

The Psychological Costs of Painless but Recurring Experiences of Racial Discrimination

Que-Lam Huynh

California State University, Northridge

Thierry Devos and Cheyenne M. Dunbar

San Diego State University

When studying discrimination, it is important to examine both perceived frequency and stress associated with these experiences, as well as the interplay between these two dimensions. Using data from Latino/a participants ($N = 168$), we found an interaction effect of the reported frequency and reported stressfulness of discrimination on psychological distress (depression and anxiety), such that frequency predicted greater psychological distress for low-stress events, but high-stress events were associated with greater distress regardless of frequency. In addition, using the constructs of “stated” and “derived” stressfulness, we found that the frequency of experiences of discrimination that were rated as less stressful were, in fact, correlated with greater psychological distress. Discrimination events not experienced as stressful nonetheless may have negative implications for the target, especially if they occur frequently.

Keywords: perceived discrimination, Latino/as, anxiety, depression, Schedule of Racist Events

Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic minority population in the U.S., and like other ethnic minorities, they face racial discrimination in their daily lives—discrimination that can take many forms. For example, they may experience frequent but seemingly harmless discrimination, as in the case of Jim Shee, a U.S.-born 70-year-old man of Spanish and Chinese descent living in Arizona, who has been stopped twice in 1 month by local law enforcement and asked to produce his “papers.” Although he reports these events as not highly stressful, Mr. Shee worries that he will be vulnerable to even more frequent racial profiling under a new Arizona law (Senate Bill 1070; State of Arizona, 2010) that requires state and local law enforcement officers to investigate alleged immigration violations (American Civil Liberties Union, 2010). Conversely, Latinos may experience relatively rare but stressful discrimination, as in the case of Viridiana Ramirez, a U.S.-born 19-year-old woman of Mexican descent, who was falsely arrested and detained for 4 hours during an immigration raid conducted by Arizona’s Maricopa County Sheriff’s Office. After being released from custody, she tearfully recounted the traumatic experience as “bad,” “scary,” and “shocking” (azfamily.com, 2010). In both cases, Shee and Ramirez have perceived racial discrimination toward themselves, but their experiences obviously vary in frequency and perceived stressfulness (among other dimensions). For the targets of perceived discrimination, what are the costs of such experiences? What are the mental health

correlates of highly stressful experiences of discrimination, such as that of Ms. Ramirez? What about more common experiences of discrimination that are perceived as relatively benign in comparison, such as that of Mr. Shee? Research focused solely on the perceived frequency of discrimination may only address the experiences of Mr. Shee, whereas research focused solely on the perceived stressfulness of discrimination may only account for the experiences of Ms. Ramirez. In this report, we argue that it is important to examine and measure both the perceived frequency and stressfulness of discrimination. Specifically, we examine psychological adjustment related to discrimination events that vary in perceived frequency and stressfulness, and we investigate the mutually constitutive effect of those two dimensions on adjustment.¹

Given the pervasiveness of racial discrimination in American society (American Civil Liberties Union, 2007), researchers have begun to empirically examine the correlates and effects of perceived discrimination (e.g., Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Crocker & Major, 1989; Harrell, 2000; Jones et al., 1984; Major & O’Brien, 2005). Perceived discrimination refers to “the level or frequency of discriminatory incidents to which people perceive they (or members of their group) have been exposed” (Major & Sawyer, 2009). Past research has found that perceiving oneself to be a target of discrimination has important implications for adjustment, including psychological adjustment (e.g., anxiety, depression, stress; Banks, Kohn-Wood, & Spencer, 2006; Jones, Cross, & DeFour, 2007), self-esteem (Crocker, Cornwell, & Major, 1993; Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991; Major & Crocker, 1993; Major, Kaiser, O’Brien, & McCoy, 2007), and increased risk of stress-related diseases (Barnett, Marshall, &

Que-Lam Huynh, Department of Psychology, California State University, Northridge; Thierry Devos and Cheyenne M. Dunbar, Department of Psychology, San Diego State University.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Que-Lam Huynh, Department of Psychology, California State University, Northridge, 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330-8255. E-mail: huynh.queclam@gmail.com

¹ Throughout the report, we use the term *perceived stressfulness* to refer to people’s appraisal of specific discrimination situations, and we use the term *psychological distress* as an umbrella term for psychological symptoms such as anxiety and depression, not in reference to specific experiences of discrimination.

Sayer, 1997; Manuck, Cohen, & Kaplan, 1994; Marsland et al., 1995; Mays, Cochran, & Barner, 2007). In fact, Sellers and Shelton (2003) documented the impact of perceived discrimination on well-being in a longitudinal study of African American students over one academic year: after controlling for Time 1 perceived discrimination and distress, perceived discrimination at Time 2 was associated positively with global distress (a composite variable containing anxiety, depression, and general life stress items). Taken together, cross-sectional and longitudinal studies indicate that racial discrimination experiences can be conceived as stressors that are detrimental for well-being (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). Because depression and anxiety symptoms have been the focus of much previous research on the correlates of perceived discrimination, we examined these two mental health variables in the present study.

Discrimination events vary in perceived frequency, and repeated experiences of discrimination are linked to poorer psychological health (Branscombe et al., 1999; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003; Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997). For instance, in a randomly selected sample of 520 African Americans living in Southern California, Klonoff and Landrine (1999) found that certain types of racist events are more common than others. Being treated unfairly by strangers because of one's race or ethnicity occurred fairly frequently (67% of participants reported experiencing this within a year's period), whereas being forced to take drastic steps to address a racist event was less common (44% of participants reported experiencing this within a year's period). In the same sample, perceived frequency of discrimination was moderately related to current psychological symptoms as measured by the Hopkins Symptoms Checklist—58 (see also Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). When discrimination is experienced repeatedly, it is likely to be perceived as pervasive, systematic, and unaltering, which can lead to a sense of helplessness. In particular, Branscombe and colleagues (1999) have asserted that discrimination is especially detrimental if it is perceived to be based on race, gender, age, or another stable personal characteristic because one can expect to encounter discrimination in different situations at different times throughout one's life. The focus on perceived frequency of discrimination has illuminated the many personal and social costs of discrimination.

Another important dimension of discrimination experiences is the perceived stressfulness of such events, and this appraisal dimension also should be considered when examining the link between discrimination and mental health. For example, in Klonoff and Landrine's (1999) study, African American participants reported varying degrees of stress associated with their discrimination experiences. Participants reported that being treated unfairly by people in service jobs was more stressful than being treated unfairly by friends. In addition, their ratings of racist event stressfulness were moderately correlated with psychological symptoms (see also Jones et al., 2007; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996).

To our knowledge, despite the importance of assessing perceived stressfulness in addition to perceived frequency of discrimination, most self-report instruments do not assess this appraisal dimension. Most available instruments either measure different ways in which people perceive that they have been treated differ-

ently because of their race (e.g., Racism Reaction Scale by Thompson, Neville, Weathers, Poston, & Atkinson, 1990; Perceptions of Racism Scale by Green, 1995) or different levels (e.g., self, group, institution) at which people perceive discrimination based on race (e.g., Racism and Life Experiences Scale by Harrell, 1994 and 1995; Index of Race-Related Stress by Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996; and Perceived Racism Scale by McNeilly et al., 1996). Although the Perceived Racism Scale by McNeilly and colleagues (1996) assesses emotional and behavioral coping responses to perceived discrimination at different levels, it does not measure stressfulness associated with racist experiences. The only instrument that comprehensively assesses frequency of racist discrimination events in different domains of life (e.g., school, work) and stressfulness appraisals for each event is the Schedule of Racist Events (SRE; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996).

However, even when researchers have measured both perceived frequency and stressfulness of discrimination using the SRE, they often have combined these two dimensions into one perceived discrimination score in their analyses (see Jones et al., 2007; Klonoff & Landrine, 1999, and Landrine & Klonoff, 1996 for exceptions). At first sight, this practice could be justified on the grounds that the two dimensions are related, but it fails to acknowledge that they are not perfectly predictive of each other and that these dimensions could be unique and interactive sources of variations in psychological health outcomes. More importantly we believe that estimates of the relationship between frequency and stressfulness in previous research have been artificially inflated because of the response options available to participants and, in turn, how researchers have treated these two dimensions in their analyses. Specifically, when participants indicated that they had never experienced a given racist event, they were likely to choose a stressfulness rating of *not at all stressful* for that event. This same rating anchor also could be chosen for events that had been experienced but not deemed to be stressful. Therefore, when researchers correlated stressfulness with frequency, the correlation was inflated by stressfulness ratings on situations that had not been experienced (see DeBlaere & Moradi, 2008; Jones et al., 2007; Liang, Li, & Kim, 2004; Pieterse & Carter, 2007; Witherspoon & Speight, 2009). As detailed in the Measures and Descriptive Statistics sections below, we provided a *not applicable* anchor for the stressfulness items to address this problem. Consequently, we found a lower, more accurate correlation between frequency and stressfulness than in previous studies, which corroborated our claims that perceived frequency and stressfulness should be treated as independent dimensions of discrimination, and could be sources of interactive effects on psychological adjustment.

For example, seemingly benign events, such as everyday verbal slights or assumptions of criminality (Sue et al., 2007), could have a cumulatively negative impact on psychological health over time, as in the example of Mr. Shee. On the other hand, as illustrated by the case of Ms. Ramirez, highly stressful experiences of racial discrimination could be related to psychological health even if they occurred infrequently. In the present study, we assessed the dimensions of frequency and stressfulness separately, and we examined the interaction between frequency and stressfulness as one way to understand the mutually constitutive relationship between these two dimensions. We hypothesized that there would be main effects of frequency and stressfulness on psychological adjustment, such that participants who reported perceiving more discrim-

ination or more stress associated with discrimination experiences would report higher psychological distress. In addition, we expected an interaction between the two dimensions in predicting adjustment, such that events rated as lower in stressfulness would be associated with higher psychological distress if they occurred frequently, whereas events rated as higher in stressfulness would be associated with higher psychological distress regardless of frequency.

As another way to document the mutual constitution of perceived frequency and stressfulness of discrimination, we examined how the directly *stated stressfulness* of an event might be different from an indirect measure of stressfulness, or *derived stressfulness*. Consumer psychologists commonly compare stated and derived methods of assessing the importance of any given product attribute in order to understand why people choose to purchase certain products (e.g., Mittal, Katrichis, Forkin, & Konkell, 1994; Smith & Deppa, 2009). For example, researchers might ask new car buyers directly whether power windows are important in their purchasing decision, which gives them a sense of the stated importance of the product attribute (power windows). To get at derived importance, they might correlate the presence or absence of power windows to satisfaction with the purchase. Often, researchers find that stated and derived importance metrics reveal different stories about the importance of product attributes. In other words, stated importance might be low but derived importance might be high, or vice versa. Here, we applied and adapted these principles to better understand stressfulness associated with any given perceived discrimination experience. Stated stressfulness was defined as the perceived stressfulness of a discrimination event, and it was indicated by mean ratings of stressfulness provided by respondents. In other words, this indicator reflects the extent to which a situation is experienced as stressful versus benign. On the other hand, derived stressfulness was conceptualized as the relationship between experiencing the discrimination event and psychological adjustment. It was operationalized as the correlation between the frequency ratings and responses on the psychological adjustment measures. Because of the limits of introspection, including limits on self-knowledge about automatic, nonconscious evaluative and emotional processes (e.g., Kihlstrom, 1987; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Wilson, 2002), people may not be aware of the effects of discrimination on their well-being. For example, after repeated exposure to racial discrimination events that people appraise as relatively benign or unstressful, these events may in fact have negative consequences for mental health that is outside of people's conscious awareness. As a result, they may state that the events were unstressful, but the frequency of the events may be related to poorer adjustment (derived stressfulness). Thus, we expected that stated stressfulness would be different from derived stressfulness. More precisely, and in line with our considerations regarding the role of stressfulness and frequency, we tested the hypothesis that the recurrence of experiences of discrimination would be linked to poor psychological adjustment outcomes (higher derived stressfulness) when they are perceived as relatively not stressful (lower stated stressfulness). In other words, at least under some circumstances, stated and derived stressfulness could be negatively related, yielding additional evidence for the complex interplay between the perceived frequency and stressfulness of discrimination.

Method

Participants

Participants were 168 Latino/a undergraduate students from a large, public university on the West Coast of the U.S. In response to an open-ended question about their ethnic group identification, most (78 or 46.43%) participants identified as "Mexican American," followed by "Mexican" (30 or 17.86%), "Latino/a" (26 or 15.48%), "Hispanic" (22 or 13.10%), and "Chicano/a" (4 or 2.38%). The rest of the participants (8 or 4.76%) self-identified using a combination of some of the terms listed above. The sample ranged in age from 18 to 25 years ($M = 18.71$, $SD = 1.38$), most of whom (114 or 67.9%) were college freshmen, and the majority of the sample (128 or 76.2%) were women. All participants were American citizens, and most (91%) were born in the U.S. They participated in exchange for course credit.

Measures

Perceptions of discrimination. The Schedule of Racist Events (SRE; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996) consists of 17 items assessing the frequency and stressfulness (also called "appraisals" by Landrine and Klonoff) of racist events.² Before responding to the SRE items, participants answered an open-ended question about their ethnic identification. The answer to this question (e.g., Latino/a, Hispanic, Chicano/a, Mexican American) was piped into the SRE items by the software program so that each item reflected the participant's own label for his or her ethnicity. Typically, the SRE is administered as a paper-and-pencil questionnaire for which broad ethnic labels, such as Latino/a or Asian American, are used for all participants of a given ethnic category (e.g., Liang et al., 2004). Instead of using these broad labels, our procedure allowed participants to self-identify ethnically so that the SRE items would be more relevant to their unique self-label and associated experiences. After responding to this open-ended question, participants were given (in randomized order) the 17 SRE events. For each event, a question about frequency always preceded a question about stressfulness.

Respondents rated the frequency of each event during the past year on a 6-point Likert-type scale with the following response options: 1 = *never*, 2 = *once in a while (less than 10% of the time)*, 3 = *sometimes (10%–25% of the time)*, 4 = *a lot (26%–49% of the time)*, 5 = *most of the time (50%–70% of the time)*, or 6 = *almost all of the time (more than 70% of the time)*. After rating the frequency of each event, they also rated the stressfulness of the event on a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*), and we gave participants the additional option of choosing 0 (*not applicable*) for events that they had not experienced. A sample item assessing frequency of a racist event is, "How many times in the past year have you been accused or suspected of doing something wrong (such as stealing, cheating, not doing your share of the work, or breaking the law) because you are Mexican American?" Principle axis factoring indicated that the

² We excluded the 18th SRE item assessing how different one's life would be without these racial discrimination experiences from the analyses reported here.

SRE items loaded on one factor (all items had loadings $\geq .40$). This is true for both the frequency subscale and the stressfulness subscale. Table 1 displays means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alphas for all study variables. Higher mean scores indicate more frequent discrimination experiences and greater stressfulness associated with such experiences.

Anxiety symptoms. Participants rated the extent to which they experienced anxiety symptoms within the past week, including the day of the study, on a 4-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*rarely or none of the time—less than 1 day*) to 4 (*most of the time—5 to 7 days*). Based on a review of the literature, we chose 14 items (7 anxiety, 7 calm) to represent the most common dimensions of anxiety measurement: control over emotions, control over cognitions, ability to relax, startle response or hyperarousability, worrying, apprehension, restlessness, fears, and somatic symptoms (Antony, Orsillo, & Roemer, 2001). Principle axis factoring indicated that the 14 anxiety attributes loaded on one factor. Sample items include “trembling” and “uncertain” (anxiety), and “at ease” and “composed” (calm). Calm items were reverse-scored, so higher mean scores indicate more frequent anxiety symptoms.

Depression symptoms. Participants rated the extent to which they experienced depression symptoms within the past week, including the day of the study, on the same 4-point Likert-type scale. Based on a review of the literature, we chose 14 items (7 depression, 7 happiness) to represent the most common dimensions of depression measurement: depressed mood, guilt, suicidal thoughts, lack of interest, psychomotor retardation, insomnia/sleep disturbances, somatic symptoms, and agitation (Nezu, Ronan, Meadows, & McClure, 2000). Principle axis factoring indicated that the 14 depression attributes loaded on one factor. Sample items include “hopeless” and “unmotivated” (depression), and “cheerful” and “confident” (happiness). Happiness items were reverse-scored, so higher mean scores indicate more frequent depression symptoms.

In addition to rating the 14 depression attributes above, participants completed the Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression (CES-D; Radloff, 1977) scale as another measure of depression symptoms. The CES-D is a commonly used 20-item measure that assesses the presence and frequency of clinical symptoms associated with depression. Participants rated the frequency with which the symptoms have occurred over the past week on the same 4-point Likert-type scale used for the anxiety and depression attributes. Sample items include “I felt depressed” and “I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.” Principle axis factoring indicated that 17 out of 20 CES-D items loaded on one

factor, and the remaining three items (items 2, 7, and 8) did not load on any factor. These items were dropped from all analyses reported below. Higher mean scores indicate more frequent depression symptoms.

Procedure

Before the study began, all participants were given an informed consent document, and they were asked to read this document and sign it to indicate consent. After giving informed consent, they were each seated at a desktop computer in a laboratory setting that could accommodate up to four people during each session. All questionnaire items were presented through Inquisit 2.0 software (Draine, 2005). First, they completed the open-ended ethnicity item and then the SRE as a measure of perceived discrimination. Next, they rated the attribute items and the CES-D as measures of anxiety and depression symptoms. Lastly, they completed a demographic questionnaire, including items about country of birth, parents' country of birth, ethnicity, gender, age, and academic history. After completing the study, they were debriefed and thanked for their participation. This study was conducted in compliance with the guidelines of the university's Institutional Review Board.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for the perceived frequency and stressfulness of discrimination, anxiety, and depression appear in Table 1. Overall, participants did not report experiencing discrimination extremely frequently. However, they experienced a nontrivial amount of discrimination on average ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.53$), or between *once in a while* and *sometimes or 10%–25% of the time*. The type of discrimination that participants reported experiencing most frequently was “wanting to tell someone off for being racist but didn't say anything.” As with frequency, participants rated the stressfulness of discriminatory situations to be relatively low. The most stressful type of discrimination experienced by participants was feeling “really angry about something racist that was done” to them.

The correlation between frequency and stressfulness ($r = .40$) is lower than those previously reported in the literature (see DeBlaere & Moradi, 2008; Jones et al., 2007; Liang et al., 2004; Pieterse & Carter, 2007; Witherspoon & Speight, 2009), and it deserves some

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Alphas, and Correlations Among Main Study Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Frequency	Stressfulness	Anxiety	Depression	CES-Depression
Schedule of Racist Events							
Frequency	2.48	0.53	—	—			
Stressfulness	2.51	1.13	.40***	—			
Anxiety attributes	2.01	0.54	.10	.28***	(.90)		
Depression attributes	1.67	0.52	.17*	.20**	.78***	(.91)	
CES-Depression	1.59	0.46	.24**	.19*	.72***	.83***	(.75)

Note. Values in the diagonal are Cronbach's alpha.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

attention. As noted earlier, we provided an additional response option for the stressfulness items (0 = *not applicable*) for events that participants had not experienced for several reasons. First, it allowed us to easily compute a mean stressfulness score for each participant after dropping all the stressfulness responses of 0. Second and more importantly, without this additional response option, respondents who stated that they had never experienced a racist event (frequency rating of 1 = *never*) also would have rated the stressfulness of that event as not at all stressful (stressfulness rating of 1 = *not at all*), thereby inflating the correlation between frequency and stressfulness. If our data were treated in the same manner as in previous research (i.e., if events that were not experienced were assigned a stressfulness rating of 1 = *not at all* rather than 0 = *not applicable*), the correlation between frequency and stressfulness was artificially inflated ($r = .81$). Instead, we computed mean stressfulness without responses of 0, and we computed the correlation between frequency and stressfulness using only frequency ratings of 2 (*once in a while or less than 10% of the time*) or higher, indicating that participants indeed had experienced an event (see Table 1). This approach provides a more accurate estimate of the relationship between perceived frequency and stressfulness of discrimination by removing the stressfulness ratings that would inflate the correlation between frequency and stressfulness.

Interaction Between Frequency and Stressfulness

Before testing our hypotheses, we examined zero-order correlations among study variables (see Table 1). First, we found that frequency and stressfulness were moderately correlated. Second, there were small-to-moderate positive correlations between perceived discrimination (frequency and stressfulness) and more frequent anxiety and depression symptoms. Third, the three indicators of psychological distress (anxiety symptoms, depression symptoms, and CES-D) were highly intercorrelated. Thus, we computed an aggregated psychological distress score using these three scales, and this aggregated psychological distress score was the dependent variable in the regression results presented below.³

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a regression analysis with the aggregated psychological distress score as the criterion variable, and perceived frequency of discrimination, perceived stressfulness of discrimination, and the interaction of these two variables (centered) as the predictor variables. Supporting previous findings, there were significant main effects of perceived frequency [$\beta = .18, t(161) = 2.19, p = .03$] and perceived stressfulness [$\beta = .08, t(161) = 2.50, p = .01$] of discrimination on aggregated psychological distress.⁴ However, as we hypothesized, these main effects were qualified by a significant interaction between perceived frequency and stressfulness, $\beta = -.12, t(161) = -2.55, p = .01$ (see Figure 1). Simple-slope analyses indicated that the relationship between frequency and aggregated psychological distress was significantly different at low and high levels of stressfulness, $t(161) = 3.06, p = .003, r = .34$. For low-stress events, frequency predicted higher aggregated psychological distress; however, for high-stress events, frequency did not predict aggregated psychological distress. In other words, high-stress events were associated with psychological distress regardless of how frequently they occurred. This interaction, along with the separate interactions for anxiety, depression, and CES-D displayed in Table 2, is consistent with the

notion that there is a psychological cost for seemingly benign perceived discrimination experiences—experiences that were rated as not very stressful by participants.

Stated Versus Derived Stressfulness

We hypothesized that stated stressfulness and derived stressfulness reveal different information about the relationship between perceived discrimination and mental health. We operationalized stated stressfulness as the rating of stressfulness of the discrimination experience (i.e., stressfulness ratings for the SRE items), and we operationalized derived stressfulness as the correlation between the frequency of discrimination (i.e., frequency ratings for the SRE items) and adjustment (i.e., anxiety and depression scores as measured by the anxiety and depression attributes and the CES-D; see Table 3). In both the regression and stated versus derived analyses, we examined the effect of frequency of discrimination as a function of stressfulness of discrimination. However, the regressions reported above examined how each dimension of discrimination (main effects of frequency and stressfulness) and their interaction (interaction effects of frequency and stressfulness) were related to adjustment after aggregating across situations, and the stated versus derived stressfulness approach answered a different question. With this approach, we were able to examine whether the events participants reported as stressful (i.e., stated stressfulness index) were in fact also “stressful” as indicated by the association between perceived frequency of each event and psychological distress (i.e., derived stressfulness index). In other words, these stated versus derived stressfulness analyses allowed us to examine variability in the frequency—psychological distress relationship across situations. We compared the stated and derived stressfulness indices to each other in order to understand the congruency (or lack thereof) between what participants reported about the events and the potential impact of those events on their adjustment.

To test this hypothesis, we correlated stated and derived stressfulness scores across all 17 SRE items. We found small-to-moderate *negative* correlations between stated and derived stressfulness ($-.34 \leq rs \leq -.14$), indicating that these two indicators of distress yield opposing results. This finding suggests that discrimination events most related to adjustment tend not to be reported as stressful by respondents. More precisely, the perceived frequency of discrimination events rated as less stressful was actually correlated to poorer adjustment, suggesting that events deemed less harmful were nonetheless related to psychological distress for the target of discrimination. Also, the perceived frequency of events rated as more stressful was not related to worse adjustment.

³ When separate regression analyses were performed for each measure of adjustment (anxiety attributes, depression attributes, and CES-D), the results were highly similar to those obtained using the aggregated distress score. See Table 2 for full results of these analyses.

⁴ Four items of the SRE (1, 2, 5, 10) capture *reactions* to racist events rather than merely *experiencing* racist events. When we conducted regression and stated vs. derived analyses without these four items, the findings did not differ substantively. Thus, we reported findings based on all 17 SRE items here.

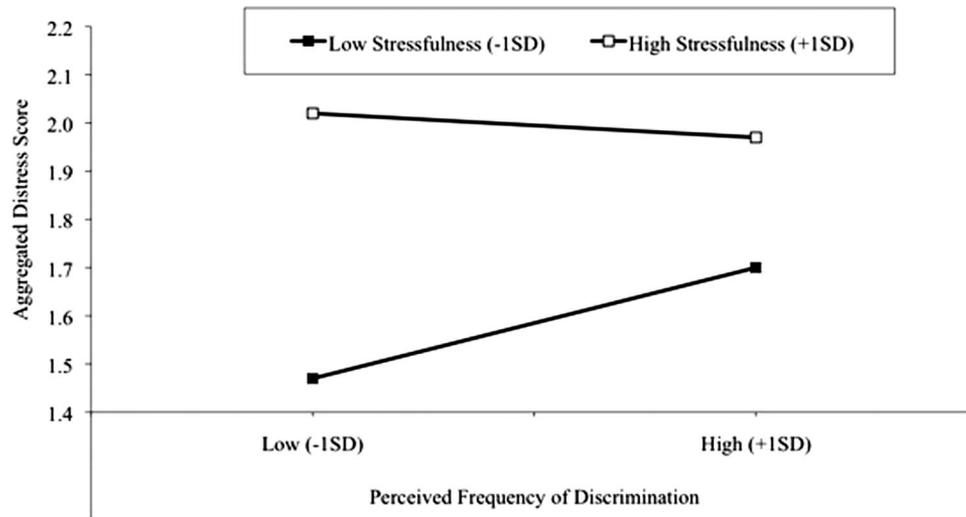


Figure 1. Interaction of perceived discrimination frequency and stressfulness predicting aggregated psychological distress.

Discussion

In summary, we found evidence for the mutually constitutive relationship between perceived frequency and stressfulness of discrimination. First, there is an interaction between the reported frequency of discrimination and the reported stressfulness of those events on both depression and anxiety. For higher stress events, frequency does not predict depression or anxiety, but for lower stress events, higher frequency is associated with higher depression and anxiety. Second, we also found that the events for which perceived frequency is most negatively related to lower adjustment tend not to be reported as stressful by Latino/a college students. Thus, it is important for researchers to examine both perceived frequency and perceived stressfulness, as the interplay between these two dimensions of discrimination has meaningful relations with psychological adjustment.

Returning to the examples of Mr. Shee and Ms. Ramirez, our findings provide empirical evidence for the negative correlates of frequent but seemingly benign experiences of discrimination (as in

the case of Mr. Shee) and stressful but infrequent experiences of discrimination (as in the case of Ms. Ramirez). In addition, our findings highlight the limits of introspection (e.g., Wilson, 2002), or more specifically, a relative inability to consciously evaluate the impact of a racist event on one's psychological well-being (i.e., as shown by the stated vs. derived stressfulness analyses). These findings suggest that the way racist events are experienced (as more or less stressful) should be considered somewhat distinct from the relationship between those events and psychological adjustment. Finally, given that some seemingly painless discrimination experiences are in fact related to psychological distress, we believe that our findings speak to the microaggressive nature of such experiences (Sue et al., 2007).

Implications

Previously, researchers have computed and used a composite score for the SRE by averaging frequency and stressfulness ratings. Our findings reveal two important issues that should be taken into account in future research using the SRE: 1) participants should be given the choice of *not applicable* for the stressfulness ratings for the events they have not experienced, and 2) frequency and stressfulness ratings should be examined separately. On a related note, the way in which researchers assess the perceived stressfulness of discrimination may greatly influence their findings; therefore, it is important to measure stressfulness in multiple ways in order to attain a more nuanced understanding of perceived discrimination. For example, our results regarding stated versus derived stressfulness demonstrated that the discrimination experiences not reported as stressful can nonetheless be associated with lowered psychological adjustment.

Limitations and Future Directions

Given the correlational nature of our data, we cannot draw causal conclusions about the relationship between perceived dis-

Table 2

Regression Analyses Testing the Effects of Perceived Frequency and Stressfulness of Discrimination on Mental Health Outcomes

Criterion Variable	β	t	p	R^2	p
Anxiety Attributes					
Frequency	.08	0.89	.373		
Stressfulness	.28	3.47	.001		
Frequency \times Stressfulness	-.20	-2.36	.020	.11	.0003
Depression Attributes					
Frequency	.18	1.94	.054		
Stressfulness	.16	1.94	.054		
Frequency \times Stressfulness	-.17	-1.96	.052	.07	.007
Depression (CES-D)					
Frequency	.30	3.27	.001		
Stressfulness	.11	1.37	.172		
Frequency \times Stressfulness	-.22	-2.60	.010	.11	.0004

Table 3
Correspondence Between Stated Stressfulness and Derived Stressfulness

SRE Item	Stated Stressfulness	Derived Stressfulness			
	SRE Stressfulness	Correlation between SRE Frequency and Anxiety Attributes	Correlation between SRE Frequency and Depression Attributes	Correlation between SRE Frequency and CES-Depression	Correlation between SRE Frequency and Aggregated Distress
Really angry about something racist that was done to you	3.14	.13	.14	.11	.13
Wanted to tell someone off for being racist but didn't say anything	3.03	.12	.12	.20	.16
Treated unfairly by people in helping jobs	2.94	.21	.20	.27	.24
Treated unfairly by institutions	2.89	.11	.05	.06	.08
Got into an argument or a fight about something racist that was done to you/someone else	2.79	.22	.32	.24	.28
People misunderstood your intentions and motives	2.77	.14	.12	.11	.13
Treated unfairly by people in service jobs	2.72	.12	.23	.24	.22
Been accused or suspected of doing something wrong	2.66	.30	.37	.40	.38
Treated unfairly by teachers and professors	2.60	-.09	-.09	-.08	-.09
Forced to take drastic steps to deal with some racist thing that was done to you ^a	2.57	—	—	—	—
Treated unfairly by strangers	2.51	.11	.16	.26	.20
Treated unfairly by your coworkers, fellow students and colleagues	2.49	.25	.38	.45	.39
Been made fun of, picked on, pushed, shoved, hit, or threatened with harm	2.49	.17	.39	.43	.36
Treated unfairly by your employers, bosses and supervisors	2.43	.41	.51	.52	.51
Treated unfairly by neighbors	2.36	.08	.08	.18	.13
Been called a racist name	2.29	.02	.06	.17	.09
Treated unfairly by people that you thought were your friends	2.26	.32	.48	.28	.38
	Correlation with Derived Stressfulness	-.14	-.32	-.35	-.30

Note. Items are presented in ranked order according to the mean perceived stressfulness, from most to the least stressful event/situation. "Correlation with Derived Stressfulness" indicates correspondence between stated stressfulness and derived stressfulness.

^a We do not report derived stressfulness indices for this item because the number of participants ($N = 7$) reporting that they had experienced the event was too small to compute a reliable correlation.

crimination and psychological adjustment. It is possible that individuals who are poorly adjusted perceive more discrimination toward themselves. However, as discussed earlier, there is longitudinal evidence pointing to the fact that perceptions of discrimination lead to poorer adjustment (Sellers & Shelton, 2003), and it is generally accepted that perceived discrimination can be conceptualized as a type of stressor that affects mental health (Clark et al., 1999; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). Another limitation is the homogeneity of our sample: all participants were Latino/a college students. Future studies should examine these issues using samples more diverse in terms of socioeconomic status, age, and ethnicity. In addition, future studies should examine other appraisal dimen-

sions of discrimination events, such as how much control people perceive having over the situations, how they cope with these events, or how harmful they perceive the events to be. Given our current findings, it is possible that these appraisal dimensions commonly measured in the stress and coping literature interact with perceived frequency of discrimination. Thus, an important goal of future research is to examine whether and how specific appraisals play a role in discrimination experiences. Finally, we are limited by the self-report and retrospective nature of the data. However, given our interest in the correlates of pervasive discrimination across a variety of contexts, not in a single event, experimental manipulation of perceived discrimination is not appropri-

ate. Thus, future studies should employ a longitudinal design with multiple timepoints to better address issues of causality, and at the same time, take into consideration the measurement and analytic issues we have addressed in this study.

Conclusion

In summary, our data show that perceived discrimination is related to poorer adjustment for Latino/as. These findings are in line with previous research that has demonstrated the negative impact of pervasive and stable racial discrimination. In other words, exposure to such repeated events is likely to be detrimental for the targets of discrimination. Contributing to the literature, our findings clearly illustrate the hidden costs of relatively benign but frequently occurring discrimination experiences. Both the interaction effects and the stated versus derived analyses show that discrimination experiences that are not reported as stressful by the target may still be linked to poorer psychological adjustment (depression and anxiety). In short, seemingly painless discrimination events still have a psychological cost if they occur often enough, and they are not as unproblematic as people report.

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