Contextual Influences on Children’s Identity & Development (2017-2018)
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Introduction

Negative perceptions of Black and Latinx students’ academic abilities and behaviors makes them susceptible to experiencing racial discrimination from teachers through micro-aggressions in the classroom\(^2\), teacher expectations\(^3\), curriculum placement\(^4\), and disciplinary practices\(^5\). However, Black students who are aware of racial discrimination, especially in schools, are more likely to exhibit higher self-esteem\(^6\), psychological functioning\(^7\), and academic achievement\(^8\). An external locus of control, or feeling like one’s life outcomes are out of an individual’s control, may serve as a protective buffer against negative effects of discrimination\(^9\). Given the importance of understanding and recognizing racial discrimination is for Black students’ academic outcomes\(^1\), the purpose of our study is to examine adolescents’ perceptions of racial discrimination:

Research Question: How do adolescents of color conceptualize racial/ethnic discrimination and perceive its impact on their lives?

Data & Methods

Data collection: Researchers conducted semi-structured, open-ended, in-person interviews with 52 middle school-aged students at two Durham community organizations. Each lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Interview questions focused on students’ goals, school experiences (e.g. teacher and peer perceptions), race/ethnicity (e.g. identity, cultural socialization, salience), neighborhoods (e.g., demographics, perceived quality), and community organizations (e.g. activities, conversations about race/ethnicity).

Data analysis:

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by team members. Data was analyzed and coded using NVIVO software.

Results

We found 4 themes related adolescents’ perceptions of racial discrimination:

1. Post-Racial Society: Students perceived that racial discrimination occurred in the past and no longer exists.
   “A lot of black people had to go through segregation...and I think it’s important to me because I don’t want that to happen in the world ever again.”

2. Race Doesn’t Matter: Students perceived race as having no impact on the way they are treated.
   “Just because we are a different color doesn’t mean nothing in the real world.”

3. Blatant Racism: Adolescents perceived discrimination as explicit and their examples involved unequal distribution of resources and Jim Crow-era segregation.
   “Race doesn’t really matter or your sex doesn’t really matter. [Teachers] are there to teach you, and you’re there to learn.”

4. Talking about Race is Racist: Students perceived that talking about race was racist.
   “Like if a white person go down the street and gets jumped, and a black person doesn’t, then everybody—that’s being treated differently. But if they both get jumped, then that’s being treated the same.”

Talking About Race is Racist: Students perceived that talking about race was racist.

“My community organization] usually don’t talk about that because they don’t want anybody to be offended.”

“No, not really. Cause we don’t have nothing to talk about. That’s racist or whatever.”

Conclusions & Next Steps

Students generally dissociated implicit experiences (i.e. micro-aggressions, stereotype threat, etc.) from racial/ethnic discrimination. Students seemed to believe that racial discrimination exists explicitly from teachers through distribution of resources. Some students perceived that simply discussing race was racist. Future research should include a larger sample size to evaluate whether these perceptions are consistent with more racially and ethnically diverse adolescents.

References