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## Conversations About Race and Perceptions of Racial Discrimination Among Emerging Adults

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# Bidirectional Relations between Conversations about Race and Racial Discrimination among Students of Color

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## ABSTRACT & BACKGROUND

### ABSTRACT

The current study focuses on bidirectional relations between conversations about race and the perceptions of discrimination among college students. We hypothesized that (1) more conversations about race would increase subjects' perceptions of racial discrimination, and (2) the more subjects experienced discrimination, there will be an increase in conversations about race. A linear regression analysis was conducted, which supported our hypothesis that both negative conversations about race predicts perceived racial discrimination among college students. When tested in the other direction, perceptions of racial discrimination significantly predicted both positive and negative conversations about race. We discuss the implications and future directions for these conversations impacting racial discrimination and the implications for increasing social awareness.

### BACKGROUND

- Currently, the U.S. has experienced rapidly growing major ethnic groups of Latinas/os, African Americans, and Asian Americans (Chapell, 2017).
- Additionally, colleges and universities around the U.S. are becoming increasingly diverse (Chen, 2017; Renn & Reason, 2012) and conversations about race are more likely to occur, which may turn out to be positive or negative experiences (Miller, Donner, & Fraser, 2004).
- With a setting prone to racial interactions, it is important to understand how present experiences of conversations about race, whether positive or negative, may help inform discrimination experiences, and well as how discrimination informs these conversations.

### CURRENT STUDY & HYPOTHESES

- Considering the increasing diversity of college-universities and the prevalence of peer-to-peer interactions, the present study tests whether (1) positive and/or negative conversations about race predicts perceived discrimination among college students, and (2) perceived discrimination predicts positive/negative conversations about race.
- Experiencing conversations about race increases the perceptions of racial discrimination among college students.
- Perceptions of racial discrimination among college students increases the likelihood of students having negative and positive conversations about race.

## METHOD

### MEASURES

#### Perceptions of discrimination (Landriene & Klonoff, 1996)

- “In the past year how many times have you been treated unfairly because of your ethnicity/race?”
- Answers were based on a scale, (1) *never* to (6) *almost all of the time*.

#### Positive and negative conversations about race

- “In the past month I had a conversation with someone about something positive about my ethnic-racial group.”
  - “In the past month I had a conversation with someone about something negative about my ethnic-racial group.”
- Answers were based on a scale of (1) *not at all* to (5) *extremely often or almost always*.

### PROCEDURE AND PARTICIPANTS

- Data were from a larger study focused on college students' feelings and thoughts before and after 23andme genetic results.
- The study involved a diverse set of students from VCU. Participants completed a survey before and after receiving their 23andme results. The current study used pre--test data.
- Emerging adults (30.59% men, 69.41% woman) who identified as a student of color were included in the current study (16% Hispanic/Latino, 4.6 % Indigenous, 44.25% Black, 5.7 % Pacific Islander, 24.85% Asian, 4.6% other.

## RESULTS

- A linear regression analysis revealed that increased negative conversations about race significantly predicted increased perceived racial discrimination ( $B = .38, p < .001$ ). College students who experienced more negative conversations relating to race were more likely to experience increased perceived racial discrimination.
- Contrastingly, positive conversations about race did not significantly predict more perceived racial discrimination ( $B = -.07, p = .34$ ). There is insufficient evidence that having more positive conversations about race increased the perception of racial discrimination.

- In conjunction with the aforementioned data, a linear regression analysis was conducted to find if more racial discrimination predicted both positive and negative conversations about race.
- Increased discrimination significantly predicted an amplification in both positive ( $B = .25, p = .02$ ) and negative ( $B = .40, p < .001$ ) conversations about race.

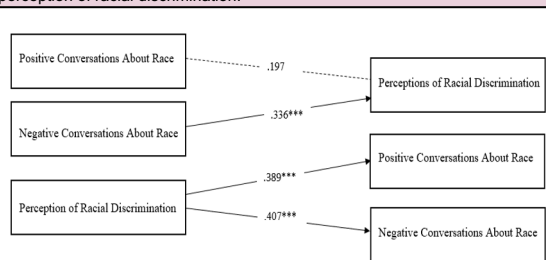


Figure 1: Final Process Model. White ethnicity group was controlled for, but not indicated in this model for reading purposes. \*\*\* $p < .001$

## DISCUSSION

- As hypothesized, results indicated that having negative conversations about race increased perceptions of discrimination.
- When tested in the other direction, increased perceptions of racial discrimination did predict more conversations about race, both positive and negative.
- The more discrimination experiences one has regarding their race, the more conversations they tend to have about race with others.

### IMPLICATIONS

- Results suggest that negative conversations involving race and ethnicity hold more weight than positive conversations do in regard to noticing and labeling an experience as discriminatory.
- When emerging adults partake in negative conversations about race they may, later, be more aware of a discriminatory experience and able to label it as such.
- The value of having these conversations is emphasized by the results. Understanding and being able to label discrimination is necessary to increase diversity and progressivity within a society. These conversations allow a greater understanding of one another and contribute to the social awareness amongst college students.

### LIMITATIONS

- To reduce participant burden as part of the larger study, positive conversations, negative conversations, and racial discrimination were each assessed with 1-item measures, which may not have fully captured these variables.
- Given that important findings emerged for positive and negative conversations, more qualitative research should be conducted to better understand what conversations consist of, and with whom college students engage in them.

### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Further research can be done with the same or similar questions, but with younger age groups. Assessing the effects of racial conversations and its effects on perceived discrimination at an earlier age may potentially result in higher resilience against adversity. Given that racial experiences start early, this is an important future direction.