

Between Hope and Racial Battle Fatigue: African American Men and Race-Related Stress

William A. Smith, Ph.D.
University of Utah
Associate Professor, Department of Education, Culture & Society
Associate Professor, Ethnic Studies Program - African American
Studies Division

Man Hung, Ph.D.
University of Utah
Assistant Professor, Department of Orthopaedics

Jeremy D. Franklin, M.S.
University of Utah
Doctoral Student, Department of Education, Culture & Society

Abstract

Decades of empirical research has provided valuable evidence that racism is experienced as a stressor which can have a negative influence on the mental, emotional, and physical health of People of Color. The purpose of this study is to assess how hope, as a form of coping, mitigates the weight of racial microaggressions, societal problems, and mundane extreme environmental stress among 670 African American men. Using structural equation modeling, we find that for African American men, hope is like a pendulum that can intensify their racial battle fatigue or lessen it if it is not managed effectively. African American men with high to moderate levels of hope had more stress associated with racial microaggressions and societal problems than men who had low hope. From our findings, we believe that adaptive racial socialization may be playing a significant role in reducing stress.

“To be a Negro in America is to hope against hope.”
—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.”—Maya Angelou

Introduction

Over the past four decades, slow but growing empirical research has provided valuable evidence that racism is experienced as a stressor which can have a negative influence on the mental, emotional, and physical health of People of Color (i.e., African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinas/os, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, and bi- and multiracial people (Anderson, 1989; Brondolo, Brady ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, & Contrada, 2009; Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Pierce, 1970, 1974, 1975a, 1975b, 1988, 1995; Ramos, Jaccard, & Guilamo-Ramos, 2003; Smith, 2004, 2008a, 2008b). A positive consequence of this emerging focus is that the concept of stress has moved beyond primarily the field of psychology into counseling, education, sociology, social work, and other social science areas that attempt to explain how People of Color respond to racist discrimination. This investigation has also led to our increased understanding and recognition that most People of Color are living lives replete with exposure to chronic forms of mundane racism. The central question we raise in this study is if “hope” mitigates the impact of racial microaggressions, societal problems, and environmental stress for African American men as a form of coping.

Being Black and Feeling Blue?

In a multiethnic study by Carter and Forsyth (2010), they reported that their American Indian, Asian American, Black, Latina/o, and biracial participants experienced most of their racial incidents at work (32%) or at school (25%) and the vast majority (82%) described

their experiences as recurring incidents. Approximately two-thirds (65%) of the participants reported examples of discrimination in terms like “oftentimes denied access or service,” “being treated based on a racial stereotype,” enduring a “hostile work environment,” or as a “violation of racial rules/norms.” Roughly one third (32%) characterized their experiences as a form of harassment (e.g., physical or verbal assault, profiling, or multiple experiences). Carter and Forsyth asked their participants to describe from a checklist the emotion they felt in reaction to these memorable encounters with discrimination. The participants reported feeling disrespected (75%), angry (74%), insulted (60%), disappointed (51%), frustrated (45%), outraged (44%), hurt (43%), or shocked (42%). Along with the reported psychological reactions to specific incidents of mundane racism, this study further supported previous research that indicated that mundane racism is stressful and is a component of emotional distress (e.g., Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Pierce, 1970, 1974, 1988, 1995).

African Americans are disproportionately and consistently among the highest self-reporters for experiencing mundane forms of racist discrimination (Peters & Massey, 1983). In fact, African Americans have been the primary targets of racist discrimination for one of the lengthiest and continuous periods in the entire history of the human race (Feagin, 2010). With the exception of indigenous groups in several colonized areas, the nearly four centuries of sustained oppressions is longer than any other group (Feagin, 2004). The aftermath of this legacy is that many African Americans are currently living in so-called “post-Brown” (i.e., post-civil rights) societies but are still subjected to *Plessy*-like (i.e., separate and “unequal”) racial ideologies and contemporary experiences (Smith, 2004, 2008a). For example, Landrine and Klonoff (1996) reported the experiences of discrimination that African Americans encountered ranging from face-to-face interactions to discrimination in housing, employment, and health and social services. More significantly, the overwhelming majority (98.1%) of their African American participants experienced some form of racism in the past year. In fact, racist experiences are so frequent that depression, tension, and rage about mundane racism are the most shared problems presented by African Americans in

psychotherapy (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; National Institute of Mental Health, 1983). Based upon similar arguments and findings, Fernando (1984) suggested that racist discrimination is more than an added stress; it is a pathogen that affects health.

According to Brown et al. (2000), African American's perception of racist discrimination was more consistently related to psychological distress than to depression. In this significant study, it appeared that the forms of insults and indignities suffered as a result of mundane racist discrimination were extremely upsetting to African Americans. Yet, they did not, overall, result in increased rates of depression. This study extended our understanding from previous research which predicted that racist discrimination would be more strongly linked to psychological distress than to psychiatric disorders. The belief, here, is that African Americans and other racial/ethnic groups who have been historically exposed to discriminatory events develop adaptive coping strategies that mitigate, or reduce to some extent their vulnerability to, unfair treatment (cf., Bowser, 1981; Daly, Jennings, Beckett, & Leashore, 1995; Fernando, 1984; Pettigrew, 1981; Stevenson, 1997). Consequently, although experiences of racist discrimination contribute to high levels of psychological distress and low levels of subjective well-being, African Americans may use a variety of coping strategies that effectively block the etiological relationships of discriminatory stress to serious mental disorders (Brown et al., 2000).

African Americans and Hope

Adams and colleagues, in a series of studies, have reported on the important role hope played in the subjective well-being of African Americans (Adams, 2002; Adams & Jackson, 2000; Adams & Nelson, 2001; Adams et al., 2003). The central point in these studies is that African Americans draw on hope as a way of remaining perseverant in the face of adversity. Snyder and colleagues (1991) defined hope as a cognitive set that contains a sense of agency and pathways for individuals to reach desired goals. Therefore, the belief among many hope theorists is that hopeful thinking individuals including African

Americans and other People of Color, can gain new insights into reaching their goals (Adams et al., 2003). Yet, in a unique study of African American college students' hope and coping with race-related stress, Danoff-Burg, Perlow, and Swenson (2004) found slightly contradictory findings. Their study did not find hope or coping to have direct effects on students' satisfaction with life. However, they found hope and coping interacted to predict life satisfaction. These researchers also discovered that high hope students did not use active coping strategies.

In contrast, low hope students benefitted from the use of actively seeking social support, emotional expressions, and emotional processing as coping strategies. These researchers' findings did not support the common belief that high hope individuals, who are characterized by goal-directed agency and access to a variety of adjustment-enhancing pathways, would use active, approach-oriented strategies. One of the most significant findings in this study is that within a race-relevant context, hope may be correlated with a sense of personal efficacy. Therefore, African Americans with low hope might believe that collective action against racism is more efficacious than an individual effort. Additionally, these researchers reported that the coping strategy that appeared to help low hope African American students was reaching out to others to receive support or to understand and share their personal reactions to stressful encounters (Danoff-Burg, Perlow, & Swenson, 2004). As a result, social support is an effective and adaptive coping strategy in dealing with mundane racism. Moreover, social support systems offer a protection against potential pathogenic effects of racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue (Cohen & McKay, 1985; Pierce, 1970, 1974, 1974a, 1974b, 1988, 1995; Smith, 2004, 2010; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007).

Racial Microaggressions and Racial Battle Fatigue

Building on the work of Pierce (1970, 1974, 1975a, 1975b, 1988, 1995), Lazarus and Folkman (1984), Fernando (1984), and Carroll (1998), Clark, Anderson, Clark, and Williams (1999) proposed a model that further elucidated the relationship between mundane

racism, biopsychosocial factors, and specific health outcomes. The fundamental idea of this model is that the perception of environmental stimuli as racial micro aggressions resulted in inflated psychological and physiological stress responses that are influenced by a set of factors—constitutional, socio-demographic, psychological, and behavioral—along with various styles of coping responses (Clark, Anderson, Clark & Williams, 1999). Racial microaggressions refer to subtle attacks or invalidations taxed against an individual because of their race or ethnic group membership (Sue, 2010; Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torinom, 2007). The varied coping forms apply to the specific efforts, both behavioral and psychological, that people use to minimize stressful events. Clark, Anderson, Clark, and Williams also suggest that coping styles influence the “magnitude and duration” of responses to the race-related stress caused by racist discrimination. They also suggest that maladaptive coping strategies worsen negative consequences and adaptive coping responses diminish negative outcomes. Smith (2004, 2008a, 2008b, 2010) contributed to this important work while including other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks (e.g., Critical Race Theory, LatCrit, sociology, psychology, history, Black feminist/womanist theory, Chicana feminism), to better understand the unique experiences of People of Color as a form of *racial battle fatigue*. Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) defined racial battle fatigue as “the result of constant physiological, psychological, cultural, and emotional coping with racial microaggressions in less-than-ideal and racially hostile or unsupportive environments” (p. 555). Therefore, racial battle fatigue is the constant use or redirection of energy for coping against mundane racism which depletes psychological and physiological resources needed in other important, creative, and productive areas of life (Smith, 2008b). More recent research is beginning to offer a clearer picture of how the concept of racial battle fatigue is conceptually linked between the experience of racial discrimination and generalized anxiety disorder (Soto, Dawson-Andoh, & BeLue, 2010). This connection can better assist clinicians in interpreting the effects of racism over a person’s lifespan and how it specifically impacts African Americans and other People of Color.

Racial Microaggressions, Stress, and African American Men

In the growing scholarship on racial microaggressions and stress, the unique experience of African American males as a form of gendered racism has started to be considered as an important area of research (Harper, 2009; Smith, 2010; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). In a recent national study by Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2011), racial microaggressions and societal problems were found to predict varying levels of mundane extreme environmental stress (or MEES) among African American men. In this study of African American men, intensifying forms of racial microaggressions interacted at increasing levels of education (i.e., from high school through post-graduate degree holders) that heightened racial battle fatigue in mundane, extreme, and stressful environments. Furthermore, societal problems were not just a problem of the poor and less “formally” educated among these men. African American men, despite their educational levels, were significantly impacted by societal problems, which further heightened their MEES. One of the more alarming findings was among those who were college graduates. For college graduates, both racial microaggressions and societal problems accounted for approximately 40% of mundane stress.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to extend our current understanding of the role of racial microaggressions in the experiences of African American men, which has rarely been empirically addressed. We suggest that something is happening in the racialized experiences of African American men that are worth further examination. African American men have been historically exposed to gendered forms of racist discrimination. Yet, not much is understood about the ways they use coping strategies, like maintaining hope, to mitigate unfair treatment. We suspect that because of reported racial microaggressions, societal problems, and mundane racism, to be an African American male in the United States is to hope against hope. We further posit that there is something unique about this “hope” that makes African

American men “rise” and succeed in the face of gendered racist discrimination. By facilitating studies on racial microaggressions, mundane racism, race-related stress, societal problems, and racial battle fatigue, scale development can lead to a better understanding of the psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses as a method to create preventive health and mental health interventions (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). This study asks the following two research questions:

1. Do increasing levels of hope mitigate the effects of racial microaggressions on MEES?
2. Do increasing levels of hope mitigate the effects of societal problems on MEES?

Methods

This study utilized the African American Men Survey data collected in 2006 by The Washington Post, Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University. This survey provides researchers a wide range of opportunities to explore social, educational, and political issues at the national level.

Participants

In the Spring of 2006, the International Communications Research conducted a national telephone interview with 2,864 adults in the United States. Among all of the participants, 1,328 were African American men. Due to the random nature of the interviews, not all participants were asked of all questions in the survey. As such, our sample contained a total of 670 African American men.

In our analyses, subjects were divided into three groups: “High” Hope (those African American males who never or hardly ever lose hope), “Moderate” Hope (those African American males who do not too often lose hope), and “Low” Hope (those African American males who quite often lose hope – which included those who indicated somewhat often and very often lose hope). The High group consisted of

three hundred forty-six African American males (N = 346); the Moderate group consisted of one hundred sixty-six (N = 166); and the Low group consisted of one hundred fifty-eight (N = 158). Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of these three groups of African American males.

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics* (High N = 346, Moderate N = 166, Low N = 158).

	Hi n (%)	Mod n (%)	Lo n (%)
Age			
18yr to 30yr	96 (27.7)	69 (41.6)	57 (36.1)
31yr to 50yr	111 (32.1)	57 (34.3)	48 (30.4)
51yr to 85yr	128 (37.0)	38 (22.9)	50 (31.6)
Not reported	11 (3.2)	2 (1.2)	3 (1.9)
Annual household income			
<\$30K	89 (25.7)	47 (28.3)	70 (44.3)
\$30-\$49K	75 (21.7)	35 (21.1)	36 (22.8)
\$50-\$74K	56 (16.2)	38 (22.9)	15 (9.5)
\$75K+	76 (22.0)	25 (15.1)	15 (9.5)
Not reported	50 (14.5)	21 (12.7)	22 (13.9)
Educational level			
No high school diploma	60 (17.3)	31 (18.7)	41 (25.9)
High school diploma	110 (31.8)	62 (37.3)	60 (38.0)
Some college, but no degree	95 (27.5)	42 (25.3)	36 (22.8)
College graduate	76 (22.0)	29 (17.5)	16 (10.1)
Not reported	5 (1.4)	2 (1.2)	5 (3.2)
Marital Status			
Married	151 (43.6)	56 (33.7)	50 (31.6)
Living w/ a partner but not married	19 (5.5)	18 (10.8)	17 (10.8)
Separated	17 (4.9)	10 (6.0)	11 (7.0)
Divorced	40 (11.6)	8 (4.8)	16 (3.8)
Widowed	15 (4.3)	4 (2.4)	4 (2.5)
Never married	102 (29.5)	68 (41.0)	60 (44.3)
Not reported	2 (0.6)	2 (1.3)	0 (0.0)
Employment Status			
Full time	209 (60.4)	98 (59.0)	64 (40.5)
Part time	22 (6.4)	16 (9.6)	21 (13.3)
Not employed	115 (33.2)	51 (30.7)	73 (46.2)
Not reported	0 (0.0)	1 (0.7)	0 (0.0)

Country of birth			
US	304 (87.9)	151 (91.0)	135 (85.4)
Foreign	38 (11.0)	14 (8.4)	19 (12.0)
Not reported	4 (1.1)	1 (0.6)	8 (2.6)
Have children			
Yes	237 (68.5)	95 (57.2)	97 (61.4)
No	108 (31.5)	71 (42.8)	60 (38.0)
Not reported	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.6)

Note: Hi = Never or hardly ever lose hope; Mod = Not too often lose hope,
Lo = Quite often lose hope.

Data Analysis Method

A structural equation modeling approach was used to analyze the hypotheses in this study. Racial microaggressions, societal problems, and MEES were three latent variables created from observed variables (see Table 2). Racial microaggressions was created using five observed variables: In your day-to-day life, how often do any of the following things happen to you because of your racial background? (1) You are treated with less respect than other people; (2) You receive poorer service than other people at restaurants or stores; (3) People act as if they think you are not smart; (4) People act as if they are afraid of you; and (5) People act as if they think you are dishonest. The scale of these five observed racial microaggressions variables had been recoded from the original African American Men Survey dataset such that 0 = “never”, 1 = “once in a while”, 2 = “somewhat often”, and 3 = “very often.” Societal problems was created similarly using the following eight observed variables: Please tell me whether you think it is a big problem, a small problem, or not a problem for black men today. (1) HIV/AIDS; (2) becoming involved in crime; (3) racial discrimination; (4) poverty; (5) not having good jobs; (6) drug and alcohol abuse; (7) not being responsible fathers; and (8) young black men not taking their education seriously enough. Again, the scales of these eight observed societal problems variables had also been recoded such that 0 = “not a problem”, 1 = “small problem”, and 2 = “big problem.” Finally, the latent outcome variable MEES was comprised of seven observed variables: Are you worried about (1) not getting the health care you

need? (2) being arrested? (3) you or a family member getting HIV or AIDS? (4) not having enough money to pay your bills? (5) being the victim of a violent crime? (6) being a victim of racial discrimination? and (7) being unfairly treated by the police? These seven variables were recoded into a four-point scale (0 = “not at all worried”, 1 = “not too worried”, 2 = “somewhat worried”, and 3 = “very worried”).

Table 2: *Analysis of data structures.*

Unstandardized estimates of factor loadings (Lambda).

Numbers in parenthesis represents standardized estimates.

All estimates are significant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

(Total N = 670).

	Lambda
Racial microaggressions	
Because of your racial background, ...	
you are treated with less respect than other people	0.845 (0.637)
you receive poorer service than other people at	
restaurants or stores	0.866 (0.670)
people act as if they think you are not smart	1.000 (0.697)
people act as if they are afraid of you	0.928 (0.639)
people act as if they think you are dishonest	1.002 (0.719)
Societal problems	
HIV/AIDS	1.023 (0.498)
becoming involved in crime	0.785 (0.511)
racial discrimination	0.893 (0.369)
poverty	1.185 (0.526)
not having good jobs	0.876 (0.487)
drug and alcohol abuse	0.836 (0.539)
not being responsible fathers	1.072 (0.540)
young black men not taking their education	
seriously enough	1.000 (0.618)
MEES	
worried about not getting the health care you need	0.879 (0.649)
worried about being arrested	1.010 (0.734)
worried about you or a family member getting	
HIV or AIDS	
worried about not having enough money to pay your bills	0.896 (0.639)
worried about being the victim of a violent crime	0.883 (0.675)
worried about being a victim of racial discrimination	0.871 (0.680)
worried about being a victim of racial discrimination	0.891 (0.691)
worried about being unfairly treated by the police	1.000 (0.735)

Note: For Racial Micro aggression, ML χ^2 (df) = 41.029 (5), CFI = 0.959, SRMR = 0.030.
For Societal Problems, ML χ^2 (df) = 57.201 (20), CFI = 0.986, SRMR = 0.034.

For MEES, ML χ^2 (df) = 90.641 (14), CFI = 0.962, SRMR = 0.032.

In order answer the research questions, we first specified the relationship among the latent variables: racial microaggressions, societal problems, and MEES. Measurement models were constructed to specify how the latent variables were to be measured in terms of the observed variables. The full structural equation model was developed by combing the measurement models of racial microaggressions, societal problems, and MEES. Table 3 presents the bivariate correlations among the latent factors. We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis on the measurement model of racial microaggressions, societal problems, and MEES to ensure proper fit of the model. Finally, we tested the full structural equation model by each level of hope (High, Moderate, and Low). Model 1 was comprised of age, annual household income, and level of education. Model 2 incorporated the latent variable of racial microaggressions. Model 3 included the latent variable of societal problems to Model 1. Model 4, the final model, contained all of the tested variables.

Table 3: *Bivariate correlations of latent factors* (Total N = 670).

	(1)	Phi (2)	(3)
(1) Racial microaggressions	1.000		
(2) Societal problems	0.168	1.000	
(3) MEES	0.323	0.264	1.000

Results

As Table 1 shows, the Moderate Hope group had a slightly higher proportion of younger people whereas the High Hope group had slightly higher proportion of older people. Across all three levels of hope, at least a third of the participants had a high school diploma. Among High, Moderate, and Low Hope individuals, about 50%, 43%, 33% had at least some college experience or was a college graduate, respectively. While categories of annual household income were

distributed rather evenly among the High and Moderate Hope groups, approximately half of the people in Low Hope group had an annual household income of less \$30,000. Over 40% in the High Hope group were married. Approximately 34% and 32% of Moderate and Low Hope individuals, respectively, were married.

Table 4 presents the relationship among age, income, education, racial microaggressions, and societal problems. We found that age and educational level significantly affected MEES. After controlling for age, annual household income, educational level, and racial microaggressions ($b = 0.327$, $\beta = 0.258$, $p < 0.01$) and societal problems ($b = 1.199$, $\beta = 0.346$, $p < 0.01$) still significantly affected MEES in the High Hope group. Racial microaggressions accounted for 6.4% of the variation in MEES, while societal problems accounted for 11.9%.

Table 4: *Structural equation models of MEES in black males who never or hardly ever lose hope, who not too often lose hope, and who quite often lose hope.*

All relationships are unstandardized regression coefficients. Numbers in parentheses represent standardized regression coefficients. (Total N = 670).

	MODEL1	MODEL2	MODEL3	MODEL4
Hi (N = 346)				
Age	-0.012** (-0.217)	-0.011** (-0.191)	-0.014** (0.246)	-0.012** (-0.223)
Annual household income	-0.023 (-0.049)	-0.020 (-0.043)	-0.027 (-0.058)	-0.025 (-0.052)
Educational level	-0.184** (-0.196)	-0.224** (-0.237)	-0.157* (-0.167)	-0.191** (-0.202)
Racial microaggressions		0.327** (0.258)		0.249* (0.196)
Societal problems			1.199** (0.346)	1.056** (0.303)
R ²	0.096	0.160	0.215	0.243
R ² change		0.064	0.119	0.147
Mod (N = 166)				
Age	-0.019** (-0.391)	-0.017** (-0.347)	-0.019** (-0.398)	-0.017** (-0.355)

Annual household income	-0.052 (-0.132)	-0.076 (-0.189)	-0.054 (-0.136)	-0.074 (-0.186)
Educational level	0.072 (0.090)	0.070 (0.086)	0.071 (0.088)	0.069 (0.086)
Racial microaggressions		0.382** (0.317)		0.346* (0.287)
Societal problems			0.034 (0.233)	0.334 (0.102)
R ²	0.172	0.270	0.206	0.277
R ² change		0.098	0.034	0.105
<hr/>				
Lo (N = 158)				
Age	-0.005 (-0.094)	-0.004 (-0.091)	-0.005 (-0.100)	-0.005 (-0.097)
Annual household income	-0.060 (-0.147)	-0.064 (-0.156)	-0.063 (-0.153)	-0.066 (-0.161)
Educational level	-0.009 (-0.010)	-0.006 (-0.007)	-0.014 (-0.016)	-0.011 (-0.013)
Racial microaggressions		0.191 (0.184)		0.189 (0.182)
Societal problems			0.287 (0.069)	0.261 (0.063)
R ²	0.030	0.064	0.035	0.068
R ² change		0.034	0.005	0.038

Note1: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; R² change is in reference to the baseline model (MODEL1).

Note2: Hi = Never or hardly ever lose hope; Mod = Not too often lose hope,

Lo = Quite often lose hope.

However, when we looked at the group of African American males with Moderate Hope, we found that societal problems was not significant. Only racial microaggressions ($b = 0.382$, $\beta = 0.317$, $p < 0.01$) significantly predicted MEES in this group after controlling for demographic characteristics. The variations in MEES accounted for by racial microaggressions were 9.8%, and the variations accounted for by societal problems were 3.4%.

Among African American males in the Low Hope group, the results indicated that none of the factors (i.e., age, annual household

income, educational level, racial microaggressions, and societal problems) have any significant influence in MEES. Racial microaggressions and societal problems were no longer significant, and they only explained 3.4% and 0.5% of the variance in MEES, respectively.

Altogether, age, annual household income, educational level, racial microaggressions, and societal problems accounted for 24.3% of the total variation in MEES in the High Hope group, 27.7% in the Moderate Hope group, and 6.8% in the Low Hope group.

Discussion

The primary goal of the present study was to assess how hope, as a form of coping, mitigates the weight of racial microaggressions, societal problems, and mundane extreme environmental stress among African American men. Our findings add to the discussion on how African American men uniquely deal with added race-related stress and manage the intensity of racial battle fatigue. Consequently, our findings extend the literature on understanding gender-specific forms of racist discrimination and stressful environments. Moreover, we find that for African American men, hope is like a pendulum that can intensify their racial battle fatigue or lessen it if it is not managed effectively.

Historically, African American men have constantly faced unrelenting and routine messages of being unwanted, different, violent, untrustworthy, uneducated, and immoral (Feagin, 2006; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007). These perceptions present a tenuous existence in the minds of many African American men who must then negotiate the realities of crippling inequities (Profit, Mino, & Pierce, 2000). A major factor among African American men and how they mitigate racist discrimination and still rise is based upon the coping method they use (Brondolo et al., 2009). Typically, high as compared to low hope people are considered to be happier, more successful, and resourceful in the pursuits of their goals (Adams, et. al. 2003).

Hope appears to play a different role for the African American men in this study when compared to previous research. Race-related

socialization appears to influence how much hope is healthy or realistic (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Brown, 2008; Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Neblett, Philip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006). African American men with high to moderate levels of hope had more stress associated with racial microaggressions and societal problems than did men who had low hope. Like similar findings in the study by Danoff-Burg, Prelow, and Swenson (2004), we are encouraged from our findings that hope works differently for African American men. Hope appears to be correlated with a more realistic assessment of the possibilities of experiences that African American men might face. Possessing a more realistic understanding of the potential for racist discrimination offers these men additional avenues for coping. Hope does not always have to be based in reality. Therefore, by having a more accurate understanding of racial microaggressions and societal problems, these men learn to avoid extremely harmful external control behaviors that can destroy typical or mainstream avenues for reaching their goals.

It should be clear that we are not suggesting that African American men with low or moderate levels of hope are playing into a negative self-fulfilling prophecy or that they are not reaching their expected goals. However, we are suggesting that low and moderate hope men are taking into account additional realities that their high hope peers appear to overlook and therefore they are struggling with more self-reported stressors. Under these circumstances, the opening quote from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is still appropriate in the present lives of African American men. Moreover, in our study, to be an African American man is to hope against hope that racial microaggressions, societal problems, and racial battle fatigue will diminish in the near future. Thus, we agree with Stevenson (1997), African American men must possess three important forms of racial socialization as forms of coping: proactive, protective, and adaptive.

In our study, it appears that adaptive racial socialization might be playing a significant role in reducing stress among low hope African American men. Adaptive racial socialization is an orientation that recognizes the racial microaggressions and racist discrimination that pervades, identifies it, and then keeps it at bay long enough to develop room for creative counterstrategies (Stevenson, 1997). Consequently,

high hope African American men, who tend to be slightly more formally educated, older, hold full-time jobs, higher incomes, and who married in greater numbers, are more at-risk from the relative safety that adaptive racial socialization provides. Maintaining or developing adaptive racial socialization strategies can enhance African American men's belief in a world that is obfuscated with racist relations while promoting healthy self-development despite the obstacles they face (Stevenson, 1997).

Limitations

This study did not directly or indirectly examine racial identity and racial socialization as a part of hope or coping. Future quantitative studies should consider the direct link between these theoretical concepts. Also, social support networks are important for future research. Additionally, it would be interesting to examine how "hope" is viewed in a diverse racial/ethnic group of both women and men. Finally, qualitative research might offer a clearer lens of the nuances of hope, racial socialization, racial identity, and coping among African American men as a method in the mitigation of racial battle fatigue.

Conclusion

The present study extends the discussion of gender-specific race-related research, specifically among African American men. Our study support the findings of Danoff-Burg, Prelow, and Swenson (2004), hope merely does not have the same function in the context of African American men dealing with race-related stress and racial microaggressions as it does in previously studied contexts. Racial microaggressions are a national health risk for all People of Color. The data is clear that African Americans are constantly battling varying degrees of societal factors as they vacillate between hope and health. Racial battle fatigue is a useful concept to assist researchers in understanding the health and coping of African Americans and other racially marginalized groups. Future research should keep in mind that racist discrimination impacts its targets at multiple levels of health—

physiological, psychological, emotional, and behavioral. If society truly desires to get to a place where we can benefit from the full talents of a racially and ethnically diverse democracy, then we need to eliminate the racial inequities and racist pathogens that compromise dreams, hopes, and outcomes for People of Color.

Bibliography

- Adams, V., Rand, K., Kahle, K., Snyder, C. R., Berg, C., King, E. A., et al. (2003). African Americans' hope and coping with racism stressors. In R. Jacoby & G. Keinan (Eds.), *Between stress and hope: From a disease-centered to a health-centered perspective* (pp. 235-250). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Anderson, N. B. (1989). Racial differences in stress-induced cardiovascular reactivity and hypertension: Current status and substantive issues. *Psychological Bulletin, 105*(1), 89-105.
- Bowman, P. J., & Howard, C. (1985). Race-related socialization, motivation, and academic achievement: A study of black youths in three-generation families. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry, 24*(2), 134-141.
- Bowser, B.P. (1981). Racism and mental illness: An exploration of the racist's illness and the victim's health. In O. Barbarin, P.R. Good, O.M. Pharr, & J.A. Siskind (Eds.), *Institutional racism and community competence* (Chap. 11, DHHS Publ. NO. [ADM] 81-907). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Brondolo, E., Brady ver Halen, N., Pencille, M., Beatty, D., & Contrada, R. (2009). Coping with racism: A selective review of the literature and a theoretical and methodological critique. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 32*(1), 64-88.
- Brown, D. L. (2008). African American resiliency: Examining racial socialization and social support as protective factors. *Journal of Black Psychology, 34*(1), 32-48.
- Brown, T. N., Williams, D. R., Jackson, J. S., Neighbors, H. W.,

- Torres, M., Sellers, S. L., et al. (2000). "Being black and feeling blue": The mental health consequences of racial discrimination. *Race and Society, 2*(2), 117-131.
- Carroll, G. (1998). *Environmental stress and African Americans: The other side of the moon*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Carter, R. T., & Forsyth, J. (2010). Reactions to racial discrimination: Emotional stress and help-seeking behaviors. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 2*(3), 183-191.
- Clark, R., Anderson, N. B., Clark, V. R., & Williams, D. R. (1999). Racism as a stressor for African Americans: A biopsychosocial model. *American Psychologist, 54*(10), 805-816.
- Cohen, S. & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin, 2*, 310-357.
- Daly, A., Jennings, J., Beckett, J. O., & Leashore, B. R. (1995). Effective coping strategies of African Americans. *Social Work, 40*(2), 240-248.
- Danoff-Burg, S., Perlow, H. M., & Swenson, R. R. (2004). Hope and life satisfaction in Black college students coping with race-related stress. *Journal of Black Psychology, 30*(2), 208-228.
- Feagin, J. (2004). Documenting the costs of slavery, segregation, and contemporary racism: Why reparations are in order for African Americans. *Harvard BlackLetter Law Journal, 20*(49-81).
- Feagin, J. R. (2006). *Systemic racism: A theory of oppression*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Feagin, J. R. (2010). *The White racial frame: Centuries of racial framing and counter-framing*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Feagin, J. R., Vera, H., & Imani, N. (1996). *The agony of education: Black students at White colleges and universities*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Fernando, S. (1984). Racism as a cause of depression. *International Journal of Social Psychology, 30*(1-2), 41-49.
- Fischer, A. R., & Shaw, C. M. (1999). African Americans' mental

- health and perceptions of racist discrimination: The moderating effects of racial socialization experiences and self-esteem. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 46*(3), 395-407.
- Harper, S. (2009). Niggers no more: A critical race counter narrative on Black male student achievement at predominantly white colleges and universities *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 22*(6), 697-712.
- Landrine, H., & Klonoff, E. A. (1996). The schedule of racist events: A measure of racial discrimination and a study of its negative physical and mental health consequences. *The Journal of Black Psychology, 22*(2), 144-168.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer Pub. Co.
- National Institute of Mental Health. (1983). *Research highlights: Extramural research*. Washington, DC; U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Neblett, E. W., Philip, C. L., Cogburn, C. D., & Sellers, R. M. (2006). African American adolescents' discrimination experiences and academic achievement: Racial socialization as a cultural compensatory and protective factor. *Journal of Black Psychology, 32*(2), 199-218.
- Peters, M. F., & Massey, G. (1983). Mundane extreme environmental stress in family stress theories: The case of Black families in White America. *Marriage & Family Review, 6*(1-2), 193-218.
- Pettigrew, T. F. (1981). The mental health impact. In B. Bowser & R. Hunt (Eds.), *Impacts of racism on White Americans* (pp. 97-118). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Pierce, C. (1970). Offensive mechanisms. In F. B. Barbour (Ed.), *The Black seventies* (pp. 265-282). Boston, MA: Porter Sargent.
- Pierce, C. M. (1974). Psychiatric problems of the Black minority. In G. Caplan & S. Arieti (Eds.), *American handbook of psychiatry* (pp. 512-523). New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Pierce, C. M. (1975a). The mundane extreme environment and its effect on learning. In S. G. Brainard (Ed.), *Learning disabilities: Issues and recommendations for research* (pp. 111-

- 119). Washington, DC: National Institute of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.
- Pierce, C. M. (1975b). Poverty and racism as they affect children. In I. Berlin (Ed.), *Advocacy for child mental health* (pp. 92-109). New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel.
- Pierce, C. M. (1988). Stress in the workplace. In A. F. Coner-Edwards & J. Spurlock (Eds.), *Black families in crisis: The middle class* (pp. 27-35). New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel.
- Pierce, C. M. (1995). Stress analogs of racism and sexism: Terrorism, torture, and disaster. In C. Willie, P. Rieker, B. Kramer & B. Brown (Eds.), *Mental health, racism and sexism* (pp. 277-293). Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburg Press.
- Profit, W. E., Mino, I., & Pierce, C. M. (2000). Stress in Blacks. In G. Fink (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Stress* (pp. 324-330). London: Academic Press.
- Ramos, B., Jaccard, J., & Guilamo-Ramos, V. (2003). Dual ethnicity and depressive symptoms: implications of being Black and Latino in the United States. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 25(2), 147-173.
- Smith, W. A. (2004). Black faculty coping with racial battle fatigue: The campus racial climate in a post-civil rights era. In D. Cleveland (Ed.), *A long way to go: Conversations about race by African American faculty and graduate students* (pp. 171-190). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Smith, W. A. (2008a). Campus wide climate: Implications for African American students. In L. Tillman (Ed.), *A handbook of African American education* (pp. 297-309). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Smith, W. A. (2008b). Higher education: Racial battle fatigue. In R. T. Schaefer (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of race, ethnicity, and society* (pp. 615-618). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Smith, W. A. (2010). Toward an understanding of Black misandric microaggressions and racial battle fatigue in historically White institutions. In V. C. Polite (Ed.), *The state of the African American male in Michigan: A courageous conversation* (pp. 265-277). East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.

- Smith, W. A., Allen, W. R., & Danley, L. L. (2007). "Assume the position... you fit the description": Psychosocial experiences and racial battle fatigue among African American male college students. *American Behavioral Scientist, 51*(4), 551-578.
- Smith, W. A., Hung, M., & Franklin, J. D. (2011). Racial battle fatigue and the miseducation of Black men: Racial microaggressions, societal problems, and environmental stress. *Journal of Negro Education, 80*(1), 63-82.
- Snyder, C. R., Harris, C., Anderson, J. R., Holleran, S. A., Irving, L. M., Sigmon, S. T....Harney, P. (1991). The will and the ways: Development and validation of an individual-differences measure of hope. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60*(4), 570-585.
- Solórzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. J. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro Education, 69*(1/2), 60-73.
- Soto, J. A., Dawson-Andoh, N. A., & BeLue, R. (2011). The relationship between perceived discrimination and generalized anxiety disorder among African Americans, Afro Caribbeans, and non-Hispanic Whites. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 25*(2), 258-265.
- Stevenson, H. C. (1997). Managing anger: Protective, proactive, or adaptive racial socialization identity profiles and African American manhood development. *Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community, 16*(1-2), 35-61.
- Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions and marginality: Manifestation, dynamics, and impact*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.
- Sue, D. W., Bucceri, J., Lin, A. I., Nadal, K. L., & Torino, G. C. (2007). Racial microaggressions and the Asian American experience. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 13*(1), 72-81.

Biographies

WILLIAM A. SMITH is an Associate Professor in the Department of Education, Culture & Society and Associate Professor, Ethnic Studies Program (African American Studies division). He serves as the Associate Dean for Diversity, Access, & Equity in the College of Education and has a Presidential Appointment as the Special Assistant to the President & Faculty Athletics Representative. Dr. Smith coined the term racial battle fatigue as a theoretical framework to better understand how the biopsychosocial approach is a valuable method for examining the impact of race-related stress to the biological, psychological, and social factors and their complex interactions in the health of People of Color. In addition to racial battle fatigue, his research interests include inter-ethnic relations, racial attitudes, racial identity & socialization, affirmative action attitudes, and the impact of student & faculty diversity on university and college campuses.

MAN HUNG is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Orthopaedics at the University of Utah. She is also affiliated with the Huntsman Cancer Institute, the Center for Clinical & Translational Science, and the Division of Epidemiology, Department of Internal Medicine at the University of Utah. She serves as the lead psychometrician and statistician, and collaborates with investigators across multiple disciplines. Her research focuses on outcomes evaluation, instrument development, computerized adaptive testing, informatics, and event forecasting.

JEREMY D. FRANKLIN is a doctoral student in the Department of Education, Culture & Society at the University of Utah.

Contact Information:

William A. Smith, Ph.D.
University of Utah
College of Education
1705 E. Campus Center Drive, MBH #225
Salt Lake City, Utah 84112-9251

Journal of Black Masculinity, Vol.2, No. 1

(801) 581-8221 / (801) 581-5223-fax

All comments and queries regarding this article should be addressed to
william.smith@utah.edu