

ABSTRACT

The Impact of Racial Microaggressions and Major Discriminatory Events on Mental Health

by
Florence Lui

Chair: Deidre Anglin, Ph.D.

The current study, a secondary data analysis, sought to determine the number and nature of latent groups for experiences of spectrum racial discrimination (i.e., both major and microaggressive racial discrimination) in a sample of emerging adults from a people of color (POC)-majority public university setting in the United States, and to understand the role of socio-demographic variables in defining each Group. In addition, the study aimed to ascertain the extent to which endorsing spectrum racial discrimination experiences predicted anxiety and/or depression above the effects of general, non-race-related stress. Finally, the analyses gauged the mediating and/or moderating role of coping in the relation between racism experiences and anxiety and/or depression.

Latent class analysis (Collins & Lanza, 2010) revealed two distinct groups of spectrum racial discrimination experiences: participants tended to either experience little to no racism or some racism. Blacks were more likely than Whites to belong to the Racism group. Belonging to the Racism group predicted both anxiety and depression above and beyond the effects of perceived stress. Results indicated neither a mediation nor moderation model of coping, but did reveal an association between coping and depression scores: active coping in response to racial discrimination was correlated with lower depression scores when compared with passive coping.

Awareness of the mental health effects of both everyday and major racial discrimination may help clinicians and educators better understand the experiences of young adults of color. Future efforts to clarify the role of complex intersecting identities in endorsing racism

experiences and subsequent psychological distress may aid in more individualized approach to treating race-based stress and trauma.

Keywords: racial microaggressions, major discrimination, racism, race-based traumatic stress, anxiety, depression

