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The Perceived Payoff of Education: Do Generational Status and Racial Discrimination Matter?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the associations among racial discrimination, generational status, and perceptions of the economic value of education among Latina/o youth. Participants were 400 urban, low-income, Latina/o students from a large, Midwestern city who completed surveys in both 9th- and 10th-grades. Results revealed that more perceived racial discrimination was associated with more perceived economic limitations of education. When analyzed by generational status, more racial discrimination in 9th-grade was significantly related to lower perceived economic value of education in 10th-grade for third-generation and later participants, but not for first- or second-generation participants. The results provide evidence for the diverse experiences of racial discrimination and perceived economic value of education across generational groups.

Keywords

Generational status; racial discrimination; value of education; Latina/o youth; educational attitudes

Introduction

Theorists have discussed the importance of race/ethnicity in the development of adolescents of color (García Coll et al., 1996), and recently, researchers have studied the role of specific racial processes that influence adolescent development. García Coll et al.'s (1996) integrative framework begins with social position factors (e.g., generational status), which relate to pervasive social mechanisms (e.g., discrimination) that in turn create social contexts that influence the developmental processes and outcomes of children of color. Guided by García Coll et al.'s (1996) framework, our study examined the interaction between generational status and racial discrimination from adults and how that interaction affects perceptions of the economic value of education among urban, low-income Latina/o adolescents.

The Role of Racial Discrimination in Values Toward Education

We use Perreira, Kiang, and Potochnick's (2013) model of how discrimination influences the academic outcomes of immigrant children and Eccles' (1994) expectancy-value theory to understand how racial discrimination affects Latina/o adolescents' values toward education. Our study focuses on the economic value of education, which reflects individuals' beliefs about whether education is related to future economic and job opportunities and success (Mickelson, 1990). Racial/ethnic discrimination first negatively affects proximal processes,

such as aspirations and academic motivation, which then influences more distal outcomes, such as academic achievement (Perreira et al., 2013). Immigrant youth's experiences with discrimination may make them pessimistic about opportunities for them in the labor market, which may influence their academic and career aspirations (Perreira et al., 2013). Expectancy-value theory (Eccles, 1994) suggests that youth's experiences with racial discrimination could influence their utility value of education, which is the perception of the usefulness of education for future success. Thus, experiencing discrimination might lead some youth to believe that education may not pay off in the future.

Past research shows that youth's experiences with racial discrimination are significantly associated with their perceived value of education for future success. Eccles, Wong, and Peck (2006) found a negative association between peer and teacher discrimination and African American adolescents' achievement motivation, which included the utility of school for future success. In another study of Latina/o children who were mostly first- or second-generation immigrants, it was found that more teacher discrimination was associated with poorer academic attitudes among students who attended predominantly White or moderately diverse schools (Brown & Chu, 2012).

In a longitudinal study, Mroczkowski and Sánchez (2015) found that racial discrimination from adults in 9th-grade predicted economic value of education in 10th-grade, which is akin to Eccles et al.'s (2006) utility of school variable, while controlling for value of education in 9th-grade. Specifically, more reported discrimination significantly predicted fewer perceived economic benefits and more perceived economic limitations of education (Mroczkowski & Sánchez, 2015). Examining the economic value of education is important as it is significantly and positively correlated with GPA and attendance among urban, low-income, Latina/o youth (Colón & Sánchez, 2010). In sum, past findings suggest that experiencing racial discrimination may make youth pessimistic about the utility of education for their future success.

Role of Generational Status in Academic Outcomes

Another factor that may affect academic outcomes is generational status. A dominating theory in the discourse about generational differences in academic outcomes is the immigrant paradox. The immigrant paradox suggests that earlier generations (i.e., first- and/or second-generation) have better outcomes than later generations (Marks, Ejesei, & García Coll, 2014). Researchers state that youth from immigrant families are more successful because they acknowledge the sacrifices their parents have made by immigrating to the US and their parents are optimistic about their children's prospects for future success (Fuligni, 1997; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). Thus, immigrant youth are more motivated and exert more effort in school than later generation youth (Fuligni, 1997; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995).

Research supports the immigrant paradox theory. Fuligni's (1997) study of racially/ethnically diverse youth revealed that first- and second-generation youth reported valuing Math, English, and academic success more than their third-generation counterparts. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) found that first-generation, Mexican-origin youth endorsed more optimistic and positive attitudes toward school than their later-generation

counterparts. Finally, foreign-born Latina/o youth reported significantly higher scores on the utility of education and on their intrinsic value of education compared to U.S.-born Latina/o youth (Perreira, Fuligni & Potochnick, 2010). These studies provide support for the immigrant paradox theory in Latina/o youth's attitudes and values towards school.

Interaction of Racial Discrimination & Generational Status on Academic Outcomes

In their literature review of racial/ethnic discrimination of immigrant youth, Perreira et al. (2013) encourage researchers to examine how generational status moderates the association between discrimination and academic outcomes, but few researchers have studied this (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010). Not all youth who experience racial discrimination have poor outcomes; therefore, within-group variation in the responses to discrimination could be related to generational status. Immigrant youth might interpret discrimination cues differently (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010) and have a different response to discrimination compared to later generation youth. To our knowledge, Huynh and Fuligni (2010) is the only published study that examined the interaction between generational status and racial discrimination, but they did not find a significant interaction effect on GPA. Perhaps generational status moderates the association between racial discrimination and values towards education, a proximal academic variable.

The Current Study

This study is an extension of the Mroczkowski and Sánchez (2015) investigation, which examined the roles of gender, ethnic identity, and racial discrimination in the economic value of education. In the previous study, we found that racial discrimination and ethnic identity were significantly related to economic value of education. The present study adds to the literature by examining the roles of racial discrimination and generational status in economic value of education, while controlling for gender and ethnic identity, among urban, low-income Latina/o adolescents.

Consistent with the immigrant paradox theory, we expected that first-generation participants would report more perceived economic benefits and fewer perceived economic limitations of education than later-generation participants in both 9th- and 10th-grades (Hypothesis 1). Next, we hypothesized that more perceived racial discrimination in 9th-grade would significantly predict fewer perceived economic benefits and more perceived economic limitations of education in 10th-grade (Hypothesis 2). Finally, given Perreira et al.'s (2013) suggestion to examine how generational status moderates the association between discrimination and academic outcomes, we tested whether the associations between racial discrimination and values toward education vary by generational status (Research Question 1).

Method

The present study was part of a larger, longitudinal investigation that explored the relations among racial and cultural processes and academic outcomes of urban, low-income Latina/o youth. The university's Institutional Review Board and the participating school district's

Research Review Board approved the larger study. The procedures for the present study are described in Mroczkowski and Sánchez (2015).

Participants

The participants in this study were 400 students who completed surveys in both 9th- and 10th-grades. The sample in the current study comes from the same dataset analyzed in Mroczkowski and Sánchez (2015). Demographic information for the sample is presented in Table 1.

Measures

Participants were asked to report their age, gender, and race/ethnicity, and they completed measures that assessed perceived adult racial discrimination, economic value of education, and ethnic identity. These measures are described in Mroczkowski and Sánchez (2015).

Generational status—Generational status was calculated using information about the place of birth of participants, their parents, and their grandparents. Participants were first-generation if they were born outside the US, second-generation if at least one parent was born outside the US and the participant was born in the US, and third-generation and later if at least one grandparent was born outside the US and both parents and the participant were born in the US, or if both parents and all grandparents were born in the US.

Data Analytic Strategy

Missing data for racial discrimination, economic benefits and limitations of education, and ethnic identity in both 9th- and 10th-grades were imputed with multiple imputation in SPSS (IBM, 2012). This process produced five imputed datasets, and pooled results from these datasets were used to conduct the descriptive, correlational, and MANCOVA analyses in SPSS. Path analysis was conducted to test Hypothesis 2 and Research Question 1. Full information maximum likelihood (FIML) modeling was used to maximize the availability of observations in the path analyses conducted in AMOS 7.0 (Arbuckle, 2006). Model fit was assessed with the chi-square statistic, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). CFI values above .90 and RMSEA values below .06 suggested well-fitting models (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Given our findings in Mroczkowski and Sánchez (2015), we controlled for gender and ethnic identity in all MANCOVA and path analyses.

Results

Descriptive Results and Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics for racial discrimination, economic benefits of education, and economic limitations of education are presented in Table 2. Results are presented for all participants and by generational status in both 9th-grade and 10th-grades. Results of Pearson's bivariate correlation analyses are presented in Table 2.

Generational Differences in Economic Value of Education

To explore how economic value of education varied across generational groups in 9th- and 10th-grades (Hypothesis 1), we conducted two MANCOVAs. The first MANCOVA testing for generational differences in economic benefits and economic limitations of education in 9th-grade revealed a significant overall effect, Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.97$, $F(4, 788) = 2.77$, $p < .05$, partial eta squared = .014. Results of univariate F tests did not reveal any significant differences among the generational groups for economic benefits of education, $F(2, 395) = 2.09$, ns , or for economic limitations of education, $F(2, 395) = 2.69$, ns . The second MANCOVA testing for generational differences in economic benefits and economic limitations of education in 10th-grade was not significant, Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.99$, $F(4, 788) = 0.52$, ns , partial eta squared = .003.

The Role of Racial Discrimination in Economic Value of Education and Generational Differences

We modeled a longitudinal, cross-lag panel analysis using path analysis to test whether racial discrimination in 9th-grade was significantly related to economic value of education in 10th-grade (Hypothesis 2), and to explore generational differences in the relation between racial discrimination in 9th-grade and economic value of education in 10th-grade (Research Question 1).

Overall group model—The overall group model provided an excellent fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 24.87$, $df = 7$, (37) $p < .001$; RMSEA = .08, CFI = .96) and allowed us to test Hypothesis 2. In this model, racial discrimination in 9th-grade was positively related to economic limitations of education in 10th-grade ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$), but not to economic benefits of education in 10th-grade ($\beta = -.04$, ns). Full details are presented in Table 3.

Multiple group model—The unconstrained model provided an excellent fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 132.15$, $df = 94$, (82) $p < .001$; RMSEA = .02, CFI = .96). The fully constrained model also provided an excellent fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 184.73$, $df = 124$, (52) $p < .01$; RMSEA = .03, CFI = .93). However, the results of the chi-square nested model comparison showed that the structural paths could not be constrained to equality across each generational group (χ^2 change = 52.58, $df = 30$, $p < .001$). Follow-up analyses showed the paths for the first- and second-generational groups could be constrained to equality without resulting in a significant decrease in model fit (χ^2 change = 18.91, $df = 15$, ns). However, neither the first-generation group (χ^2 change = 37.87, $df = 15$, $p < .001$) or the second-generation group (χ^2 change = 28.44, $df = 15$, $p < .05$) could be constrained to equality with the third-generation group without significant decreases in model fit.

To test Research Question 1, we examined the paths for each group, which revealed significant differences in the relations among racial discrimination in 9th-grade and economic limitations and economic benefits of education in 10th-grade. For first-generation participants, racial discrimination in 9th-grade was not significantly related to economic benefits or limitations of education in 10th-grade. For second-generation participants, the relation between racial discrimination in 9th-grade and economic limitations in 10th-grade was trending toward significance ($\beta = .12$, $p = .05$). The results for third-generation and later

participants revealed that more racial discrimination in 9th-grade was significantly related to fewer perceived economic benefits of education in 10th-grade ($\beta = -.30, p < .05$) and more perceived economic limitations of education in 10th-grade ($\beta = .37, p < .05$). See Table 3 for all path coefficients for each group.

Discussion

Guided by García Coll et al.'s (1996) integrative framework for the development of children of color, our study contributed to the research literature by examining the role of racially and culturally specific processes in the perceived value of education in a sample of urban, low-income Latina/o youth. This is the first study to test the interaction of racial discrimination and generational status on academic outcomes in a Latina/o only adolescent sample.

Similar to our findings in Mroczkowski and Sánchez (2015), results revealed that racial discrimination from adults negatively affected participants' perceived economic limitations of education. The novel contribution of the current study is our examination of generational differences in the economic value of education. Based on the immigrant paradox theory (Fuligni, 1997; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995), we expected first-generation participants would report more favorable perceptions of the economic value of education than later-generation participants, but the data did not support this hypothesis. Although we found a significant overall multivariate effect for economic value of education in 9th-grade, the univariate *F* tests were not significant so we were unable to further assess differences in economic value of education across generational groups. However, the significant overall effect suggests there may be differences in economic value of education across generational groups. This finding is worth further investigation.

As suggested by Perreira et al. (2013), we examined whether generational status moderates the association between racial discrimination and economic value of education. Our findings supported the immigrant paradox. Racial discrimination in 9th-grade was significantly related to fewer perceived economic benefits and more perceived economic limitations of education in 10th-grade for the third-generation and later group, but not for the first- or second-generation groups. Thus, third-generation and later participants may be more sensitive to the negative effects of racial discrimination on their perceived economic value of education. Third-generation and later participants might feel a sense of disillusion after experiencing racial discrimination, which may result in their perceptions of fewer economic benefits and more economic limitations of education. Furthermore, first- and second-generation participants may cope with racial discrimination differently. Researchers have suggested that individuals of different generational groups may interpret racial discrimination cues differently (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010). First- and second-generation participants may experience racial discrimination, but then compare the opportunities in the US to their home country and believe the opportunities here are still better and worth the sacrifices their parents have made (Fuligni, 1997).

Limitations, Strengths, and Future Directions

Limitations of the present study included the limited range of responses on the racial discrimination from adults measure. Most participants reported no to few perceptions of

racial discrimination, but this limited range is similar to past research using the same measure with other samples (e.g., Niwa, Way, & Hughes, 2014). Further, our participants were low-income. Perhaps third-generation and later participants from higher socioeconomic status groups have more positive attitudes toward the economic value of education. Thus, poverty and class are important contextual variables to consider in future research.

Despite limitations, the present study had several strengths. This study was the first to examine the interaction effect of racial discrimination and generational status on educational attitudes among urban, low-income Latina/o youth. Another strength is that we tested these relations at two time points and retained 87% of the participants from 9th- to 10th-grade. Thus, the current study provides a more nuanced understanding of the cultural, racial, and educational experiences of urban, low-income Latina/o high school students.

Our findings have implications for intervention. Because proximal academic measures, such as values toward education, predict academic achievement (Murdock et al., 2000; Perreira et al., 2013), more research on generational differences in attitudes toward education can inform early intervention efforts that can ultimately positively affect the academic achievement and educational attainment of Latina/os in the US. Given the harmful effects of racism, there should be increased efforts to target adults in interventions to decrease racism and prejudice toward youth of color. While working toward that goal, however, there should also be interventions aimed at helping Latina/o youth effectively cope with racial discrimination. Finally, because of the evidence in this study that the relations between racial discrimination and values toward education vary across generational groups, there should be efforts to tailor interventions to each group to ensure the interventions are helpful and relevant for all Latina/o youth. Ideally these efforts would contribute to a more equitable society in which the American Dream is a realistic possibility for all.

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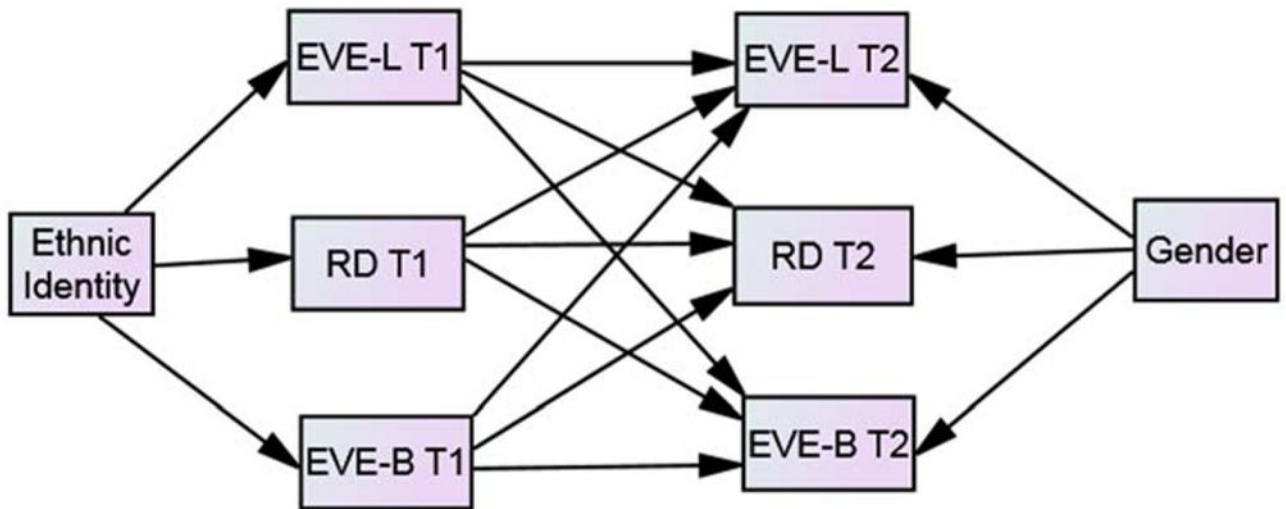


Figure 1. Cross-lagged panel analysis for racial discrimination in 9th-grade predicting economic benefits and economic limitations of education in 10th-grade.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Age (years)		
Mean (<i>SD</i>)	15.08 (0.55)	-
Gender		
Male	184	46%
Female	216	54%
Racial/Ethnic Identity ¹		
Mexican	375	94%
Puerto Rican	18	5%
Other Latina/o ethnicity	21	5%
African American/Black	6	2%
White	7	2%
Generational Status		
First-generation	96	24%
Second-generation	260	65%
Third-generation or later	44	11%

¹Because participants could check more than one race/ethnicity, the sum of the racial/ethnic group percentages exceeds 100%.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and correlations among predictor and criterion variables for whole sample and by generational status

Variable	All Participants						First-generation						Second-generation						Third-generation and later					
	Time 1		Time 2		Time 1		Time 2		Time 1		Time 2		Time 1		Time 2		Time 1		Time 2		Time 1		Time 2	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
1. RD	400	0.39 (0.57)	400	0.35 (0.52)	96	0.45 (0.60)	96	0.33 (0.46)	260	0.38 (0.56)	260	0.36 (0.51)	44	0.30 (0.59)	44	0.37 (0.70)	44	0.30 (0.59)	44	0.30 (0.59)	44	0.37 (0.70)	44	0.37 (0.70)
2. EVE-B	400	4.36 (0.80)	400	4.27 (0.85)	96	4.30 (0.82)	96	4.20 (0.91)	260	4.42 (0.77)	260	4.30 (0.81)	44	4.16 (0.91)	44	4.24 (0.92)	44	4.16 (0.91)	44	4.16 (0.91)	44	4.24 (0.92)	44	4.24 (0.92)
3. EVE-L	400	2.25 (0.67)	400	2.30 (0.67)	96	2.39 (0.72)	96	2.32 (0.69)	260	2.22 (0.64)	260	2.29 (0.66)	44	2.17 (0.69)	44	2.27 (0.71)	44	2.17 (0.69)	44	2.17 (0.69)	44	2.27 (0.71)	44	2.27 (0.71)
1. RD T1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. EVE-B T1	-08	-	-08	-	-08	-	-08	-	-08	-	-08	-	-08	-	-08	-	-08	-	-08	-	-08	-	-08	-
3. EVE-L T1	.23	-.44**	.23	-.44**	.26	-.33**	.26	-.33**	.19	-.52**	.19	-.52**	.30	-.31*	.30	-.31*	.30	-.31*	.30	-.31*	.30	-.31*	.30	-.31*
4. RD T2	.52	-.06	.52	-.06	.38	-.09	.38	-.09	.55	-.03	.55	-.03	.70	-.15	.70	-.15	.70	-.15	.70	-.15	.70	-.15	.70	-.15
5. EVE-B T2	-.11	.22	-.11	.22	-.08	.21	-.08	.21	-.06	.23	-.06	.23	-.11	-.43	-.11	-.43	-.11	-.43	-.11	-.43	-.11	-.43	-.11	-.43
6. EVE-L T2	.23	-.25**	.23	-.25**	.21	-.27*	.21	-.27*	.20	-.28**	.20	-.28**	.44	-.08	.44	-.08	.44	-.08	.44	-.08	.44	-.08	.44	-.08

Note. For all scales, higher scores suggest more of the construct. RD = Racial Discrimination; EVE-B = Economic Value of Education-Benefits; EVE-L = Economic Value of Education-Limitations; T1 = 9th-grade; T2 = 10th-grade;

^ $p < .10$.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

Table 3

Structural factor loadings for whole sample and by generational group

Path	Overall Model	Multiple Group Model		
		1 st -Generation	2 nd -Generation	3 rd + -Generation
RD T1 → EVE-B T2	-.04	.04	b.01	b.30*
RD T1 → EVE-L T2	.13**	.07	.12 [^]	.37*
RD T1 → RD T2	.50***	.35**	.52***	.71***
EVE-B T1 → EVE-B T2	.13*	.15*	.12*	.15
EVE-B T1 → EVE-L T2	.39***	-.10	-.07	-.06
EVE-B T1 → RD T2	-.01	.04	.01	-.06
EVE-L T1 → EVE-B T2	-.21***	-.35***	-.14*	-.20
EVE-L T1 → EVE-L T2	-.08	.45***	.39***	.17
EVE-L T1 → RD T2	.05	.01	.07	.06
Gender → EVE-B T2	.02	.14	-.02	.19
Gender → EVE-L T2	-.01	-.06	-.02	-.01
Gender → RD T2	-.08	-.09	-.11*	.04
Ethnic Identity T1 → EVE-B T2	.16**	.15***	.17***	.12**
Ethnic Identity T1 → EVE-L T2	-.22***	-.20***	-.23***	-.25***
Ethnic Identity T1 → RD T2	.02	.04	.02	-.01

Note.

[^]
 $p < .10$.*
 $p < .05$.**
 $p < .01$.***
 $p < .001$.RD = Racial Discrimination; EVE-B = Economic Value of Education-Benefits; EVE-L = Economic Value of Education-Limitations; T1 = 9th-grade; T2 = 10th-grade