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## School and Neighborhood Contexts, Perceptions of Racial Discrimination, and Psychological Well-being Among African American Adolescents

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### Abstract

The present study examined contextual influences on the relationship between racial discrimination (individual, cultural, and collective/institutional) and psychological well-being. Two hundred and fifty two African American adolescents (46% male and 54% female, average age = 16) completed measures of racial discrimination, self-esteem, depressive symptoms and life satisfaction. Archival information regarding the racial/ethnic composition of the participants' neighborhoods and schools was used and increased school diversity was linked to increased perceptions of cultural discrimination. Regardless of school and neighborhood diversity, high perceptions of collective/institutional discrimination were linked to lower self-esteem for students in high diversity settings. Further, high levels of collective/institutional discrimination were associated with lower life satisfaction for African American youth in low diversity settings.

### Keywords

African American; Adolescents; Racial discrimination; Psychological well-being; Neighborhood context; School context

### Introduction

Racial discrimination is negatively linked to a variety of developmental indicators for minority youth (Swanson et al. 2003; Garcia Coll et al. 1996), such as decreased self-esteem and increased depressive symptoms (Fisher et al. 2000; Wong et al. 2003). Interestingly, research suggests that context makes a difference for how likely one is to experience racial discrimination (Gee 2002; Gee et al. 2007). For example, African American college students in desegregated settings reported fewer incidents of interpersonal racial discrimination (Postmes and Branscombe 2002). Although theoretical formulations suggest that discrimination comes from various sources, previous empirical research has employed

measures of racial discrimination that focus primarily on interpersonal experiences with a few exceptions (e.g., Fisher et al. 2000).

In the present study, we utilize the Integrative Model as the theoretical framework for examining perceptions of racial discrimination and contextual influences among African American adolescents. The Integrative Model proposes that American society stratifies individuals on the basis of social position variables, such as race, ethnicity, social class and gender (Garcia Coll et al. 1996). Racial discrimination is proposed to operate at the macro level through the creation of segregated contexts, which includes residential, social and psychological dimensions that directly influence developmental pathways for youth of color (Garcia Coll et al. 1996). Additionally, racial discrimination is a normative and frequent occurrence for children and adolescents of color (Garcia Coll et al. 1996). Thus, social position variables, racial discrimination, and the resulting segregated contexts are believed to increase negative outcomes and reduce positive outcomes for children and adolescents of color (Garcia Coll et al. 1996). Our initial goal was to examine how the racial diversity in schools and neighborhoods influence perceptions of racial discrimination among African American youth. We were also interested in examining whether the racial diversity of an adolescents' context moderates the relationship between perceptions of racial discrimination and psychological well-being.

### Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination consists of dominant group members' actions that have a differential and negative effect on subordinate racial/ethnic groups (Feagin and Eckberg 1980). It has been suggested that racial discrimination is a normative and pervasive experience for minority youth (Garcia Coll et al. 1996). Consistent with this proposition, previous research has indicated that the majority of preadolescent African Americans reported experiencing at least one discriminatory experience in their lifetime (Gibbons et al. 2004), in the past year (Guthrie et al. 2002), and in the past three months (Prelow et al. 2004). Previous empirical research also indicates that the majority of African American youth reported feeling harassed, being perceived as unintelligent or being wrongly disciplined because they were African American (Fisher et al. 2000; Rosenbloom and Way 2004). Unfortunately, not only is discrimination a normative experience for African American youth, it has also been consistently linked with poorer outcomes. In a multi-ethnic sample of adolescents, Greene et al. (2006) found that perceived discrimination from peers and adults was associated with lower self-esteem and increased depressive symptoms over a three-year period. Additional research has shown that perceptions of racial discrimination were linked to increased depressive symptoms and increased conduct problems over time among rural African American youth (Brody et al. 2006).

Yet, one limitation of previous research is the absence of research utilizing multidimensional measures of perceived discrimination. Theoretical formulations suggest that racial discrimination is multidimensional with four distinct types. *Individual racism* consists of personal and degrading actions experienced by minorities, which promote the belief that they are inferior (Jones 1997). *Cultural racism* occurs when the beliefs and practices of the dominant group are regarded as superior to those of subordinate groups (Jones 1997).

*Institutionalized racism* constitutes differential access to societal goods, services, and opportunities, which results in racial inequities for minority group members (Jones 1997; Rosenbloom and Way 2004). Institutionalized racism has been linked to segregated contexts or environments (i.e., neighborhoods and schools) which result in differential access to opportunities and resources (Garcia Coll et al. 1996). *Collective racism* occurs when dominant group members work to restrict or deny minority group members their basic rights and privileges (Essed 1991). Using the multidimensional paradigm, Fisher et al. (2000) examined the effect of institutions, educational contexts, and peers as sources of racial discrimination among a multi-ethnic sample of adolescents. The results indicated that African American youth reported more institutional and educational discrimination than their non-Hispanic white counterparts, and that discrimination in educational and peer contexts was associated with more distress and lower self-esteem (Fisher et al. 2000). Previous research also indicates that perceptions of individual and institutional discrimination were differentially linked to academic performance. Specifically, perceptions of individual discrimination were linked to school importance, whereas perceptions of institutional discrimination were linked to grade point average among African American adolescents (Chavous et al. 2008). Wong et al. (2003) conducted a study of African American adolescents' perceptions of individual discrimination from peers and teachers and the results indicated that perceptions of peer and teacher discrimination were negatively associated with self-esteem and positively associated with depression (Wong et al. 2003). Thus, distinct types of racial discrimination may differentially influence the psychological well-being of African American youth.

### **The Role of Context**

While research has found a consistent link between experiences of discrimination and well-being, the role of context is less clear. In particular, schools and neighborhoods are important contexts for adolescent development (Jessor 1993) that deserve further consideration. It has been suggested that segregation is a prominent characteristic that results in distinct ecological environments for children and adolescents of color (Garcia Coll et al. 1996). Segregation refers to the physical separation of the races by enforced residence in restricted areas (Williams and Collins 2001). Levels of residential segregation remain very high for African Americans in that most African Americans live in racially segregated neighborhoods (Williams and Collins 2004). An empirical association between racial segregation and perceptions of racial discrimination has been demonstrated. For example, a curvilinear relationship between perceived discrimination and the racial composition among African American adults has been reported (Welch et al. 2001). Specifically, perceptions of discrimination increased as census tracts approached 50% African American, but perceptions of discrimination decreased with racial compositions greater than 50% African American (Welch et al. 2001). Similarly, perceptions of racial discrimination were highest in block groups where African American women were the minority and lowest in block groups where African Americans were the majority (Hunt et al. 2007). These findings suggest that African Americans may perceive more incidents of discrimination in diverse contexts or contexts where they are in the minority. Furthermore, perceptions of discrimination may decrease among African Americans in settings in which they are the majority.

Accordingly, high school education remains highly segregated for African American adolescents (Orfield and Eaton 1996), such that the average African American child attends a school that is 57% African American (Logan 2002). While there is no research examining the effects of residential segregation on adolescent perceptions of discrimination, there has been some research on the effects of educational contexts. Specifically, research on African American adults and college students has indicated that those in segregated settings perceive more discrimination than those in desegregated settings (Postmes and Branscombe 2002). Among adolescents, research suggests that school and classroom ethnic composition are important for feelings of peer victimization, loneliness, and self-worth (Juvonen et al. 2006). Greater ethnic diversity in the classroom was associated with lower levels of peer victimization and higher self-worth; while more diversity at the school level also predicted lower levels of peer victimization (Juvonen et al. 2006). Research suggests that more diverse environments may be associated with more positive outcomes due to the balance of power among ethnic groups (Graham 2006).

Despite the burgeoning research on perceptions of racial discrimination and contextual influences, a few limitations are noted. The first limitation concerns the lack of empirical research assessing the multidimensionality of racial discrimination among adolescent samples. With the exception of a few studies examining individual and institutional discrimination (e.g., Fisher et al. 2000; Chavous et al. 2008), prior research has utilized one-dimensional measures of perceived discrimination. Given that the findings suggest that distinct indicators of racial discrimination are differentially linked to psychological well-being and educational outcomes, the multidimensional approach is necessary to understand how racial discrimination influences developmental outcomes among minority youth. The second limitation is the lack of empirical research examining contextual influences on adolescent perceptions of racial discrimination. Though prior research suggests that perceptions of discrimination increase in neighborhoods where African American adults are in the minority (Welch et al. 2001; Hunt et al. 2007), it is unclear if these relationships are similar for African American youth. Although previous research suggests that greater diversity in school settings is linked to lower levels of victimization among adolescent samples, (Juvonen et al. 2006), it is unknown if school diversity impacts adolescent perceptions of racial discrimination. The last limitation concerns the lack of research examining the role of neighborhood and school contexts in the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and psychological well-being. Given that theoretical formulations suggest that schools and neighborhoods are important contexts for youth (Jessor 1993) and that youth of color attend and reside in segregated schools and segregated neighborhoods (Garcia Coll et al. 1996), it is necessary to understand the moderating capacity of context in the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and psychological well-being among African American youth.

## The Current Study

The present study will enhance existing theoretical and empirical research on adolescent perceptions of racial discrimination. The utilization of multiple dimensions of racial discrimination and the inclusion of contextual factors like neighborhood and school afford an enhanced perspective on what influences perceptions of racial discrimination among

African American youth. The first hypothesis explores the relationship between racial diversity in schools and neighborhoods and perceptions of individual, cultural, institutional and collective racism. Based on previous research, we anticipate that perceptions of the four types of racial discrimination will be the greatest in neighborhood settings where African American youth are in the minority (Welch et al. 2001; Hunt et al. 2007). We also expect that perceptions of the four types of racial discrimination will be the greatest in school settings where African American youth are in the majority (Postmes and Branscombe 2002). The second hypothesis concerns the moderating influence of context on the relationship between racial discrimination and psychological well-being. In order to be consistent with prior research examining multiple types of racial discrimination among African American youth (Fisher et al. 2000; Wong et al. 2003), self-esteem, depressive symptoms and life satisfaction were examined as indicators of psychological well-being. It was of interest to assess whether neighborhood and school diversity alters the relationship between perceptions of racial discrimination and psychological well-being. Garcia Coll et al. (1996) suggest that youth of color are simultaneously enmeshed in multiple segregated contexts (i.e., racially segregated neighborhoods and schools). As such, a term was created that assesses the range in racial diversity for the adolescents' schools and neighborhoods, and we assessed whether perceived racial discrimination was linked to psychological well-being for African American youth in racially integrated settings compared to youth in racially segregated settings.

## Method

### Participants

The participants in this study were 252 urban African American adolescents ranging in age from 13 to 18. The sample was composed of 116 males (46%) and 136 females (54%) high school students with an average age of 16 ( $SD = 1.1$ ). As an indicator of family environment, the participants reported that their parent/guardian (usually the mother) was either married/cohabitating (56%), separated (9%), divorced (8%), never married (22%), or widowed (4%). The participants also reported that their parent/guardian had the following educational levels: less than a high school diploma (8%), high school diploma (45%), one year of college or an associate's degree (25%), a bachelor's degree (11%), or a graduate degree (8%).

### Procedure

The participants were recruited from high schools in a large, northeastern city. Approval was obtained from the school district and 51 public high schools were targeted for recruitment. The eight schools were selected on the basis of the principals' willingness to participate in the study. The principals identified specific classrooms where participants could be recruited, and these were visited by the researcher and assistants to explain the study and distribute parental consent forms. Participation in the study was granted only if parental consent forms were returned, and the response rate ranged from 30% to 60% per classroom with an average response rate of 45%. The administrations occurred in small groups in the school libraries. Prior to the administration of the questionnaire, the participants signed assent forms, which explained the study. The participants were reminded that their

participation was voluntary and that the results from their questionnaire would remain confidential. The interview time ranged from 30 to 60 min and upon completion, the participants were debriefed and allowed to ask questions. All of the administrators were African American female college students.

## Measures

**Demographic Information**—All adolescents completed questions requesting information about their gender, age, parental marital status, parental education level and place of residence.

**The Index of Race-Related Stress (IRRS)**—The IRRS is designed to assess perceived experiences of racial discrimination among African Americans (Ustey and Ponterotto 1996). The scale assesses lifetime prevalence with responses ranging from 0 (*this has never happened to me*) through 4 (*event happened and I was extremely upset*). The IRRS was developed and normed among African American adults, but previous psychometric analyses were conducted among African American adolescents. An exploratory factor analysis indicated that adolescent responses were consistent with a three-factor structure corresponding to individual, cultural and collective/institutional racism (Seaton 2003). A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted among another sample of African American adolescents. The results suggested that a three component oblique model provided the best fit to the data and three discernible factors were apparent: individual racism, cultural racism and collective/institutional racism (Seaton 2006). Given that the present sample also utilized African American adolescents, the three factor structure was utilized. The individual racism subscale ( $\alpha = .87$ ) contains 10 items and assesses the perception that dominant group members engage in behaviors that feel denigrating to minority group members. A sample item includes “White people have treated you as if you were stupid and needed things explained to you slowly or several times.” The cultural racism subscale ( $\alpha = .83$ ) contains nine items and assesses the perception that the cultural history and practices of the dominant group are considered superior to those of other groups. A sample item includes “You seldom hear or read anything good about Black people on radio, TV, newspapers, or in history books.” The collective/institutional racism subscale ( $\alpha = .84$ ) contains 13 items and assesses the perception that dominant group members’ negative attitudes are embedded in social institutions such as the educational system. A sample item includes “You think you did not receive a school award you deserved because you are Black.” Given that the responses for the IRRS combine frequency of discriminatory experiences and response to the discriminatory incidents, the responses were coded as 0 if event never happened or 1 if event happened regardless of response. Counts were computed so that scores indicate the number of incidents perceived by the participants regardless of reaction to discriminatory experiences, which is consistent with other research examining perceptions of discrimination among African American adolescents (Seaton et al. 2008).

**Neighborhood Diversity**—The racial diversity of the respondent’s neighborhood was assessed using data from the 2000 United States Census. Each respondent was asked to provide their current residential address, and this information was used to obtain the racial composition of the respondent’s block group. The block group was used because it is



considered to be the smallest and most precise unit of analysis for minimizing measurement error (Collins and Williams 1999). Employing methods described in Juvonen et al. (2006), the racial diversity of each student's neighborhood was computed based on information about the percentage of African American, Hispanic, White and Asian residents. Using information about the number of different racial/ethnic groups ( $g$ ) and the proportion of individuals ( $p$ ) who are members of each group ( $i$ ), the index ( $D_C$ ) provides an estimate of the relative probability that two randomly selected students are from different racial/ethnic groups:

$$D_C = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^g p_i^2$$

Higher scores indicate more diversity (range 0–1). Due to the small numbers of individuals belonging to the “Islander”, “Indigenous” and mixed race categories, these were omitted from the present analyses.

**School Diversity**—The racial diversity of each high school was assessed using archival data obtained from the school district. Using the same procedures described above for estimating neighborhood diversity, the racial diversity of each student's school was computed based on information about the percentage of African American, Hispanic, White and Asian students.

**Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale**—The Rosenberg Self-esteem scale is an assessment of self-acceptance (Rosenberg 1989). The 10-item Likert scale ( $\alpha = .85$ ) consists of rating items with responses ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). A sample item includes “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.” This scale has been found to be a valid and reliable measure among samples of African American adolescents (see Fitzpatrick et al. 2005; Seaton et al. 2008).

**Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression (CES-D) Scale**—The CES-D scale assesses the frequency of depressive symptoms experienced within the past week (Radloff 1977). The Likert scale ( $\alpha = .74$ ) consists of 20 items with responses ranging from 0 (*rarely*) to 3 (*most or all of the time*). A sample item includes “I did not feel like eating, my appetite was poor”, and higher scores are indicative of higher depressive symptoms. This scale has been found to be a valid and reliable measure among samples of African American adolescents (see Sellers et al. 2006; Yip et al. 2006).

**Satisfaction with Life Scale**—The Satisfaction with Life scale is a self-report measure that evaluates satisfaction with life (Pavot and Diener 1993). The Likert scale ( $\alpha = .81$ ) consists of 5 items with responses ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A sample item includes “In most ways my life is close to my ideal”, and higher scores indicate high life satisfaction levels. This scale has been found to be a valid and reliable measure among other African American adolescent samples (see Vera et al. 2008).

## Results

### Descriptives and Correlations

The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the study variables are presented in Table 1. The three dimensions of discrimination were positively correlated with each other. Moreover, individual and cultural discrimination were positively correlated with more school diversity, whereas individual and collective/institutional racism were positively associated with depressive symptoms. Collective/institutional racism was also negatively associated with self-esteem. As one might expect, school diversity, neighborhood diversity and the combined index of school and neighborhood diversity were all positively associated with one another. The three indices of psychological well-being were also associated with each other such that self-esteem had a positive association with life satisfaction and a negative association with depressive symptoms. Likewise, depressive symptoms had a negative association with life satisfaction.

### Diversity as a Predictor of Racial Discrimination

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to assess the relationship between diversity and experiences of racial discrimination. Perceptions of individual, cultural and collective/institutional racism were regressed separately on the diversity indices for school and neighborhood. Because research has found that demographic characteristics and psychological well-being are associated with perceptions of discrimination (e.g., Adams and Dressler 1988; Kessler et al. 1999), all analyses control for age, gender, parental marital status, parental educational level, self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and life satisfaction (Table 2). The results indicated that more diversity in a student's school was associated with increased perceptions of cultural racism (column 2). No other significant associations were found between school and neighborhood diversity for perceptions of individual, cultural or collective/institutional racism.

### Racial Segregation, Racial Discrimination and Psychological Well-being

The main effects of discrimination (individual, cultural or collective/institutional racism) on psychological outcomes (self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and life satisfaction) were examined with the interactive effects of context and discrimination (Table 3). Using multiple regression, demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, parental marital status, parental education level), the three sources of racial discrimination (i.e., individual, cultural or collective/institutional racism), the combined school and neighborhood diversity index,<sup>1</sup> and the interaction term for each source of discrimination with the combined school and neighborhood diversity index were used to predict each of the three psychological adjustment variables. The results suggested that higher perceptions of collective/institutional racism were associated with lower self esteem (column 1) and higher depressive symptoms (column 2). Moreover, there was an interaction of collective/institutional racism with diversity for both self-esteem and life satisfaction (Figs. 1, 2). Specifically, tests of simple

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<sup>1</sup>Because one of the main goals of this paper was to examine the interactive effects of diversity and sources of discrimination, the school and neighborhood diversity indices were averaged into a single score. An analysis testing all possible combinations of school and neighborhood diversity with each of the three dimensions of discrimination would have resulted in a less parsimonious regression model.



effects (Aiken and West 1991) for the self-esteem interaction (Fig. 1) indicate that while all levels of diversity were found to have a negative association between collective/institutional racism and self-esteem, the association was strongest for students in high diversity contexts ( $b = -.14$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p < .01$ ) weaker for students in low diversity contexts ( $b = -.10$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and weakest for students in moderately diverse settings ( $b = -.03$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Regardless of diversity level, all students reported that higher perceptions of collective/institutional racism were associated with poorer self-esteem but this effect was particularly strong for students in high diversity settings. As for the effects on life satisfaction, the only significant effect was observed for students in low diversity contexts ( $b = -.17$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and not for students in moderate and high diversity settings ( $b = -.03$ ,  $SE = .03$ , *n.s.*;  $b = -.01$ ,  $SE = .03$ , *n.s.*, respectively). That is, only students in low diversity settings reported that high levels of collective/institutional racism were associated with lower life satisfaction levels.

## Discussion

The results of the present study indicate that context influences adolescents' perceptions of racial discrimination but the influence depends on the specific context being examined. We find that as school diversity increases, perceptions of cultural racism increase among African American adolescents. There was a trend (marginally significant finding) for perceptions of individual racism such that as schools have lower percentages of African Americans and higher percentages of non African American youth, perceptions of racial discrimination increase among African American students. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that a lower composition of African Americans at the neighborhood level was linked to increased perceptions of racial discrimination among African American women (Hunt et al. 2007). We also find a trend linking neighborhood diversity with perceptions of cultural racism such that as neighborhoods have lower percentages of African Americans, youth report less perceptions of cultural racism. This finding is also consistent with previous research indicating that African American college students in desegregated settings perceived less racial discrimination than those in segregated settings (Postmes and Branscombe 2002). Considered together, although school and neighborhood diversity were positively related, they seem to operate in different ways to influence youth's perceptions of racial discrimination. Specifically, school diversity appears to be linked to increasing perceptions of individual racism whereas neighborhood diversity appears to be linked to decreasing perceptions of cultural racism among African American youth. We suggest that future research disentangle these relationships to assess what factors may be influencing the inverse relationships. For example, Welch et al. (2001) reported 50% as the tipping point for increasing and decreasing perceptions of racial discrimination among African American adults. As such, there may be distinct tipping points for school and neighborhood diversity among African American adolescents.

In addition to finding main effects of diversity for perceptions of discrimination, this study also finds that neighborhood and school context moderates the relationship between perceptions of collective/institutional racism and self-esteem. Specifically, a negative association between collective/institutional racism and self-esteem was evident for all diversity levels. Yet, this relationship was strongest for adolescents in racially integrated

neighborhoods and schools (i.e., high diversity contexts). This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that African American adolescents were more likely to feel victimized by institutional discrimination as opposed to individual discrimination (Fisher et al. 2000). However, the present study suggests that this relationship is strongest in school and neighborhood settings where African American youth are in the minority. One explanation for this finding may be the overall negative quality of interactions among the various racial/ethnic groups in high diversity settings, particularly schools. Prior research suggests that discrimination is maximized in evenly mixed racial contexts (Welch et al. 2001) and that greater school diversity was related to poorer perceptions of the general school climate among diverse adolescents (Benner et al. 2008). Thus, higher levels of diversity are associated with more perceived discrimination among youth. Additionally, ethnic minorities had less positive contact with European American friends than with friends of their same racial/ethnic background (Shelton and Richeson 2006). As such, the negative interactions among youth in diverse settings may result in perceptions of institutional discrimination being linked to reduced self-esteem. A second explanation is that high diversity settings may increase the likelihood that African American youth perceive unfair treatment from adults who symbolically represent institutions. For example, previous research indicates that urban African American and Latino youth perceived discriminatory treatment from adults such as teachers, police, and shopkeepers (Rosenbloom and Way 2004). Furthermore, African American youth reported a sharper increase in perceptions of racial discrimination from adults compared to their Asian American and Latino counterparts, and this increase was linked to accelerated depressive symptoms over time (Greene et al. 2006). Thus, high diversity contexts may provide more of an opportunity for African American youth to assess whether they are being treated differently by important adults in comparison to their peers of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. Lastly, high diversity contexts may not offer the same support as low diversity contexts for African American youth. Postmes and Branscombe (2002) indicated that being in more racially segregated contexts was associated with feelings of acceptance by other in-group members. Additional research indicates that African American students who experienced a decline in the percentage of other African American students reported a decrease in their feelings of belonging (Benner and Graham 2007). Consequently, African American youth may not feel as valued and protected in high diversity settings, which may explain why perceptions of institutional discrimination are linked to lowered self-esteem. Future research should consider whether the moderating capacity of context is influenced by the perpetrator (i.e., peers or adults) of discrimination in specific neighborhoods and schools among African American youth.

The current findings also suggest that high levels of collective/institutional racism were linked to lower life satisfaction among African American youth in racially segregated neighborhoods and schools, or low diversity settings. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that residential segregation was related to an elevated risk of adult and infant mortality among African Americans (Williams and Collins 2001). Yet, the present finding enhances previous research because it indicates that perceptions of institutional discrimination are linked to diminished life satisfaction for African American youth in racially homogenous settings. One explanation is that low diversity settings increase the

likelihood that African American youth perceive the diminished resources that may exist in their schools and neighborhoods. Theoretical work suggests that racial discrimination results in racially segregated contexts (i.e., neighborhoods and schools), and these segregated contexts reduce the quality of life for minority youth via inadequate schools, inadequate health facilities and inadequate neighborhood resources (Garcia Coll et al. 1996). It is possible that African American youths' subjective perceptions of their schools and neighborhoods are consistent with theoretical formulations that segregated contexts lack resources, which have implications for their livelihoods. The present finding suggests that African American youth may be attributing their specific contexts to the type of racial discrimination (collective/institutional racism) that results in their segregated contexts, which is negatively linked to their life satisfaction. In essence, there is consistency between adolescents' subjective perceptions of institutional discrimination, the resulting context and their life satisfaction.

An important contribution of the present study is an assessment of how multiple types of racial discrimination are linked to psychological well-being in multiple contexts. The majority of previous research on adolescent perceptions of racial discrimination has focused on one-dimensional measures of racial discrimination. Yet, the findings that school and neighborhood diversity are uniquely linked to distinct types of racial discrimination reinforces the need to utilize the multidimensional approach in order to understand how racial discrimination is linked to the psychological well-being of African American youth. Though previous theoretical formulations suggest that context is important for developmental processes (Jessor 1993), and that racial discrimination is hypothesized to operate at multiple societal levels (Jones 1997), it is necessary that future research examine the multiple types of racial discrimination in multiple contexts among minority youth. Specifically, we find that high and low diversity settings moderate the relationship between perceptions of institutional discrimination and indicators of psychological well-being, but not the other types of racial discrimination. It is possible that the utilization of macro measures of context (i.e., block group diversity) account for the institutional discrimination finding. Future research should examine the relationship between multiple types of racial discrimination and multiple indicators of psychological well-being in multiple contexts among minority youth. Ultimately, these analyses would begin to address the question: For whom and under what conditions is racial discrimination a risk factor among African American youth?

A few limitations should be noted when considering the results of the present study. The cross-sectional nature of the study prevents causality from being inferred regarding the relationship between perceptions of racial discrimination and psychological well-being. Longitudinal research would allow for assessment of the causal relationship between racial discrimination and psychological well-being. An additional limitation concerns the measurement of perceived discrimination, which is believed to be a critical area in discrimination research (Williams et al. 2003). Though the instrument in the present study utilizes a lifetime period, smaller time periods and experiential sampling procedures might capture discriminatory experiences more precisely. As such, the use of lifetime periods may not adequately capture the phenomenon of discrimination among an adolescent sample. Also, the racial composition of the respective high school teachers and administrators would

provide additional information regarding context. Examining the relationship between the diversity of the school staff and discriminatory incidents would further our understanding of how school contexts influence adolescent perceptions of racial discrimination. The last limitation is the utilization of a convenience sample, which prevents generalizations from being made to other African American adolescents in urban, suburban or rural areas. Additionally, only about 16% of the schools in the targeted school district agreed to participate in the research study which suggests that the sample is not representative of the school district from which students were recruited.

The present study contributes to existing racial discrimination literature on African American adolescents. The results indicate that school diversity influences African American youth's perceptions of racial discrimination. The results also suggest that the relationship between perceptions of racial discrimination and psychological well-being is moderated by the diversity in adolescents' school and neighborhood. Specifically, perceptions of institutional discrimination are linked to lower self-esteem for youth in high diversity settings, and linked to lower life satisfaction for youth in low diversity settings. Consequently, the current study suggests that school and neighborhood contexts are important characteristics to consider when studying adolescent perceptions of racial discrimination among African American youth.

## Biographies

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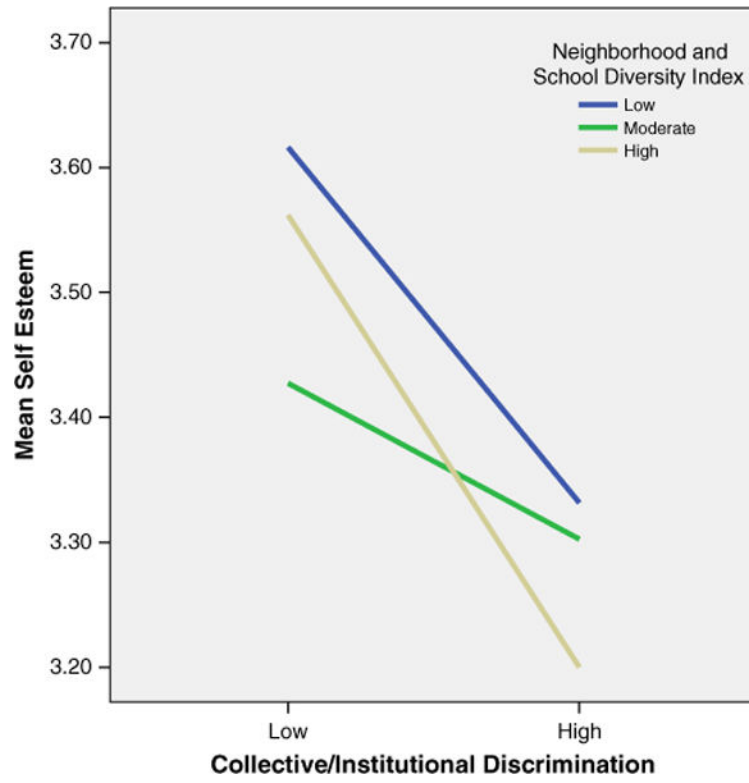
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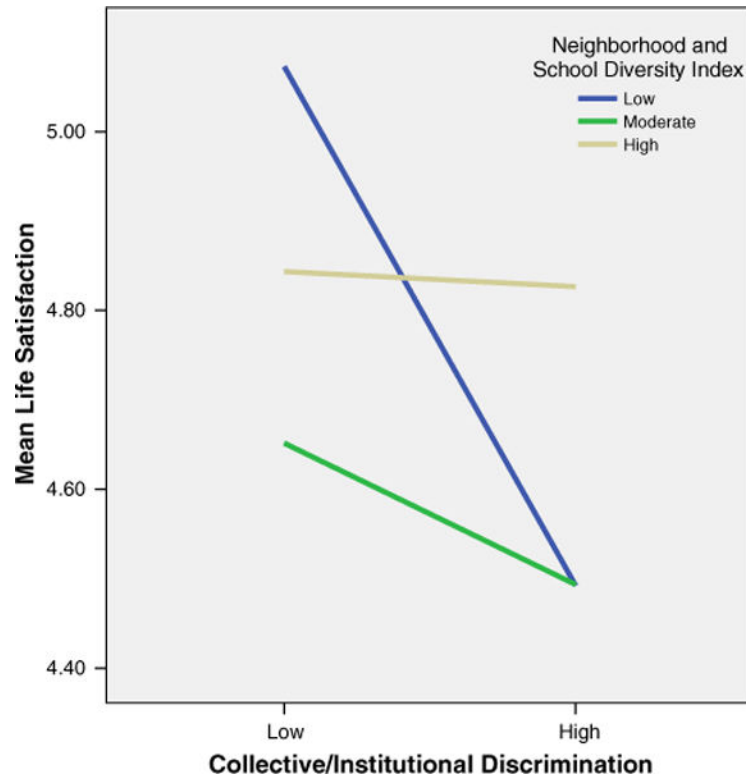
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**Fig. 1.** The effects of perceptions of collective/institutional racism and neighborhood/school diversity on self-esteem



**Fig. 2.** The effects of perceptions of collective/institutional racism and neighborhood/school diversity on life satisfaction

**Table 1**

Bivariate correlations, means and standard deviations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Cultural racism	–								
2. Individual racism	.47**	–							
3. Collective/institutional racism	.35**	.57**	–						
4. School diversity	.22**	.13*	-.10	–					
5. Neighborhood diversity	-.08	-.05	-.04	.28**	–				
6. School/neighborhood diversity combined	.11	.06	-.09	.84**	.75**	–			
7. Self-esteem	.05	-.05	-.17*	.10	.06	.10	–		
8. Depressive symptoms	.08	.14*	.22**	.01	-.05	-.02	-.38**	–	
9. Life satisfaction	-.02	-.09	-.06	.01	.02	.02	.39**	-.30**	–
Mean	6.80	6.38	3.77	.27	.23	.25	3.39	22.48	4.63
Standard deviation	2.17	2.97	3.68	.27	.22	.20	.54	8.07	1.28

\*  $p < .05$ ,

\*\*  $p < .01$ .  $N =$  ranges from 236 to 252

**Table 2**

School and neighborhood diversity as predictors of racial discrimination

Predictors	Individual racism		Cultural racism		Collective/institutional racism	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Age	-.04	.18	.01	.13	-.30	.23
Gender	-.54	.39	.00	.29	-1.02*	.51
Marital status	-.05	.11	.00	.08	.14	.14
Educational level	.22	.14	.04	.10	-.08	.18
School diversity	1.39+	.78	1.71**	.00	-.68	1.01
Neighborhood diversity	-1.08	.91	-1.25+	.00	.25	1.19
Self-esteem	-.01	.40	.28	.30	-.67	1.01
Depressive symptoms	.05+	.03	.02	.02	.10**	.04
Life satisfaction	-.15	.16	-.06	.12	.08	.21
R <sup>2</sup>	.07		.07		.10	

\*  $p < .05$ ;

\*\*  $p < .01$ ,

+  $< .10$

Discrimination, diversity and the interaction of discrimination and diversity as predictors of psychological well-being

**Table 3**

Predictors	Self-esteem		Depressive symptoms		Life satisfaction	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Age	-.04	.04	.54	.54	-.04	.09
Gender	-.07	.08	2.91*	1.18	-.18	.20
Marital status	.01	.02	-.08	.33	.03	.06
Educational level	.00	.03	.53	.41	-.03	.07
School/neighborhood diversity	.37	.23	-2.37	3.28	.32	.54
Cultural racism	.03	.02	-.15	.30	.01	.05
Individual racism	.00	.02	.04	.25	-.03	.04
Collective/institutional racism	-.03*	.01	.59**	.20	-.01	.03
Diversity × cultural racism	-.03	.11	-1.33	1.53	.01	.25
Diversity × individual racism	-.11	.09	.24	1.28	-.20	.21
Diversity × collective/institutional racism	.16*	.07	-.73	1.05	.36*	.17
R <sup>2</sup>	.10		.11		.05	

\*  $p < .2$ ;

\*\*  $p < .01$