

## **The Influence of Racial Identity Profiles on the Relationship Between Racial Discrimination and Depressive Symptoms**

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*This study examined the association between racial identity profiles, discrimination, and mental health outcomes. African American college students (N = 194) completed measures of racial discrimination, racial identity, college hassles, and depressive symptoms. Four meaningful profiles emerged through a cluster analysis of seven dimensions of racial identity assessed using the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI). Results suggested racial identity moderates the relation between discrimination and depressive symptoms. Students whose racial identity profile involves the goal of blending with the mainstream and focusing on shared human qualities rather than race as a core ideological concept had a significantly stronger association between racial discrimination and depressive symptoms. The results hold implications for investigating the experience of racial discrimination and conceptualization of racial identity.*

**Keywords:** *racial discrimination; racial identity; depressive symptoms; college students; African Americans*

Within the past two decades, research on the effects of discrimination on mental health has increased. These studies have found that increased exposure to discrimination is related to increased reporting of psychiatric problems, in particular, depression and depressive symptoms (Comas-Diaz & Greene, 1995; Essed, 1991; Fernando, 1984; Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999; Noh, Beiser, Kaspar, Hou, & Rummens, 1999; Ren, Amick, & Williams, 1999; Salgado de Snyder, 1987). Subsequently, the field has progressed from

assessing the frequency of experiences of discrimination across racial and ethnic populations to understanding personality factors that influence the experience and outcomes associated with discriminatory events. In particular, racial identity has been proposed as an influential construct in the experience of racial discrimination (Crocker & Major, 1989; Harrell, 2000; Neblett, Shelton, & Sellers, 2004; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003).

Recent research has found that different dimensions of racial identity influence the experience of discrimination. The purpose of the present study is to build on the current theoretical and empirical knowledge regarding the association of discrimination and depressive symptoms and to investigate how racial identity may moderate this relationship in African American students. In addition, this study examines distinct dimensions of racial identity simultaneously using a profile-oriented analytical approach rather than separate variables, which has been the methodology of much of the previous research.

College represents a developmental period that is significant for the awareness and process of identity formation (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968). In fact, research has found that higher education spurs worldview exploration as it is a time to evaluate and develop an understanding of norms and beliefs separate from those endorsed by parents (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This distinct period of semiautonomous individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 has been conceptualized as emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) and offers increased opportunity for identity exploration. In this study, African American college students' perspectives on racial identity, discrimination, and mental health are investigated.

## **RACIAL DISCRIMINATION**

Racial discrimination is defined as differential treatment on the basis of race (National Research Council [NRC], 2004). Recent research has highlighted that discrimination has changed over the past several decades and is now less overt (e.g., being ignored/overlooked while waiting in line, being mistaken for someone who serves others) than earlier forms of discrimination (e.g., lynching, being denied service at a restaurant; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998; Essed, 1991; Harrell, 2000; Pettigrew, 1998). However, even less overt incidents may

