The Role of Racial Identity in Perceived Racial Discrimination

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This study examined the role that dimensions of racial identity play regarding the antecedents and consequences of perceived racial discrimination among African Americans. A total of 267 African American college students completed measures of racial identity, perceived racial discrimination, and psychological distress at 2 time points. After controlling for previous perceptions of discrimination, racial centrality was positively associated with subsequent perceived racial discrimination. Additionally, perceived discrimination was positively associated with subsequent event-specific and global psychological distress after accounting for previous perceptions of discrimination and distress. Finally, racial ideology and public regard beliefs moderated the positive relationship between perceived discrimination and subsequent distress. The results illustrate the complex role racial identity plays in the lives of African Americans.

Although much of the de jure forms of racial discrimination were overturned through the civil rights movement of the 1960s, many African Americans are still forced to negotiate racial discrimination in their daily lives (Feagin, 1991; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Swim, Cohen, & Hyers, 1998). Since the start of the last century, psychologists and other scholars have argued that perceived racial discrimination and racial stigma have negatively affected the psychological development of African Americans (see Cross, 1991, for review). Unfortunately, until recently, there has been very little research that has documented the causal nature of the impact of perceived racial discrimination on African Americans' psychological well-being. Although a significant research literature has developed around Whites' negative attitudes and behaviors toward African Americans, significantly less attention has been paid to the antecedents and mental health consequences associated with the ways in which African Americans perceive racial discrimination (cf. Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Swim & Stangor, 1998).

The goal of this study was to address this oversight in the research literature by investigating the antecedents and mental health consequences of perceived racial discrimination. Specifically, we examined the relationship between different dimensions of racial identity (i.e., racial centrality, racial ideology, and racial regard) and individuals' accounts of the amount of racial discrimination they have experienced in their daily lives. Moreover, we examined the psychological consequences of perceived racial discrimination, and the extent to which dimensions of racial identity

buffer those consequences. In essence, we intend to show that certain dimensions of racial identity trigger the extent to which individuals perceive negative incidents as racial discrimination, and other dimensions of racial identity protect individuals from the adverse mental health consequences of such perceived discrimination. To support this claim, we used longitudinal data to demonstrate the complexity of racial identity and perceived discrimination on African Americans' psychological mental health. By using longitudinal data, we are better able to make inferences regarding the causal directions of the associations that we may find.

Antecedents of Perceived Discrimination

Racial discrimination is a pervasive phenomenon in the lives of many racial minorities. It can take the form of both blatant (e.g., being called a derogatory name) and subtle (e.g., being stared at by security guards while shopping) behaviors that permeate the daily lives of individuals (Essed, 1991; Feagin, 1991; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Swim et al., 1998). Research suggests that 60% or more of African American adults typically encounter racial discrimination in their lives (Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Sanders-Thompson, 1996; Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997). D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) found that 41% of African American college students reported occasionally hearing disparaging racial remarks, 41% reported frequently hearing such remarks, and 59% reported that they had been the target of racial insults at least once or twice. In a large-scale national survey, Kessler et al. (1999) found a lifetime prevalence rate of 61% for African Americans experiencing day-to-day racial discrimination. These reports suggest that racial discrimination is a common occurrence for racial minorities, particularly African Americans.

Role of Individual Differences

While racial discrimination seems to be a prevalent experience for many ethnic minorities, there are likely to be individual dif-

ferences in the extent to which people appraise any given negative incident as discriminatory. Some individuals are vigilant about seeking out instances of discrimination and are likely to claim it even in the absence of much evidence, whereas others are not so vigilant and are likely to minimize it despite the presence of unambiguous evidence (Crosby, 1984; Feldman-Barrett & Swim, 1998). A recent review by Major, Quinton, and McCoy (in press) provided a detailed description of who is most likely to attribute negative incidents to discrimination. Their review suggested that the more individuals are identified with their group (see Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Operario & Fiske, 2001) and the higher they are in sensitivity to stigmatization (see Mendoza-Denton, Purdie, Downey, & Davis, 2002; Pinel, 1999), the more likely they are to make attributions to discrimination. Additionally, the less individuals endorse the ideology of individual mobility, the more likely they are to make attributions to discrimination (see Major et al., 2002).

Of the individual differences noted above, a considerable amount of theorizing has focused on the relationship between group identification and perceived discrimination. Crocker and Major (1989) theorized that minority group identification might facilitate the likelihood of attributing negative treatment to racial prejudice and discrimination. The basis of this idea is that highly identified individuals might be more sensitive to intergroup inequalities and may be more willing to label negative incidents as prejudice. Consistent with this idea, Shelton and Sellers (2000) found that African Americans for whom race was a central component of their identity were more likely to attribute an ambiguous discriminatory event to race compared with African Americans for whom race was a less central component of their identity. Likewise, Operario and Fiske (2001, Study 2) found that ethnic minorities who were highly identified with their ethnic group were more likely to make attributions to discrimination about subtle, ambiguous behaviors of a White confederate compared with ethnic minorities who were less identified with their group. Together, these findings suggest that group identification influences the attributions ethnic minorities make about single, negative incidents they encounter.

Whereas the research cited above focused on single incidents of discrimination, additional research has examined the role of group identification in attributions to discrimination across multiple situations and time (Major et al., 2002; Operario & Fiske, 2001). Consistent with previous findings, this work suggested that highly ethnically identified individuals perceive themselves as more personally vulnerable to discrimination. For instance, Operario and Fiske (2001, Study 1) found that highly identified ethnic minorities reported more personal experiences with ethnic discrimination and were more likely to perceive themselves as targets of discrimination (e.g., "To what extent are you personally a target of discrimination?"; "In the future, how much do you think you will personally be a target of discrimination because of your race or ethnicity?") than did less ethnically identified minorities.

In contrast to the above findings, Branscombe et al. (1999) found little evidence that minority group identification influenced individuals' willingness to make attributions to discrimination and self-reported experiences with discrimination. Instead, they found evidence suggesting that attributions to discrimination were likely to influence minority group identification. Given these two different patterns of findings, there is probably a cyclical relationship

between these variables (cf. Operario & Fiske, 2001)—group identification leads individuals to perceive their personal experiences a certain way, and these experiences, in turn, lead individuals to identify more strongly with their ethnic group.

Moving Beyond Group Identification

To date, researchers have focused solely on group identification as the dimension of ethnic identity that is related to perceived discrimination. However, it is possible for two people to be equally highly identified with their group but have very distinct ideologies about what it means to be a member of that group. Additionally, they can have different feelings about their group and different beliefs regarding how others feel about their group. Accordingly, the present study extended the above group of individual-differences variables to include additional dimensions of racial identity. We define racial identity as the significance and qualitative meaning that individuals attribute to being Black in their conceptualizations of self (Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). We refer to the significance component of racial identity as *racial centrality*, and refer to the qualitative meaning of racial identity as *racial ideology* and *racial regard*. As discussed below, these additional dimensions of racial identity beliefs may impact perceived racial discrimination.

Sellers et al. (1998) suggested that there are at least four ideologies that capture African Americans' views on what it means to be a member of their racial group. These ideologies are as follows: (a) a nationalist ideology, which stresses the uniqueness of being of African descent; (b) an oppressed minority ideology, which stresses the similarities between African Americans and other oppressed groups; (c) an assimilationist ideology, which stresses the similarities between African Americans and American mainstream society; and (d) a humanist ideology, which stresses the commonalities of all humans (see Sellers et al., 1998, for a richer description of each ideology). Additionally, Sellers et al. (1998) suggested that African Americans vary in their affective and evaluative judgments of their racial group (private regard), and in their beliefs about others' affective and evaluative judgments of African Americans (public regard). Some African Americans have positive regard for African Americans whereas others have negative regard; similarly, some African Americans believe that other people have positive regard for African Americans whereas some African Americans believe that other people have negative regard. All components of racial identity, not just racial centrality, might impact perceived racial discrimination.

In terms of the specific relationships between the dimensions of racial identity and perceived racial discrimination, we make several hypotheses. Consistent with previous work, we predict that the more central being Black is to African Americans, the more likely they are to indicate they have been the targets of racial discrimination. We also predict a positive relationship between endorsing nationalist and oppressed minority ideologies and perceived racial discrimination. Individuals who endorse these ideologies are more inclined to see racism as a part of the African American experience (Sellers, Morgan, & Brown, 2001). As a result, they are more likely to attribute race as the cause of negative personal treatment. However, African Americans who endorse a humanist ideology

are less likely to view themselves and others in terms of race, and, in turn, are less likely to use race as an attribution for negative events. Finally, people who believe that other groups have relatively negative opinions of African Americans (low public regard) will be more likely to interpret negative treatment from others in terms of racial discrimination. That is, because they think others view their racial group negatively, they are likely to view negative treatment from others in terms of racial prejudice. Thus, the significance and meaning of race should determine the extent to which African Americans indicate that they have experienced racial discrimination in their lives.

Consequences of Perceived Racial Discrimination

Social psychological research has shown that negative treatment and experiences can have adverse consequences for mental health (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Schilling, 1989). The blatant and subtle behaviors of racial discrimination have been conceived of as stressors that lead to deleterious mental health outcomes (Allison, 1998; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Major et al., in press; Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Sellers et al., 2001). Consistent with these findings, various researchers have shown that racial and ethnic minorities' personal experiences with discrimination are significantly associated with poor mental health (e.g., Kessler et al., 1999; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Noh, Beiser, Kaspar, Hou, & Rummens, 1999). For instance, African Americans' and Hispanics' perceived experiences with discrimination are associated with feelings of anger and depression (Jackson et al., 1996; Salgado de Snyder, 1987). Moreover, the more African Americans indicate that they have experienced racial discrimination, the more likely they are to report lower levels of life satisfaction and happiness (Williams & Chung, in press). There is even evidence that suggests that self-reported experiences with racial discrimination are related to psychiatric problems. For instance, self-reported experience with discrimination is associated with higher psychiatric symptoms of intrusion and avoidance (Sanders-Thompson, 1996), and is related to symptoms of depression, anxiety, obsession–compulsion, and somatization among African Americans (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). Taken together, these studies indicate that perceived experiences with racial discrimination can have devastating mental health consequences.

While a number of studies have found links between perceived experiences with racial discrimination and mental health, most of these studies have used cross-sectional datasets. The use of such datasets has made it difficult to infer the direction of causality regarding the relationships. Although many have argued that experiencing racial discrimination has deleterious consequences for mental health, it is also plausible that individuals suffering from lower levels of mental health are more inclined to interpret ambiguous events as being racially motivated. Research conducted with longitudinal analyses is needed to tease apart the direction of causality regarding the link between perceived racial discrimination and mental health. It should also be noted that much of the previous research on the psychological consequences of racial discrimination have focused on global indicators of mental health such as overall life satisfaction, depression, and anxiety (e.g. Kessler et al., 1999; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). In doing so, these studies demonstrate the ubiquitous impact that perceived experiences with racial discrimination can have on African Americans.

However, it is important that mental health outcomes that are more specific to the racist event be examined as well. It is possible that event-specific outcomes (such as the extent to which the individual was bothered by the event) mediates the relationship between experiencing a racist event and more global mental health outcomes. Thus, in the present research, we examine both event-specific and global indicators of psychological distress.

Buffering Effects of Racial Identity

Just as there are individual differences that influence perceived racial discrimination, there are individual differences that influence the consequences of perceived discrimination for African Americans. Some African Americans may be negatively affected by perceived discrimination, whereas others may be buffered from these consequences because of their beliefs regarding the significance and meaning of race. We hypothesize that racial centrality, racial ideology, and racial regard will moderate the mental health consequences of perceived racial discrimination.

Researchers have assumed that a strong identification with one's group can serve as a psychological buffer against perceived prejudice and discrimination (see Cross, 1991; Phinney, 1990, 1996). The basis of this hypothesis is that feeling connected to one's group compensates for the negative effects of discrimination. That is, in the presence of discrimination, individuals can feel good about themselves by focusing on the positive aspects of their group. Despite this assumption, however, there are few empirical investigations of this relationship. One exception is research by Branscombe et al. (1999). They suggested that African Americans' levels of racial identification (racial centrality) mediate the relationship between willingness to make attributions toward prejudice and psychological well-being. Empirically, however, Branscombe et al. have tested this relationship using identification measures that more closely resemble private regard, or that combine regard with centrality, thus raising some questions about what is the mediator.[1] Further complicating this is the fact that they used a cross-sectional design, making causal interpretations regarding the direction of mediation tenuous. It must be noted that although the present study is similar to the Branscombe et al. study, there are several important differences.

First, our research extends Branscombe et al.'s (1999) study by examining the extent to which other dimensions of racial identity (i.e., racial ideology and racial regard) protect individuals from the adverse consequences of perceived discrimination. Given our model of racial identity, perceived racial discrimination may or may not be consistent with one's racial ideological worldview (Sellers et al., 1998). Specifically, African Americans with a nationalist or an oppressed minority racial ideology may expect to experience racial discrimination in their daily lives and may be more prepared to deal with it. As a result, these individuals would be buffered from the deleterious consequences of racial discrimination. That is, because the concept of racial discrimination is not foreign to the way in which they engage the world, they are better able to handle the stress. Likewise, public regard should moderate the relationship between perceived discrimination and mental health. Specifically, African Americans who believe that other

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[1] We thank an anonymous reviewer for this comment.

groups have relatively negative opinions of African Americans (low public regard) may be less affected by perceived racial discrimination because it is consistent with their racial worldview (Sellers et al., 2001). African Americans, however, who believe that other groups have relatively positive opinions of African Americans (high public regard) are less likely to think that others will treat them negatively because of their race. The experience of racial discrimination is inconsistent with their worldview. As a result, these individuals have to engage in the psychologically taxing task of reconciling the inconsistency between their worldview and their experience. We predict that such a task should be stressful and result in negative mental health outcomes.

Second, the present study proposed that the dimensions of racial identity *moderate* the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and psychological distress whereas Branscombe et al. (1999) proposed that group identification is a *mediator*. According to resiliency theory (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Masten et al., 1988), in Branscombe et al.'s model, racial identification compensates for the impact of perceived racial discrimination on African Americans' well-being. The present study examined whether various dimensions of racial identity buffered the influence of individuals' perceptions of racial discrimination. As such, we examined whether the various dimensions of racial identity served as risk-protective factors (Brook, Brook, Gordon, & Whiteman, 1990). Although both approaches suggest that racial identity may be a resilience factor in the context of racial discrimination, they differ with regard to the mechanism by which racial identity attitudes operate.

Overview of Present Study

Recently, a number of researchers have begun to conceptualize African Americans' experiences with racial discrimination within a stress and coping framework (e.g., Feldman-Barrett & Swim, 1998; Harrell, 2000; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Major et al., in press; Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Sellers et al., 2001). The stress and coping model most often used is the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This model argues that stress is the result of a transaction between situational characteristics and person characteristics that leads a person to experience an event as stressful. Thus, conceptualizing racial discrimination within such a framework allows for person characteristics (as well as situational characteristics) to play an important role in the way in which individuals experience a negative event. African Americans' beliefs regarding the significance and meaning of race in their lives would be relevant person characteristics in the stress process as it relates to perceived racial discrimination (Sellers et al., 2001). It is with this framework in mind that the present study examined three specific questions. First, do racial centrality, racial ideology, and racial regard predict the amount of racial discrimination individuals indicate they have experienced? Second, do individuals' self-reported experiences with racial discrimination predict subsequent mental health? Finally, do racial centrality, racial ideology, and racial regard buffer the impact of perceived racial discrimination on individuals' subsequent mental health?

Unlike previous work that has focused primarily on the level of group identification, we took into consideration that the qualitative meaning of what it means to be African American might shape perceived discrimination. Examining both the meaning and significance of racial identity affords us the opportunity to investigate the complexity inherent in the role that race plays in the lives of African Americans. Additionally, the present study adds to the literature by investigating the event-specific and global mental health consequences of perceived racial discrimination. Finally, we used longitudinal data from a sample of African American college students, which allows us the opportunity to better investigate the causal direction of the relationships among racial identity, perceived racial discrimination, and psychological distress.

Method

Participants

Three hundred forty-nine self-identified African American first-year college students who were in their first month of college were recruited to participate in a longitudinal study. The present study only includes the 267 participants who had complete data for the first two waves of the survey (overall retention rate of 77%). The students were recruited from three predominately White universities. One of the universities in the study was a large state university in a suburban environment in the Midwest ($n = 117$). A second university was a medium-size public university in an urban setting in the Midwest ($n = 43$). The third university was a medium-size public university in a suburban environment in the Southeast ($n = 107$). Consistent with the gender makeup of African American students at these three universities, the sample for the present study is 75% female. The sample self-reported a median family income of between $55,000 and $64,999.

Procedure

We recruited participants from a list of incoming African American freshman students provided by the university registrars' offices. We contacted students by telephone and e-mail during their first month of their first year and asked them to participate in a longitudinal study of African American students' college experiences. During this initial contact, we asked participants to confirm that they were Black or African American. Those students who indicated that they were Black and agreed to participate in the study completed a survey instrument including the measures in the present study in small group administrations (between 3 to 10 students) early during their first semester. Students completed the measures a second time in small groups at the end of their second semester. African American researchers administered the questionnaires during both waves of the study. Participants received $15 and $20 for participating in waves 1 and 2, respectively.

Measures

Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI). The MIBI is a 56-item measure of the three stable dimensions of racial identity (Centrality, Ideology, and Regard) delineated in the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity for African Americans (Sellers et al., 1997). Participants indicate their agreement with the items on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The MIBI is comprised of a total of seven subscales.

The Centrality scale consists of eight items measuring the extent to which being African American is central to the respondents' definition of

Table 1

Frequency of Occurrence and Mean Score on Amount Bothered for Selected Individual Items of Racist Hassles at Time 1 and Time 2

Item	Time 1 % occurred	Time 1 bothered M	Time 2 % occurred	Time 2 bothered M
Being ignored, overlooked, not given service	86.9	3.03	86.5	2.99
Being treated rudely or disrespectfully	87.6	3.47	89.9	3.32
Being accused of something or treated suspiciously	72.3	2.93	67.4	2.69
Others reacting to you as if they were afraid or intimidated	88.3	2.20	80.1	1.99
Being observed or followed while in public places	76.4	2.82	79.4	2.74
Being treated as if you were "stupid," being "talked down to"	79.8	3.40	80.9	3.29
Your ideas or opinions being minimized, ignored or devalued	73.0	2.95	73.8	2.78
Overhearing or being told an offensive joke or comment	79.4	2.74	72.3	2.24
Being insulted, called a name or harassed	54.7	2.20	49.1	2.03

Note. Items are from *The Racism and Life Experience Scales,* by S. P. Harrell, 1994, unpublished manuscript. Reprinted with permission of the author. Range for bothered by discrimination is from 1 = *did not bother me at all* to 5 = *bothered me extremely.*

themselves (e.g., "Being Black is important to my self-image").[2] A higher score on the Centrality scale is indicative of race being a more important aspect of the individuals' definitions of self ($\alpha = .75$). The Regard scale is composed of two subscales, Private Regard and Public Regard.[3] The Private Regard subscale consists of six items measuring the extent to which respondents have positive feelings toward African Americans in general (e.g., "I feel good about Black people."). A higher score corresponds to more positive feelings toward African Americans ($\alpha = .73$). The Public Regard subscale consists of six items measuring the extent to which respondents feel that other groups have positive feelings toward African Americans (e.g., "Overall, Blacks are considered good by others"). A higher score on the Public Regard subscale indicates a belief that other groups have more positive feelings toward African Americans ($\alpha = .73$).

The Ideology scale of the MIBI is composed of four subscales. The Assimilation subscale consists of nine items measuring the extent to which respondents emphasize the similarities between African Americans and mainstream America ($\alpha = .53$). To increase the reliability of the Assimilation subscale, two items were dropped. The resulting Assimilation subscale consists of seven items ($\alpha = .61$). An example of an item is "Blacks should try to work within the system to achieve their political and economic goals." The Humanist subscale consists of nine items measuring the extent to which respondents emphasize the similarities among individuals of all races ($\alpha = .68$). An example of an item is "Blacks would be better off if they were more concerned with the problems facing all people than just focusing on Black issues." The Minority subscale consists of nine items measuring the extent to which respondents emphasize the similarities between African Americans and other minority groups ($\alpha = .77$). An example of an item is "The same forces which have led to the oppression of Blacks have also led to the oppression of other groups." Finally, the Nationalist subscale consists of nine items measuring the extent to which respondents emphasize the uniqueness of being African American ($\alpha = .69$). An example of an item is "White people can never be trusted where Blacks are concerned." Participants completed the MIBI at Time 1 and Time 2. The present study uses participants' responses to the MIBI during Time 1 of the study only.

Daily Life Experience (DLE). The Daily Life Experience subscale is part of the Racism and Life Experience scales developed by Harrell (1994). The DLE is a self-report measure that assesses the frequency and impact of experiencing 18 "microaggressions" due to race in the past year (see Utsey, 1998, for review of scale properties). The measure is based conceptually on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model of stress and coping (see Harrell, 2000). Participants are asked to assess each of the 18 items regarding (a) how frequently they experience each racial hassle and (b) how much they were bothered by each hassle. The frequency of the hassle is assessed using a 6-point scale with the following labels: 0 = *never happened*, 1 = *one time*, 2 = *a few times*, 3 = *about once a month*, 4 = *a few times a month*, and 5 = *once a week or more*. Participants answered how bothered they were by the event using a 5-point Likert-type scale with the following labels: 1 = *did not bother me at all*, 2 = *bothered me a little*, 3 = *bothered me somewhat*, 4 = *bothered me a lot*, and 5 = *bothered me extremely*. Table 1 lists how often individuals experienced each of the 18 racial hassles at least once, and the mean scores regarding how much they were bothered by each incident for both Time 1 and Time 2.

We conducted factor analyses using a principal-component extraction method to examine the factor structure of how often individuals experienced the 18 racial hassles at both administrations separately. In both cases, examination of the scree plot suggested a one-factor structure underlying the data. The single factor explained 38.0% and 37.1% of the variance in the frequency of discrimination at Time 1 and Time 2, respectively. The same procedure was used to assess the underlying factor structure of the extent to which participants were bothered by the 18 items. Again, examination of the scree plot suggested a single factor for the data at both time points. The single structure accounted for 36.7% and 40.1% of the variance at Time 1 and Time 2, respectively. As a result, four subscales were created by averaging across participants' responses to (a) the frequency of the event ($\alpha = .90$ for both time points) and (b) how much the event bothered

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[2] Our measure of racial centrality is similar to Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-Esteem scale.

[3] Our measure of private regard is similar to Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) measure of private collective self-esteem. Similarly, our measure of public regard is similar to their measure of public collective self-esteem.

them (Time 1 α = .90, Time 2 α = .91) at both time points. We used the frequency-of-discrimination index (i.e., perceived racial discrimination) and the bothered-by-discrimination index at both time points in our analyses.

The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D). The CES-D consists of 20 items that assess the presence and frequency of clinical symptoms associated with depression (Radloff, 1977). Participants rated the frequency with which the symptoms had occurred over the past week on a scale ranging from 1 (*rarely* or *none of the time—less than 1 day*) to 4 (*most of the time—5 to 7 days*). A sample item is "I felt depressed." Appropriate items were reverse scored and averaged such that higher scores on the composite scale are suggestive of more depression (Time 1 α = .87, Time 2 α = .89).

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). The PSS includes 14 items that assess the degree to which individuals appraise situations in their lives as stressful (S. Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). Participants respond to how often they have had specific feelings or thoughts over the past month using a scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*very often*). A sample item is "In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?" Appropriate items were reverse scored and averaged such that higher scores on the composite scale are suggestive of higher levels of stress (Time 1 α = .86, Time 2 α = .85).

The Spielberger State–Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). The STAI is a 20-item measure of the tendency for participants to generally experience symptoms of anxiety (Spielberger, 1983). Participants indicated how often they felt several affective states related to trait anxiety using a scale ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 4 (*almost always*). Appropriate items were reversed scored and averaged such that higher scores on the composite scale are suggestive of higher levels of trait anxiety (Time 1 α = .87, Time 2 α = .92).

Psychological distress. A composite variable of psychological distress was created for both time points because of the high correlations among the CES-D, PSS, and STAI ($rs > .71$). We created z-scores for the three mental health scales and averaged them to yield a composite psychological distress score. Individuals scores were scaled such that higher scores represent greater psychological distress. We used a composite score for psychological distress at both time points (α = .89 for both time points).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

We performed several one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to compare students who participated in both waves of the study with the 82 students who did not participate in Time 2 on relevant variables in the study at Time 1. The analyses showed that the two groups did not differ on perceived discrimination, bothered by perceived discrimination, psychological distress, and gender. Among the racial identity variables, the groups differed only on their Assimilation scores, $F(1, 346) = 4.48$, $p < .05$, such that those individuals who remained in the study reported higher Assimilation attitudes ($M = 5.49$) than those who dropped out ($M = 5.31$). We also performed a series of one-way ANOVAs to investigate possible institutional differences in the racial identity, perceived racial discrimination, and psychological distress variables. There were significant institutional differences in participants' Humanist, $F(2, 264) = 5.81$, $p < .01$, and Assimilation, $F(2, 264) = 5.22$, $p < .01$, scores. With respect to both Humanist and Assimilationist scores, students from the medium-size urban institution ($M = 5.29$ and $M = 5.21$, respectively) reported lower scores than students at both the larger Midwestern institution ($M = 5.73$ and $M = 5.64$, respectively) and the medium size institution in the Southeast ($M = 5.66$ and $M = 5.42$, respectively).

There were also institutional differences in the extent to which individuals were bothered by perceived discrimination at Time 2, $F(2, 258) = 3.78$, $p < .05$. Students from the large institution in the Midwest ($M = 2.17$) reported that they were significantly less bothered by perceived discrimination than individuals at the medium-sized southern university ($M = 2.55$). Additionally, we performed one-way ANOVAs to examine gender differences in the study variables. Significant gender differences were found for Private Regard, $F(2, 265) = 5.33$, $p < .05$, Public Regard, $F(2, 264) = 6.76$, $p < .01$, and perceived discrimination at Time 2, $F(2, 264) = 11.76$, $p < .01$. Men reported significantly more positive feelings toward Blacks ($M = 6.60$ for men and $M = 6.40$ for women), felt that others had more positive feelings toward Blacks ($M = 3.87$ for men and $M = 3.55$ for women), and perceived more discrimination at Time 2 ($M = 1.77$ for men and $M = 1.41$ for women). As a result of these institutional and gender differences, we used dummy variables representing the three institutions and gender in all subsequent multivariate analyses.

Descriptive Analyses

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for the mental health, racial identity, and perceived racial discrimination variables. The mean for the sample was one standard deviation above the midpoint of the response scale for two of the seven MIBI subscales. The participants, on average, reported that they had very positive private regard toward Blacks and that they endorsed an assimilation ideology. In general, the sample reported experiencing racial hassles rather frequently. Of the 18 racial hassles on the perceived discrimination scale, the median number of hassles that participants reported experiencing at least once during the past year was 14 at Time 1 and 13 at Time 2. On average, they reported experiencing 12.74 racial hassles at Time 1 and 12.47 at Time 2. Thirty-four (12% of the sample) participants at Time 1 and 32 participants (12% of the sample) at Time 2 reported experiencing all 18 of the incidents at least once. Only 1 participant (0.4% of the sample) at Time 1 and 3 participants (1.1% of the sample) at Time 2 reported that they had not experienced any of the 18 racial

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Variables in the Study

Variable	M	SD
Centrality	4.95	1.04
Private regard	6.45	0.65
Public regard	3.64	0.89
Assimilation	5.50	0.64
Humanist	5.63	0.74
Minority	4.93	0.76
Nationalist	3.58	0.79
Perceived discrimination Time 1	1.63	0.81
Perceived discrimination Time 2	1.50	0.76
Bothered by discrimination Time 1	2.49	1.10
Bothered by discrimination Time 2	2.32	1.11
Depression Time 1	1.72	0.47
Depression Time 2	1.71	0.47
Anxiety Time 1	1.93	0.52
Anxiety Time 2	1.92	0.51
Perceived stress Time 1	2.22	0.63
Perceived stress Time 2	2.25	0.58

hassles. Participants reported that experiencing each of the 18 racial hassles bothered them, on average, between *a little* and *somewhat* at both Time 1 ($M = 2.49$) and Time 2 ($M = 2.32$). In general, the sample scored within one standard deviation of the midpoint on depression, anxiety, and perceived stress at both time points. Six pairwise t tests were conducted to determine differences between the perceived racial discrimination and psychological distress variables across the two time points. Participants reported experiencing racial hassles more frequently, $t(266) = 3.34$, $p < .01$, and were more bothered by the racial hassles, $t(258) = 2.78$, $p < .01$, at Time 1 than at Time 2.

We calculated Pearson's product-moment correlations to examine the bivariate relationships among the primary variables in the study. The bivariate analyses indicate several significant relationships among the various racial identity subscales at Time 1 with the perceived racial discrimination variables at Time 2 (see Table 3).

Regression Analyses for Antecedents of Perceived Discrimination

A hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model was performed to investigate the relationship between racial identity and perceived discrimination (see Table 4). Gender, two institutional dummy variables, individuals' level of psychological distress at Time 1, individuals' bothered by discrimination scores at Time 1, and individuals' perceived racial discrimination scores at Time 1 were entered as controls in the first block of variables. By controlling for previous levels of the dependent variable at Time 1 (perceived racial discrimination), the independent variables in these analyses are in effect predicting the change in the dependent variable from Time 1 to Time 2 (perceived racial discrimination). The overall model for the first block of variables as a whole explained 47% of the variance in perceived racial discrimination, $F(6, 262) = 37.94$, $p < .01$. There were significant coefficients for gender ($\beta = -.19$, partial $R^2 = .01$, $p < .05$) and perceived discrimination at Time 1 ($\beta = .54$, partial $R^2 = .21$, $p < .01$). The results suggest that in addition to men having been more likely than women to self-report an increase in the frequency of discrimination, individuals' reports of perceived discrimination

were somewhat stable over the two time points. The seven racial identity subscales were entered in the second block of variables. As a whole, the racial identity variables did not explain a significant increase in the variance of perceived discrimination at Time 2 (R^2 change $= .01$), $F(7, 262) = 1.02$, *ns*. However, racial centrality was a significant predictor by itself ($\beta = .09$, partial $R^2 = .02$, $p < .05$). As in the bivariate analyses, individuals who felt that race was a more central identity at Time 1 reported an increase in perceived racial discrimination at Time 2. The overall model explained 48% of the variance in individuals' perceived frequency of racial discrimination at Time 2, $F(13, 262) = 18.07$, $p < .01$.

Regression Analyses for the Mental Health Consequences of Perceived Discrimination

A second hierarchical OLS regression model was performed to examine if racial identity and perceived discrimination predict the extent to which individuals are bothered by racial discrimination (see Table 5). Gender, the institutional dummy variables, psychological distress at Time 1, the extent to which individuals were bothered by racial discrimination at Time 1, and perceived racial discrimination at Time 1 were entered in the first block of variables as control variables. This first block of variables explained 44% of the variance in the extent to which individuals are bothered by racial discrimination, $F(6, 257) = 32.23$, $p < .01$. The bothered by discrimination at Time 1 variable was the only significant predictor ($\beta = .59$, partial $R^2 = .22$, $p < .01$), indicating a high level of stability in the extent to which individuals are bothered by discrimination from Time 1 to Time 2. The second block of variables included main effects for the seven racial identity variables at Time 1 and perceived racial discrimination at Time 2. By including both Time 1 and Time 2 perceived racial discrimination in the model, the analyses effectively account for the stability in perceived discrimination experienced across the two time points. The second block of variables explained an additional 14% of the variance, $F(8, 257) = 10.88$, $p < .01$. Only perceived racial discrimination at Time 2 was a significant predictor ($\beta = .76$, partial $R^2 = .25$, $p < .01$) in the second block of variables. None of the racial identity variables were significant predictors. Similar to the bivariate analyses, individuals who reported experiencing

Table 3

Pearson Product–Moment Correlations of Racial Identity, Racial Discrimination, and Psychological Distress Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Centrality	1.0												
2. Assimilation	.04	1.0											
3. Humanist	−.24**	.39**	1.0										
4. Minority	.15*	.42**	.27**	1.0									
5. Nationalist	.36**	−.15*	−.42**	.11	1.0								
6. Private regard	.43**	.22**	.13*	.18**	.11	1.0							
7. Public regard	−.06	.07	.06	−.02	−.18**	.16**	1.0						
8. Freq. of discrim T1	.23**	−.04	−.10	.12	.34**	.05	−.15*	1.0					
9. Freq. of discrim T2	.28**	−.06	−.13*	.05	.27**	.08	−.10	.67**	1.0				
10. Both. by discrim T1	.27**	−.04	−.08	.13*	.30**	.09	−.15*	.72**	.53**	1.0			
11. Both. by discrim T2	.26**	−.03	−.06	.04	.22**	.12	−.06	.51**	.65**	.64**	1.0		
12. Psych. distress T1	−.07	−.07	−.03	.05	.15*	−.27**	−.14*	.23**	.15*	.16**	.18**	1.0	
13. Psych. distress T2	.04	−.05	−.00	.04	.10	−.12	−.06	.19**	.24**	.19**	.24**	.71**	1.0

Note. Freq. = frequency; discrim = discrimination; Both. = bothered; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; Psych. = psychological.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression of Racial Identity Variables at Time 1 and Control Variables Predicting Perceived Racial Discrimination at Time 2

Variable	Block 1 b	Block 2 b
Constant	0.82	1.04
Gender	−.19* (.08)	−.21* (.09)
Institution 1	−.12 (.10)	−.11 (.11)
Institution 2	.01 (.10)	.01 (.11)
Psychological distress Time 1	.00 (.04)	.01 (.04)
Bothered by discrimination Time 1	.07 (.05)	.06 (.05)
Perceived discrimination Time 1	.54** (.06)	.52** (.07)
Centrality	—	.09* (.04)
Assimilationist	—	.01 (.06)
Humanist	—	−.04 (.06)
Minority	—	−.03 (.05)
Nationalist	—	−.01 (.06)
Private regard	—	−.03 (.07)
Public regard	—	−.01 (.04)
Block 1 R^2	.47**	—
Block 2 R^2	—	.01
Total R^2	.47**	.48**

Note. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses. Dashes in cells mean the category is not applicable because the variable was not entered into the model.

* $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.

racial discrimination more frequently at Time 2 also reported an increase in being bothered more by racial discrimination at Time 2.

The third block of variables consisted of interactions between perceived discrimination at Time 2 with each of the seven racial identity subscales. The third block of variables as a whole explained an additional 2% of the variance, $F(7, 257) = 1.60$, *ns*.[4] Significant Nationalist Ideology × Perceived Discrimination ($\beta = −.16$, partial $R^2 = .01$, $p < .10$) and Public Regard × Perceived Discrimination ($\beta = .16$, partial $R^2 = .02$, $p < .05$) interactions were found for how bothered participants were by the events. The overall model explained 60% of the variance, $F(21, 257) = 17.07$, $p < .01$, in the extent to which individuals were bothered by perceived racial discrimination at Time 2. To examine the nature of the significant interactions, we centered the variables of interest and plotted the association between perceived racial discrimination and the extent bothered by discrimination for high and low levels of nationalist ideology and public regard (Aiken & West, 1991). As Figure 1 indicates, the relationship between the perceived discrimination and extent bothered by discrimination was stronger for individuals with lower levels of endorsement of a nationalist ideology. The nature of the interaction suggests that higher levels of nationalist ideology helps to buffer the impact of perceiving more discrimination on how much it bothered individuals. With respect to public regard, the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and the extent to which it bothered the individual was stronger for those individuals who felt that other groups hold more positive attitudes toward Blacks (see Figure 2). Thus, holding beliefs that other groups have negative attitudes toward Blacks buffered the impact of perceived racial discrimination on the extent to which participants were bothered by discrimination.

Lastly, a hierarchical OLS regression model was run to determine whether racial identity, perceived racial discrimination, and

their interactions predict subsequent levels of psychological distress (see Table 6). In the first block, gender, institutional dummy variables, individuals' level of psychological distress at Time 1, the extent to which individuals were bothered by discrimination at Time 1, and perceived racial discrimination at Time 1 were entered as control variables. The first block of variables as a whole explained 52% of the variance in psychological distress at Time 2, $F(6, 262) = 46.77$, $p < .01$. Psychological distress at Time 1 ($\beta = .70$, partial $R^2 = .49$, $p < .01$) and bothered by discrimination at Time 1 ($\beta = .12$, partial $R^2 = .02$; $p < .05$) were the only significant predictors in the first block of variables, indicating a degree of stability in psychological distress. The second block of variables consisted of main effects for the racial identity variables as well as the perceived frequency of racial discrimination at Time 2. The second block of variables as a group explained an additional 4% of the variance, $F(8, 262) = 2.34$, $p < .05$. Frequency of racial discrimination at Time 2 ($\beta = .25$, partial $R^2 = .05$, $p < .01$) was the only significant predictor of psychological distress at Time 2 from the second block of variables. None of the racial identity variables demonstrated a significant main effect relationship. Individuals who reported experiencing discrimination more frequently at Time 2 reported an increase in levels of psychological distress at Time 2.

The third block of variables consisted of interactions between the seven racial identity variables and perceived racial discrimination at Time 2. The block of interactions as a whole did not explain a significant increase in the variance of change in psychological distress at Time 2 ($R^2 = .01$), $F(7, 262) = 1.11$, *ns*. However, the Nationalist × Perceived Discrimination interaction was a significant predictor ($\beta = −.21$, partial $R^2 = .02$, $p < .05$). The overall model explained 57% of the variance, $F(21, 262) = 15.23$, $p < .01$, of the psychological distress at Time 2. Using the same techniques as in the previous model, we plotted the Nationalist × Perceived Discrimination interaction. As illustrated in Figure 3, the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and psychological distress was weaker for individuals who more strongly endorsed a nationalist ideology. Thus, as in the previous model, a greater endorsement of a nationalist ideology seems to buffer the deleterious influence of perceiving racial discrimination more frequently.

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[4] Although some authors advocate the position that one should not interpret a regression beta unless the overall model or, in this case, block of variables are significant (J. Cohen & Cohen, 1983), others argue that it is perfectly acceptable to interpret the betas in such an instance (see Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1985, for an in-depth discussion). The rationale for using the omnibus test as an initial decision rule is to reduce the potential for Type 1 error. However, in doing so, you also increase the probability of increasing Type 2 error. Because these analyses represent an exploration of the potential relationships between the Racial Identity × Discrimination interaction terms, we felt that the latter approach to interpreting significant betas with nonsignificant betas was the most appropriate. In this same vein, we are using $p < .10$ as criteria for significance with respect to the interaction terms. Again, we believe that the exploratory nature of our study justifies a less conservative approach. The ideal protection against Type 1 error without necessarily the artificial inflation of the possibility of Type 2 error is the replication of the present findings in another sample.

Table 5
*Hierarchical Regression of Racial Identity Variables at Time 1, Perceived Discrimination at
Time 2, and Control Variables Predicting Extent Bothered by Discrimination at Time 2*

Variable	Block 1 b	Block 2 b	Block 3 b
Constant	0.84	−0.51	0.31
Gender	−.11 (.13)	.06 (.12)	.05 (.12)
Institution 1	−.04 (.16)	.03 (.14)	−.02 (.14)
Institution 2	.24 (.16)	.19 (.15)	.14 (.15)
Psychological distress Time 1	.09 (.06)	.11† (.06)	.11† (.06)
Bothered by discrimination Time 1	.59** (.10)	.55** (.06)	.53** (.06)
Perceived discrimination Time 1	.07 (.10)	−.33** (.10)	−.30** (.10)
Centrality	—	.00 (.06)	−.14 (.11)
Assimilationist	—	.02 (.09)	.06 (.19)
Humanist	—	.04 (.08)	.11 (.18)
Minority	—	−.09 (.07)	−.33* (.16)
Nationalist	—	.01 (.07)	.24 (.16)
Private regard	—	.10 (.09)	.18 (.21)
Public regard	—	.04 (.06)	−.21 (.13)
Perceived discrimination Time 2	—	.76** (.09)	.33 (.92)
Centrality × Frequency	—	—	.09 (.07)
Assimilationist × Frequency	—	—	−.02 (.13)
Humanist × Frequency	—	—	−.08 (.10)
Minority × Frequency	—	—	.16 (.10)
Nationalist × Frequency	—	—	−.16† (.09)
Private Regard × Frequency	—	—	−.04 (.12)
Public Regard × Frequency	—	—	.16* (.08)
Block 1 R^2	.44**	—	—
Block 2 R^2	—	.14**	—
Block 3 R^2	—	—	.02
Total R^2	.44**	.58**	.60**

Note. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses. Dashes in cells mean the category is not applicable because the variable was not entered into the model.
† $p < .10$.   * $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

The findings reported here indicate that some dimensions of racial identity trigger the extent to which African Americans perceive negative incidents in their daily lives as racial discrimination. Additionally, some dimensions of racial identity protect African Americans from the negative psychological consequences associated with perceived racial discrimination. Specifically, our results show that the significance of one's group to the self-concept (i.e., racial centrality/group identification) is positively associated with how much discrimination individuals indicate they have experienced. At the same time, the meaning and affect (i.e., racial ideology and public regard) associated with one's racial group seem to protect individuals from the negative mental health consequences of perceived discrimination. Together, these findings illustrate that what could make people appear to be vigilant for discrimination may also buffer them from the adverse consequences.

Perceived Discrimination

Individuals in our sample reported experiencing racial discrimination in frequencies that are nontrivial. More than half of the sample reported that they had experienced at least 13 racial hassles in the past year. The most frequently reported racial hassles seem to involve strangers who did not have much contact with our participants (e.g., being ignored, overlooked, not given service; treated rudely or disrespectfully; others reacting to you as if they were afraid or intimidated). The least frequently reported racial hassles seem to involve more direct and overt contact with our participants (e.g., being mistaken for someone who serves others; being laughed at, made fun of, or taunted; being insulted, called a name, or harassed). African American men reported experiencing racial discrimination more frequently than women did. On one hand, we were surprised by this finding because gender differences
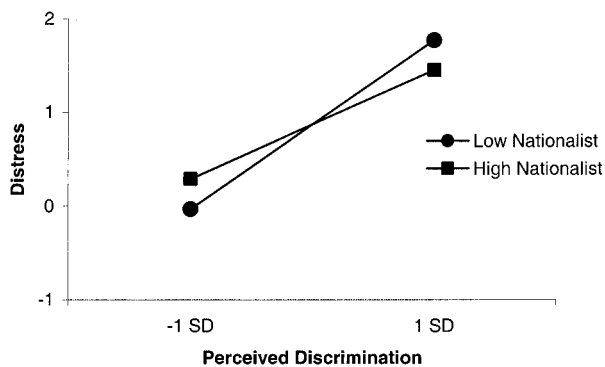

Figure 1. The relationship between perceived discrimination and bothered by discrimination by level of endorsement of a nationalist ideology.
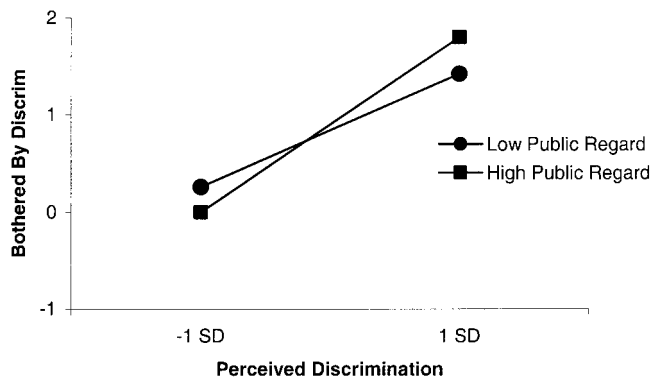
Figure 2. The relationship between perceived discrimination and bothered by discrimination by level of public regard attitudes. Discrim = discrimination.

have not typically been found in studies that have examined perceived racial discrimination (e.g., Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). On the other hand, our gender difference finding is consistent with social dominance theory, which suggests that for evolutionary reasons, males are more likely than females to be the targets of racial discrimination (Sidanius & Veniegas, 2000). Additionally, researchers have argued that the stereotypes that the broader so-

ciety holds for African Americans are gendered and focus primarily on men (King, 1988). As a result, other groups may be more likely to react toward African American men in a more discriminatory manner. Clearly, more research is needed to reconcile the inconsistencies among the findings and theoretical accounts.

Consistent with past research, our findings indicate that racial centrality/group identification is positively associated with perceived racial discrimination. Specifically, we found that the more important being Black is to African Americans, the more racial discrimination they indicated they had personally experienced in the past year. Contrary to our predictions, racial ideology and public regard were not related to perceived racial discrimination when these variables were examined in the multivariate analyses along with racial centrality. Bivariate relationships, however, revealed that racial ideology is significantly related to perceived racial discrimination. Specifically, the more that individuals endorsed a nationalist racial ideology, the more racial discrimination they reported experiencing in the past year. Additionally, the more that individuals endorsed a humanist racial ideology, the less racial discrimination they reported experiencing in the last year. These data lend partial support to the notion that racial ideology is related to perceived discrimination. Future research using cluster analytic approaches that take an individual-centered approach may identify racial identity profiles that are more or less vulnerable to perceiving racial discrimination. Such an approach may better capture

Table 6

Hierarchical Regression of Racial Identity Variables at Time 1, Perceived Discrimination at Time 2, and Control Variables Predicting Psychological Distress at Time 2

Variable	Block 1 *b*	Block 2 *b*	Block 3 *b*
Constant	−0.05	−1.14	−1.41
Gender	−.08 (.09)	.00 (.10)	−.01 (.10)
Institution 1	−.09 (.12)	−.10 (.12)	−.16 (.12)
Institution 2	.01 (.12)	−.05 (.12)	−.11 (.12)
Psychological distress Time 1	.70** (.04)	.73** (.05)	.73** (.05)
Bothered by discrimination Time 1	.12* (.05)	.09† (.05)	.09† (.05)
Perceived discrimination Time 1	−.11 (.07)	−.24** (.08)	−.21* (.08)
Centrality	—	.04 (.05)	.05 (.09)
Assimilationist	—	.00 (07)	.03 (.16)
Humanist	—	.06 (.07)	.19 (15)
Minority	—	−.02 (.06)	.01 (.13)
Nationalist	—	−.04 (.06)	.18 (.13)
Private regard	—	.09 (.08)	−.09 (.17)
Public regard	—	.02 (.05)	−.07 (.11)
Perceived discrimination Time 2	—	.25** (.07)	.53 (.77)
Centrality × Frequency	—	—	.00 (.05)
Assimilationist × Frequency	—	—	.00 (.11)
Humanist × Frequency	—	—	−.11 (.09)
Minority × Frequency	—	—	−.01 (.08)
Nationalist × Frequency	—	—	−.16* (.08)
Private Regard × Frequency	—	—	.12 (.10)
Public Regard × Frequency	—	—	.06 (.06)
Block 1 R^2	.52**	—	—
Block 2 R^2	—	.04*	—
Block 3 R^2	—	—	.01
Total R^2	.52**	.56**	.57**

Note. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses. Dashes in cells mean the category is not applicable because the variable was not entered into the model.
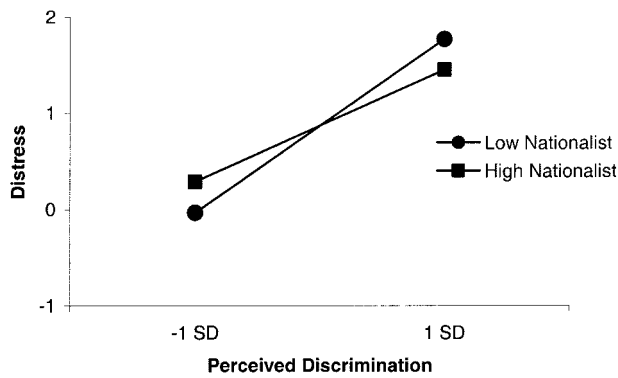
† $p < .10$.   * $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.

Figure 3. The relationship between perceived discrimination and psychological distress by level of endorsement of a nationalist ideology.

the multidimensional complexity of racial identity within individuals. Nonetheless, the present findings provide added support to other studies (e.g., Operario & Fiske, 2001; Shelton & Sellers, 2000) that suggest racial identification predicts perceived racial discrimination.

Consequences of Perceived Discrimination

The present results indicate that perceiving racial discrimination more frequently results in more negative psychological outcomes at both the event-specific and global levels of psychological distress. In their own appraisals of the impact of the events, participants reported that, on average, the occurrence of each instance of perceived discrimination bothered them. The significant relationship between individuals' self-report perceived experiences with racial discrimination and levels of psychological distress found in both our bivariate and multivariate analyses is consistent with the participants' appraisals of the impact of the events. These findings are consistent with several other studies demonstrating the negative impact of perceived discrimination on mental health (e.g., Kessler et al., 1999; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). However, because of the longitudinal nature of our data and the statistical procedures used, the present findings move us closer to believing that the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and psychological distress is unidirectional with perceived racial discrimination causing greater psychological distress. It should be noted that while perceived discrimination was related to changes in subsequent distress (both event-specific and global), neither distress measure was related to changes in the frequency of subsequent perceived racial discrimination (see Figure 4).

As predicted, racial ideology moderated the negative relationship between perceived discrimination and psychological distress. Specifically, individuals who endorsed a nationalist ideology were buffered from the negative impact of perceived racial discrimination at event-specific and global distress levels. Likewise, public racial regard moderated the perceived discrimination/psychological distress relationship. Individuals who believed that other groups perceived African Americans negatively (i.e., low public regard) were buffered from the negative impact of perceived discrimination on the global indicator of psychological distress. These findings provide empirical support to the accumulating theoretical work that suggests that individual differences protect

ethnic minorities from the deleterious impact of racism (see Crocker & Major, 1989; Major et al., in press). More important, however, these findings suggest that the protective property of racial identity is not just a result of group identification (see Branscombe et al., 1999) but extends to other components of racial identity. In fact, our findings suggest that, if racial centrality (i.e., group identification), racial ideology, and racial regard are considered simultaneously in a model to predict the mental health consequences of perceived discrimination, group identification does not protect individuals from the adverse outcomes. This suggests that it is not just how identified one is with the group, as previous research has indicated, but the meaning one places on what it is to be a member of the group that protects individuals from the negative consequence. That is, people's ideologies about who Black people are, how they should behave, how they are treated, and so forth helps shape how they respond psychologically to perceived racial discrimination. Some individuals (e.g., those who endorse a nationalist ideology and those who have low public regard) see the world in terms of other people treating African Americans negatively because of their race. When these individ-
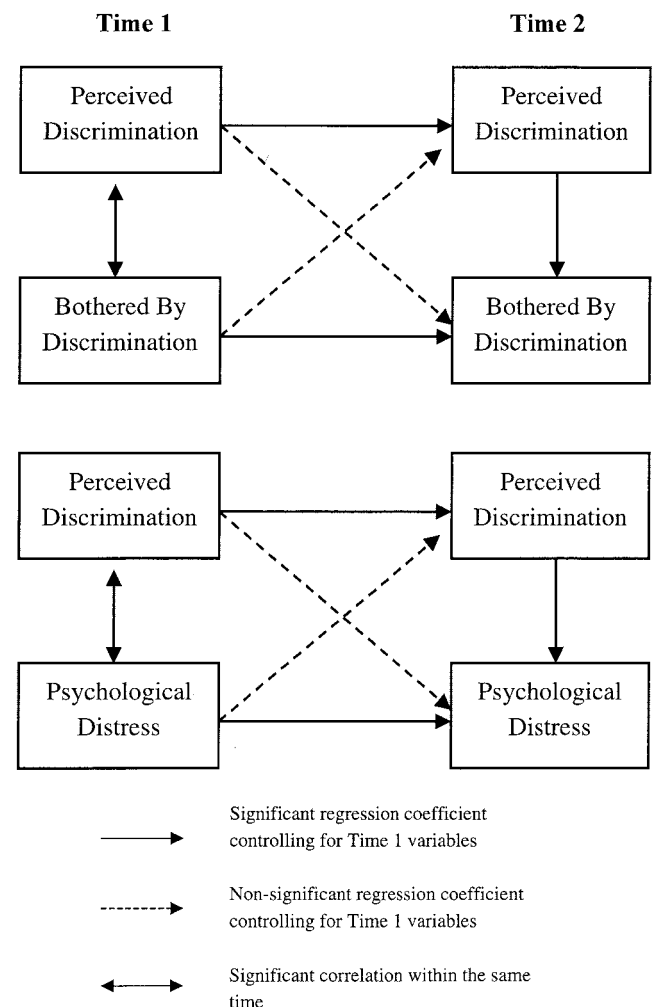

Figure 4. Pictorial representation of relationships between discrimination and mental health variables across time.

uals encounter such negative behavior in their lives, they are not as psychologically taxed in the same way that others may be taxed. One reason why they may be protected is that their beliefs about the way in which the world works for African Americans is consistent with their personal experiences of discrimination (Sellers et al., 2001). As a result, experiencing racial hassles may not be unexpected or novel, and thus may be less stressful for individuals with these racial beliefs (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Research in the coping literature has suggested that being able to make meaning of even the most horrendous events can reduce some individuals' psychological distress (e.g., Davis, Wortman, Lehman, & Silver, 2000). It is possible that a nationalist racial ideology may help some individuals make meaning of events that they experience as racial discrimination.

It is important to stress that we are not arguing that feeling as if one has been discriminated against does not have negative consequences for African Americans who endorse a nationalist ideology or have low public regard. The consequences of perceived racial discrimination may take on other forms for these groups. For instance, these individuals may be more angered by the events or affected in an unconscious manner. There also may be psychophysiological consequences of perceived racial discrimination that may or may not be buffered by a nationalist ideology or a belief that other groups hold Blacks in low regard. There is growing evidence of a link between perceived racial discrimination and cardiovascular responses (e.g., Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002; Krieger & Sidney, 1996). Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, and Zimmerman (in press) found that perceived racial discrimination was related to mental health through multiple pathways and that racial identity attitudes only moderated the pathway through stress. Future research needs to address the extent to which there are other psychological consequences that were not measured in the current research as well as whether racial identity serves as a buffer in those cases.

In the current work, we examined both event-specific (e.g., How does this affect me now?) and global (e.g., How does this affect my overall mental health?) consequences of perceived racial discrimination. We found that perceived racial discrimination takes a toll on African Americans at the time of the event and much later as well. More important, different dimensions of racial identity play a role in shaping these experiences. Recent work by Sellers et al. (in press) suggested that examining the two different levels of mental health consequences may shed light on the mediating processes involved in the discrimination–mental health link. Sellers et al. (in press) found evidence that individuals' levels of perceived stress mediated the relationship between experiences with racial discrimination and indicators of mental health in a sample of African American young adults. Using structural equation modeling, they found that reporting more experiences with discrimination was associated with higher levels of perceived stress, which, in turn, was associated with poorer mental health outcomes. Clearly more studies are needed that investigate the role of some of the other processes related to stress (e.g., cognitive appraisal and coping) in the way in which individuals' experiences with racial discrimination influences their mental health (see Feldman-Barrett & Swim, 1998). It is possible that some individuals spend more time thinking about race and perhaps racial discrimination. As a result, these individuals may develop a more varied and sophisticated repertoire of coping skills for dealing with

racial discrimination than someone who has not spent as much time thinking about the meaning of race (Sellers et al., 2001). Future work is needed that includes the role of racial coping in studies investigating racial identity, perceived racial discrimination, and mental health.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this research that need to be addressed. Our use of self-report frequencies of experiences with racial hassles to operationalize racial discrimination raises several interesting questions. For instance, there may be some concern regarding the accuracy of individuals' perceptions of how frequently they experienced discrimination over the past year. It is possible that individuals may have provided educated guesses regarding the frequency with which they experienced the racial hassles as opposed to actually recalling and counting each event. Unfortunately, it is impossible for us to know to what extent this is the case in the present study given the methodology used. We are buoyed by the fact that our findings are consistent with findings from experience sampling procedures (see Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). Also, the consistency of the relationships between perceived discrimination and the mental health outcomes that were measured at a subsequent period of time suggests that whatever inaccuracies may be in participants' reports of the frequency of discrimination is systematic. By accounting for the effects of individuals' previous reports of discrimination, our analyses are also accounting for the systematic individual differences that may lead to these inaccuracies in reports of perceived racial discrimination. Nonetheless, future studies may want to include daily diary methods in research on experiences with racial discrimination to reduce the need for retrospective reports (see Swim et al., 2001, for diary studies involving women's experiences with gender discrimination).

The racial hassle measure used in the present study requires individuals to make assessments regarding whether race plays an important role in the event (Kanner, Coyne, Schaeffer, & Lazarus, 1981). As a result, personality characteristics may play an important role in determining how an individual interprets events. This may raise questions regarding the veracity of the discrimination experienced. Such questions are at the heart of what constitutes racial discrimination. Just as Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argued that stress is best studied from a phenomenological perspective, we believe that researchers must be willing to take a phenomenological approach to studying experiences of racial discrimination. We acknowledge that the individual who perceives that he or she is being discriminated against and the person who is perceived as doing the discrimination may differ in their interpretations of the situation. We argue, however, that to understand prejudice from the target's perspective, we have to be willing to allow the target to indicate what is and is not considered racial discrimination. We believe that in the case of racial hassles, it is the target's subjective experience of the hassle that is most likely to impact the target's psychological well being.

Our recognition of the subjective nature of individuals' self-reported experiences with racial hassles does not mean that these subjective interpretations are inaccurate. In most of the lab studies on discrimination, the experimenters control whether the participant experiences discrimination. Little research has focused on

whether individuals react differently to African Americans with varying characteristics (cf. Shelton, 2000). While our finding that high-race-central individuals report experiencing more racial hassles suggests that an attributional process underlies the relationship, it is also possible that other people react to high-race-central individuals differently. Preliminary data by Shelton (2002) suggested that, in interracial interactions, Whites are more positive toward Blacks who are less identified with their group than they are toward Blacks who are more identified with their group. This is a provocative finding that suggests that highly identified African Americans may be correct in their higher levels of perceived discrimination. That is, they are the targets of more negative racial incidents than their low identified peers. Additionally, this suggests that Whites may be picking up cues from more highly identified African Americans, which results in Whites reacting in more negative ways toward these African Americans. Clearly more research is needed that examines the processes that underlie the relationship between African Americans' level of racial identification and perceived racial discrimination. This research must not focus solely on the attributional process of the African American targets or the racial attitudes of the perpetrator, but must also focus on the interaction among the two (Shelton, 2000).

One final concern regarding the present study is that there may be an important third variable, such as neuroticism, that may account for the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and psychological distress. Unfortunately, the present study did not include such a measure and thus is unable to test that alternative explanation empirically. Although we believe that by controlling for the stability in perceptions of racial discrimination, we have also in part accounted for individual differences that may impact psychological distress, future studies should include measures of such personality characteristics to actually test whether these characteristics help to explain the relationship. These studies must be careful not to prematurely dismiss the individuals' reports of experiences with racial discrimination if they do find that a third variable such as neuroticism explains away the link between discrimination and psychological distress. It is important that these studies also test for possible mediating relationships in which individuals' experiences with racial discrimination may lead to increased levels of neuroticism which, in turn, may lead to psychological distress. In any event, the present study provides a strong foundation for future research to build upon in understanding the role of racial identity in the relationship between racial discrimination and psychological distress in African Americans.

Final Thoughts

Our results as a whole show the complexity of the role of various dimensions of racial identity beliefs in the way in which perceived racial discrimination impacts the mental health of African Americans. Both the significance and the meaning that African Americans place on race were associated with whether and how they experienced racial discrimination. Dimensions of racial identity seem to serve as both a risk factor for perceiving racial discrimination and a protective factor against the deleterious impact of this discrimination on subsequent psychological distress. As researchers, we must use research designs and analytic strategies that allow for more accurate modeling of the complexity of racial identity in African Americans' lives. Although the psychol-

ogy literature has traditionally viewed ethnic minorities simply as victims of stigma and racial discrimination (cf. Sellers et al., 1998), we must begin to also examine the ways in which they are resilient and able to live normal lives in the face of such racial discrimination. In doing so, not only will we potentially gain a better understanding of the antecedents and consequences of perceived racial discrimination, but we will also provide a more accurate picture of the resilience and humanity of African Americans.

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