Discrimination, Attribution, and Racial Group Identification: Implications for Psychological Distress Among Black Americans

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Discrimination

- Contemporary forms of overt and subtle discrimination experienced by Blacks in the U.S.
- Increasing evidence for negative mental health implications.
  - Indirect and direct mechanisms
Stress-Mediation Model

- Discrimination
- Stress-Mediated
- Mental Health
Discrimination and Mental Health

- Greater stress resulting from interpersonal experiences of discrimination
- Poorer racial and self-evaluation
  - Symbolic interaction and social evaluation theories (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934; Pettigrew, 1967).
Discrimination and Attribution

• Two competing perspectives:
  • Interpreting negative experiences as instances of discrimination may have self-protective properties.
  • However, such attributions may entail a threat to social identity.
Incorporating Racial Group Identification

- Rejection-Identification Model (Branscombe et al., 1999).
  - Stronger in-group identification may mitigate the effect of discrimination.
- Direct protective effect of greater racial group identification and also buffered discrimination.
Racial Identity Model

- Discrimination
- Racial Identification
- Mental Health

Stress-Mediated
Gaps in Knowledge

• Influence of discrimination attributed to race vs. other forms of discrimination or unfair treatment more broadly.

• Does racial group identification buffer different forms of discrimination?
Methods


• Sample:
  • 5191 Black Americans (3570 African Americans and 1621 Caribbean Blacks).
  • Nationally representative of the Black American household population.
Measures

• Discrimination and unfair treatment: Everyday Discrimination Scale (Williams et al. 1997).
• Attribution: Single-item assessing the primary reason for these experiences.
• Racial Group Identification: Single-item assessing how closely the respondent felt in their feelings and ideas to other Blacks.
Measures

• Outcome: Significant Psychological Distress measured using the K6.
• Demographic characteristics:
  • Ethnicity
  • Gender
  • Age
  • Poverty
  • Education
  • Employment
  • Region
  • Social Desirability
Analyses

• Multivariable logistic regression analyses predicting significant psychological distress
• All analyses weighted and took into account complex survey design characteristics
  • SAS-callable SUDAAN
Results

**SPD**
- No: 95.3%
- Yes: 4.8%

**Discrimination**
- None: 9.7%
- Any: 20.8%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discrimination (ref: None)</th>
<th>OR (95% CI)</th>
<th>OR (95% CI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Racial Attribution</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1.10 (0.45, 2.70)</td>
<td>1.40 (0.55, 3.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>2.20 (0.81, 5.99)</td>
<td>2.64 (0.92, 7.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>12.02 (4.66, 31.03)</td>
<td>13.17 (4.90, 35.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Racial Attribution</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1.06 (0.37, 3.04)</td>
<td>2.54 (0.84, 7.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>3.37 (1.33, 8.56)</td>
<td>5.85 (2.32, 14.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>10.90 (4.37, 27.18)</td>
<td>17.07 (6.59, 44.27)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Logistic Regressions Predicting SPD

- Adding racial identification revealed a main protective effect.
  - Moderate vs Low
    OR: 0.90, 95% CI: 0.46, 1.77
  - High vs Low
    OR: 0.72, 95% CI: 0.40, 1.30
Discrimination $\times$ Racial Identification

- No significant interactions between moderate identification and discrimination
- Significant interactions between high identification and discrimination
  - With moderate levels of non-racial discrimination ($t = -2.37, p < 0.05$)
  - With moderate levels of racial discrimination ($t = -2.49, p < 0.05$)
Discrimination × Racial Group Identification

Non-Racial Attribution

Probability SPD

Racial Group Identification

Low Racial Group ID

High Racial Group ID
Discussion

- Negative mental health implications of discrimination and unfair treatment among Black Americans.
  - Regardless of primary attribution
  - Attributions to race were not relatively protective compared to non-racial attributions.
Discussion

- Some evidence for the Rejection-Identification Model
  - High racial group identification somewhat buffered the effect of both non-racial and racial discrimination.
  - May be limited to only moderate levels of discrimination.
Limitations

- Cannot conclude whether or not attributions to discrimination are protective.
- Cross-sectional design limits inferences re: direction of causality.
- Power limitations
  - Stratified analyses
  - Testing additional interactions
Implications

- Discrimination and unfair treatment should be considered in improving mental health outcomes among Black Americans.
- Additional studies on racial group identification and centrality.
- Future studies on additional dimensions of racial identity.
Acknowledgements