	0.251	0.319	0.413			
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0.631	0.537	0.416			
	N	6	6	6			
Nationalist	Pearson Correlation	0.727	0.277	0.321	0.132		
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0.102	0.595	0.535	0.804		
	N	6	6	6	6		
Central	Pearson Correlation	-0.171	0.138	0.055	0.496	-0.689	
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0.686	0.768	0.918	0.317	0.130	
	N	8	7	6	6	6	
PrivReg	Pearson Correlation	0.368	0.240	0.301	0.197	.813*	- 0.15 6
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0.370	0.604	0.562	0.708	0.049	0.71 2
	N	8	7	6	6	6	8

PublicReg	Pearson	-0.050	.766*	0.644	0.610	0.518	0.072	0.251
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.907	0.045	0.167	0.198	0.293	0.865	0.549
	N	8	7	6	6	6	8	8

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 1

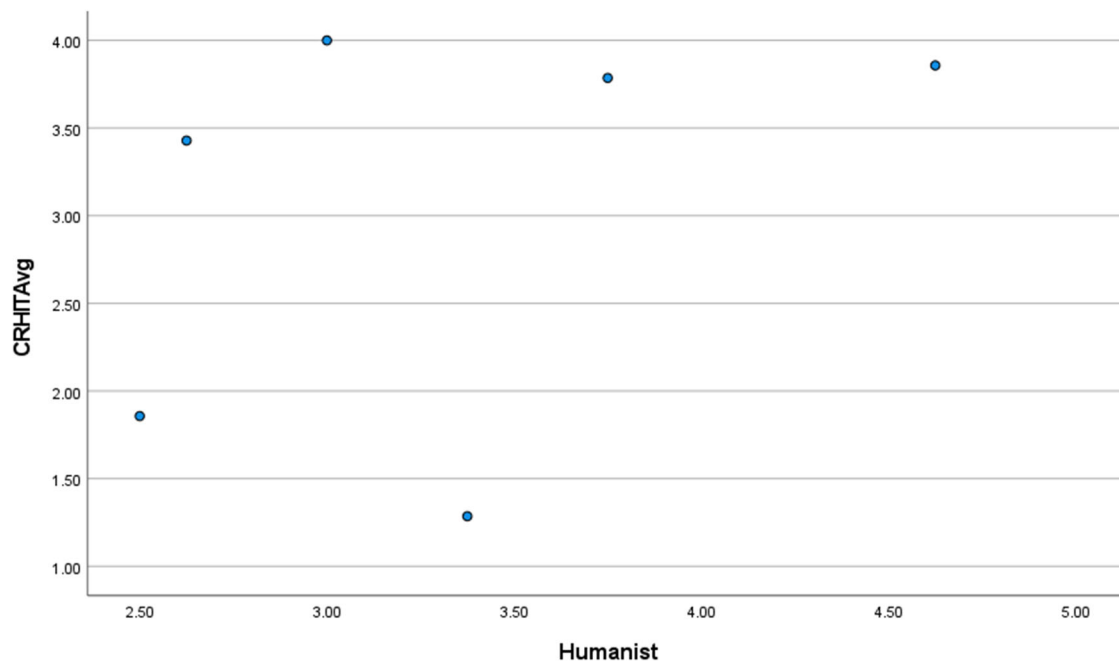


Figure 2

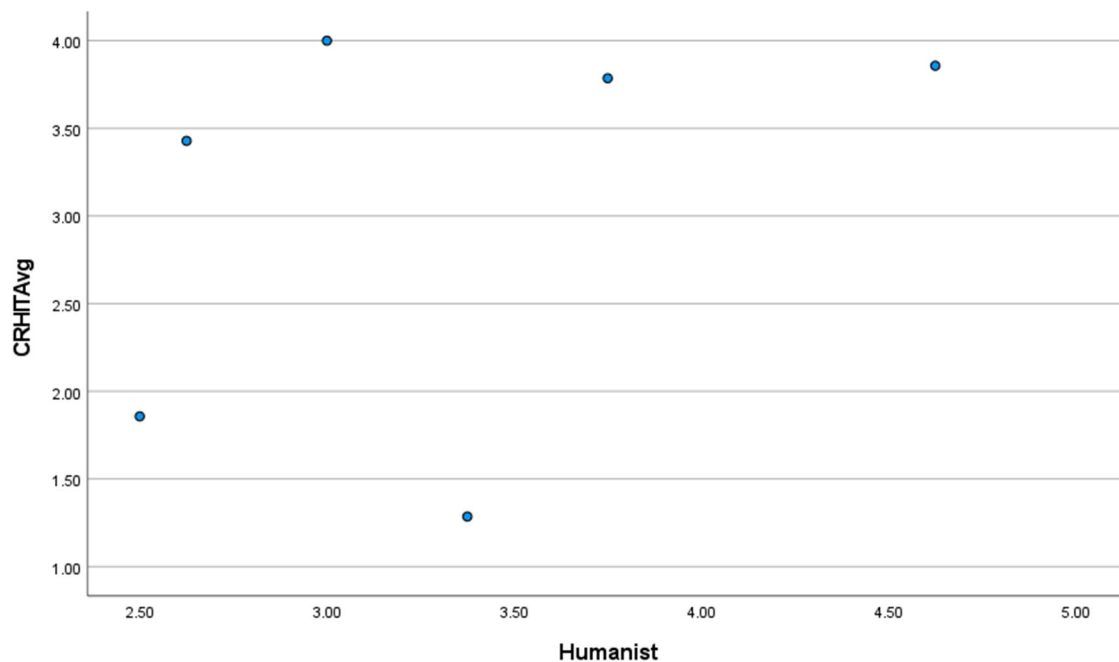
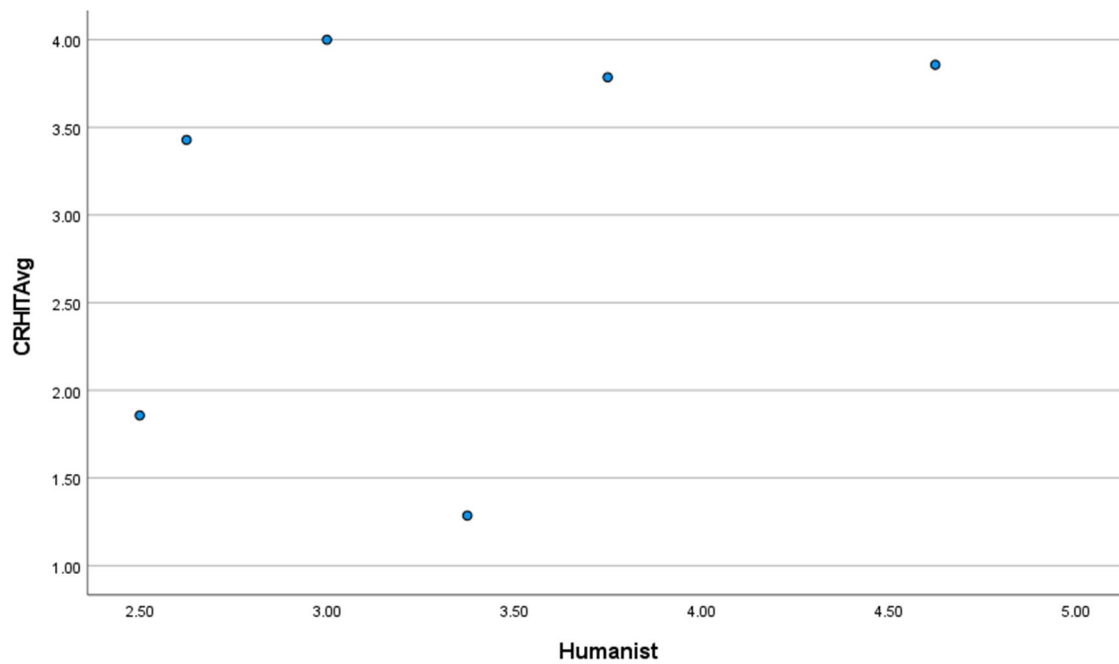


Figure 3



We looked to see if there were any relationships between the different components of the racial identity development and the relationship with the honors community. We conducted a Person's correlation, but due to small sample size, we also generated scatter plots to visualize the data. Consistent with the hypothesis, Humanist ideology had a positive weak association with the RHI-C, $r = 0.36$. As seen in Figure 1 the points are widely scattered. The majority of participants were high on the RHI-C scale. Participants who scored higher in Humanist felt a slight sense of belonging. Surprisingly inconsistent with the hypothesis Assimilation ideology ($r = .05$) and oppressed minority ideology ($r = .25$) had no correlation with the RHI-C. We also did not expect there to be a strong positive correlation between the nationalist ideology and the RHI-C, $r = .72$. In Figure 2 there is almost a linear pattern. The higher the individual scored on the Nationalist ideology the higher their sense of belonging. Interestingly there was a weak negative correlation between racial centrality and the RHI-C, $r = -.10$. In figure 3 the points are widely scattered out. There is almost a curved relationship where between the scores of 2.5 and 4.5 as centrality increases, RHI-C scores decrease. After 4.5 they increase again in RHI-C scores. When participants had moderate centrality there seemed to be a low sense of belonging. When centrality is either high or low, there is a stronger sense of belonging.

Relationship between time, racial identity development, and community relational health index

Table 3

Correlations

			CRHITAvg	If your program offers events, how often do you attend?
Spearman's rho	If your program offers events, how often do you attend?	Correlation Coefficient	0.214	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.482	
		N	13	
	How often each week do you find yourself interacting with those from the honors community outside of the class?	Correlation Coefficient	0.101	-0.216
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.744	0.459
		N	13	14

Table 4

Correlations

			How often each week do you find yourself interacting with those from the honors community outside of the class?	Ce ntr al	Pri vRe g	Publ icRe g	Assim ilation	Hu man ist	Oppresse dMinorit y
Spear man's rho	How often each week do you find yourself interacting with those from the honors community outside	Corre lation Coeff icient Sig. (2- tailed) N	- 0.2 16 0.4 59 14						

of the
class?

Central	Correlation Coefficient	- 0.485	0.378				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.223	0.356				
	N	8	8				
PrivReg	Correlation Coefficient	0.084	- 0.064	- 0.120			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.843	0.881	0.776			
	N	8	8	8			
PublicReg	Correlation Coefficient	- 0.276	- 0.127	0.144	0.267		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.508	0.765	0.734	0.523		
	N	8	8	8	8		
Assimilation	Correlation Coefficient	- .774*	- 0.080	0.559	- 0.127	0.618	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.041	0.865	0.192	0.786	0.139	
	N	7	7	7	7	7	
Humanist	Correlation Coefficient	- 0.530	- 0.207	0.314	- 0.116	0.543	.812*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.280	0.694	0.544	0.827	0.266	0.050

		tailed) N							
		6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Oppressed Minority	Correlation	0.0	0.735	0.4	0.2	0.75	0.294	0.23	
	Coefficient	45		06	65	4		2	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.933	0.096	0.425	0.612	0.084	0.572	0.658	
) N							
		6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Nationalist	Correlation	0.383	-0.414	-0.714	.812*	0.429	0.058	0.086	0.174
	Coefficient			14					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.454	0.414	0.111	0.050	0.397	0.913	0.872	0.742
) N							
		6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

We compared how much time participants spent in honors spaces to both the components of the MIBI and the RHI-C. We conducted Spearman rank correlations because time was an ordinal variable and was scored in reverse: the lower the score the more often they attended Honors events. There was no correlation between time spent interacting with those in the Honors community and the RHI-C, $r = .24$. There was also no correlation between how often participants attended events and the RHI-C, $r = .10$. As predicted, there was a strong correlation between assimilation ideology and how often participants attended events, $r = -.77$, $p < .05$. The higher individuals scored on Assimilationist ideology the more often they attended events. There was a moderate

correlation between Humanist ideology and how often participants attended events, $r = -.53$. The higher an individual scored on the Humanist ideology subscale the more often they attended events. Surprisingly there was a strong correlation between time spent interacting with others in the honors community and Oppressed Minority ideology, $r = .73$. The higher individuals scored on the Oppressed Minority subscale the more time they spent interacting with others in the program.

Discussion

The hypotheses of this study were that Black students who have an Assimilationist or Humanist ideology would have a higher sense of belonging and have higher engagement. Black honors students who have a Nationalist ideology or Oppressed minority ideologies would have less of a sense of belonging to the program and have lower engagement. Due to the small sample size, we could not draw any strong conclusions. However, we did see some interesting patterns in the data.

Interestingly, even though participants spent a relatively small amount of time engaging with the program, they had a sense of belonging. The majority of participants have not been in the program for more than 2 semesters. Prior research has found that upperclassman in the honors program tend to be less involved (Miller & Dumford, 2018). Those who have been involved for less semesters tend to be underclassman, though this is not always the case. This could play a part in why so many students did not often interact with the program. Another factor that could have affected students' interactions was the COVID 19 pandemic. This changed how students interacted with others in their community, as the way in which students could interact with one another was limited.

More research needs to be done with engagement in the program and a sense of belonging.

Sense of belonging was related to higher scores of Humanist and Nationalist ideologies. The findings on the Humanist ideology and sense of belonging were consistent with our hypothesis. This ideology does not center race, so that is not factor individuals are mainly taking into consideration when deciding to participate in an organization or community. They also are less likely to contribute their feelings of sense of belonging to their race. Interestingly the findings on Nationalist ideology and sense of belonging were not consistent with our hypothesis. This ideology centers the uniqueness of Blackness. There is a preference for Black social environments (Sellers, Smith, et.al, 1998). These individuals are more likely to spend less time in nonblack environments. The Honors Programs the participants were part of were mostly in predominantly White universities. It is interesting to see that these individuals felt a sense of belonging to a space that were not socially Black. This prompts further research on Nationalist ideology and people's sense of belonging to communities that aren't socially Black.

This study also found that Centrality and Nationalist ideology were negatively related to one another. The higher a participant scored in the Nationalist ideology subscale the lower they scored on the Centrality scale. Racial centrality is how centered one's race is in their lives. Nationalist ideology centers racially focused ideas. This is inconsistent with previous findings (Sellers, Chavous, et.al, 1998). Nationalist ideology is usually positively correlated with racial centrality. This unexpected finding could be due to the small sample size.

We also found that when participants had a moderate Centrality score, they had a low sense of belonging. When they scored either high or low on Centrality, they had a higher sense of belonging. This implies that strong feelings of how one's race is prominent in their life has an impact on their sense of belonging. There needs to be more research on how racial centrality affects a person's sense of belonging.

One significant limitation of this study was the sample size. There were only 6 people who filled out the full survey. The missing data led to incomplete scoring on the scales, as well as some scales being completely missing for individuals. One reason we had a small sample size was due to not being able to get the attention of the students. If students choose not to participate in the Honors Program outside of class, then they might not pay attention to messages from the program. Thus, disengaged students may not have seen the emails from their Honors directors about the survey. Another limitation was the design of the survey. Not every individual question was mandatory, so many participants skipped questions creating scoring issues in both the RHI-C and the MIBI. Lastly, the study relied on voluntary responses with no tangible incentive for individuals to take the survey. For example, giving out gift cards after completion or points towards their grades might have increased participation rates.

More research needs to be done on Honors Programs in general. There is little literature out there. There needs to be research done into why people choose to join the Honors Programs in general. Finding out why people do not join the programs can help make improvements to the programs. There also needs to be research done on whether lack of diversity in the programs a detriment is to students to join the program, and if it keeps current students from more actively interacting with the program. Having more

cultural activities and events would also help engagement for Black students. Contacting Black student unions on campus would also be helpful. They can give ideas on how to get Black student to engage with the Program.

Conclusion

This study describes the relationships between racial identity, sense of belonging, and time spent in honors spaces among Black honors students. Overall components of racial identity development do impact Black honors students' sense of belonging and engagement with the Honors program to some degree. Due to the small sample size of this study, we cannot apply these findings to the general population. We did find that the majority of participants think their honors programs are not diverse. This lack of diversity needs to be addressed by colleges and universities. More research needs to be done one why there is a lack of diversity in the Honors Program. We need to factor in racial identity and diversity when designing events and activities for the Honors Program. This would help increase diversity within Honors programs and help Black students and other students of color feel seen.

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Appendix 1

Figure 4

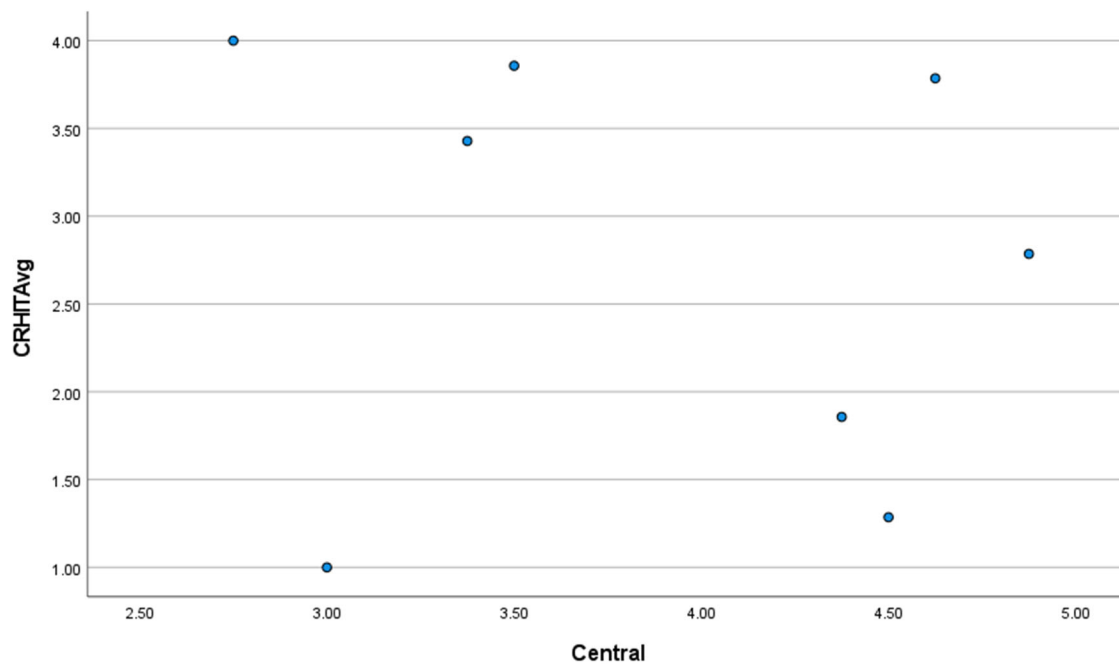


Figure 5

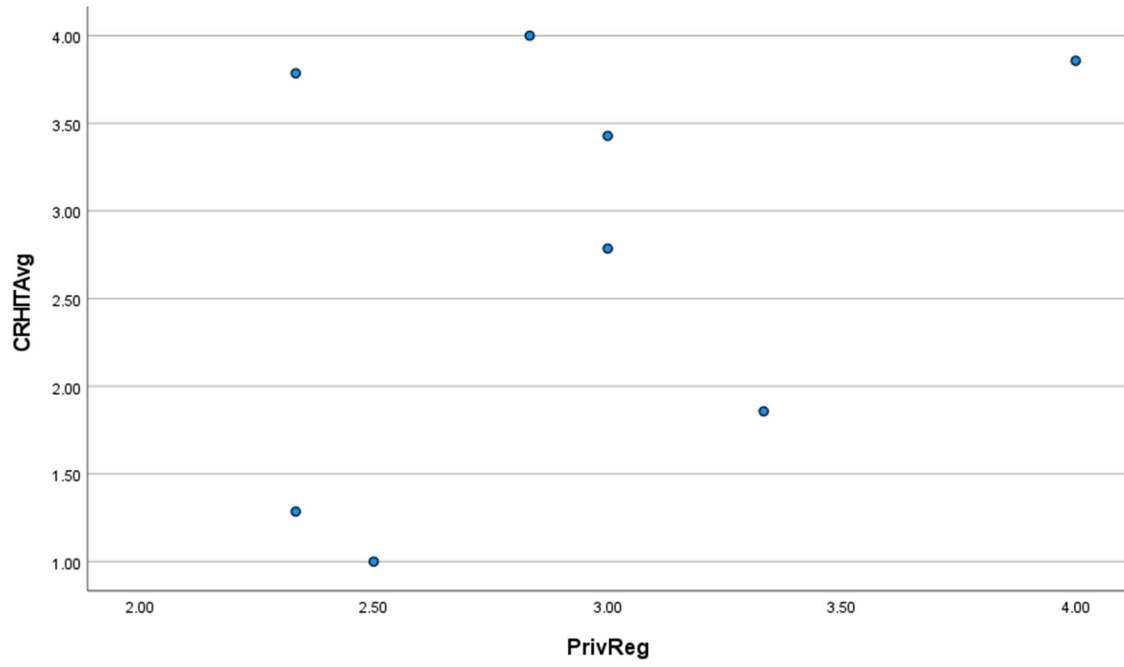


Figure 6

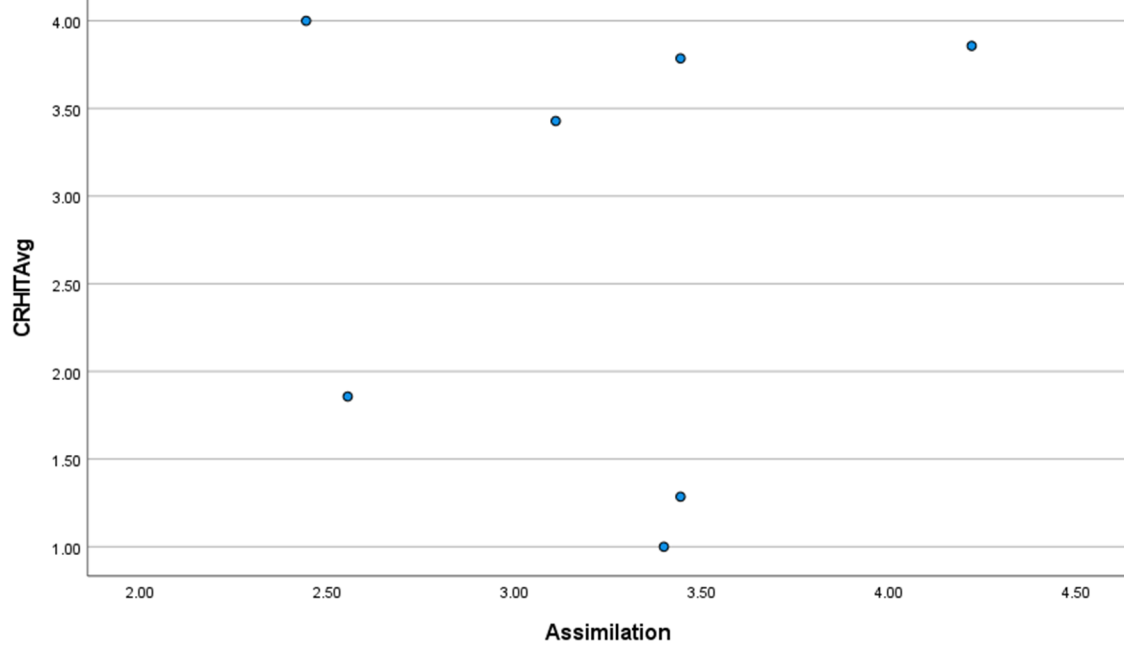


Figure 7

