

Perceived Discrimination Experiences and Mental Health of Latina/o American Persons

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With a sample of 128 Latina/o persons, the present study examined a model that tested direct, indirect, and mediated relations among perceived discrimination, psychological distress, self-esteem, sense of personal control, and acculturation to Latina/o and U.S. cultures. Path analysis of the model indicated that (a) perceived discrimination was related to greater psychological distress, with personal control partially mediating this link; (b) perceived discrimination was also related, indirectly through personal control, to lower self-esteem; (c) self-esteem partially mediated the relation between personal control and distress; (d) Latina/o and U.S. acculturation were related, indirectly through personal control, to greater self-esteem and lower distress; and (e) U.S. acculturation was related directly to greater distress.

Keywords: perceived discrimination, racism, Hispanic/Latina/o, mental health, psychological distress

Experiences of discrimination have been conceptualized as chronic life stressors for members of minority populations (e.g., Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Klonoff & Landrine, 1995; Meyer, 1995, 2003; Smith, 1985). As such, on the basis of the extensive literature linking reported experiences of daily hassles (Kanner, Coyne, Schaeffer, & Lazarus, 1981) and stressful life events (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974) to psychological distress, a positive link has been posited between perceived discrimination experiences and psychological distress of minority populations. Indeed, empirical evidence supports the perceived discrimination–distress link with samples of primarily White women (e.g., Landrine, Klonoff, Gibbs, Manning, & Lund, 1995; Moradi & Subich, 2002, 2003, 2004); African American women and men (e.g., Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Moradi & Subich, 2003; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996); persons of Arab, Chinese, Indian, Korean, Pakistani, and other Asian backgrounds (e.g., Cassidy, O’Conner, Howe, & Warden, 2004; Lee, 2003, 2005; Moradi & Hasan, 2004); and lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons (e.g., Meyer, 1995; Waldo, 1999). Despite this burgeoning body of research, however, few studies have attended to the link between perceived discrimination experiences and psychological distress of Latina/o persons.¹ Such attention is needed, given that the Latina/o population is a rapidly growing minority group that constitutes 35.2 million (12.5%) of the total U.S. population (Ramirez, 2004), perhaps more if potential underestimation of undocumented residents is considered.

Thus, there is a need to build on prior research to advance the field’s understanding of perceived discrimination experiences and mental health of Latina/o persons. The present study addresses this need by examining the relations of Latina/o persons’ perceived discrimination experiences with both psychological distress and well-being aspects of mental health. On the basis of prior conceptual and empirical literature, we test a model that includes direct and indirect relations among perceived discrimination, psychological well-being indicators, and psychological distress. Also, the potential additional roles of acculturation to Latina/o and U.S. cultures are explored in this model. These aims respond to calls for studies of culturally appropriate frameworks that attend to within-group variability in contextual and personal experiences (e.g., perceived discrimination, acculturation) that might shape Latina/o persons’ mental health (e.g., Casas, Vasquez, & Ruiz de Esparza, 2002; Gloria, Ruiz, & Castillo, 2004; Romero, 2000).

Perceived Discrimination and Psychological Distress of Latina/o Persons

Although a diverse range of backgrounds and nationalities shapes Latina/o persons’ cultural identities, individuals from this population can be targets of discrimination because they are perceived as Latina/o, without perpetrators’ knowledge of targets’ specific identities and backgrounds. Indeed, extant data suggest that participants who self-identify as “Hispanic” (collapsed across diverse national backgrounds) report levels of perceived discrimination that are comparable to that reported by African American/Black participants and higher than that reported by non-Latina/o White participants (e.g., Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Roberts,

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¹ For brevity, we use the term *Latina/o* to refer to Hispanic and Latina/o persons. However, we acknowledge differing perspectives on whether to use *Hispanic* or *Latina/o* to describe the population of interest; the former is an English term applied by the U.S. government, and the latter is a Spanish term that emphasizes shared Latin cultural origin and political history (Davila, 2001).

Swanson, & Murphy, 2004). As such, for the purpose of discussing the link between perceived discrimination experiences and mental health, we use the term *Latina/o* to refer to

individuals of diverse Hispanic-based national origins including Mexico, the countries of Central America . . . , the Spanish-speaking countries of South America . . . , the Spanish-speaking countries of the Caribbean . . . , and the U.S. territorial island of Puerto Rico. (Casas & Pytluk, 1995, p. 156)

Most studies that have considered links between perceived discrimination and mental health of Latina/o persons have conceptualized perceived discrimination as one aspect of acculturative stress (i.e., the stress associated with the acculturation process). Acculturative stress studies focus on perceived stressfulness rather than frequency of experiences and suggest that acculturative stress, which may include discrimination experiences, is related positively to psychological distress (e.g., Cervantes, Padilla, & Salgado de Snyder, 1991; Hovey & King, 1996; Salgado de Snyder, 1987). In the acculturative stress literature, a few studies have separated perceived discrimination from other stressors and found that perceived discrimination plays a unique role in the psychological distress of Latina/o persons. For example, with a sample of Mexican immigrant women, Salgado de Snyder (1987) found that those who responded affirmatively to a question asking whether they had ever been discriminated against had significantly higher depression scores than those who denied experiencing discrimination. Similarly, Alderete, Vega, Kolody, and Aguilar-Gaxiola (1999) examined perceived stressfulness of discrimination events as a dimension of acculturative stress with a sample of Mexican women and men who were migrant farm workers. These authors found that discrimination-related stress was the only unique dimension of acculturative stress linked with elevated risk for depression. Finally, Finch, Kolody, and Vega (2000) assessed perceived stressfulness of discrimination experiences as a dimension of acculturative stress and also assessed perceived frequency of discrimination experiences with a separate three-item scale. With their sample of Mexican American women and men, Finch et al. (2000) found that discrimination stress and frequency each predicted unique variance in depression when demographic variables (e.g., age, gender), acculturation, and socioeconomic status were included in the regression model. Thus, findings from acculturative stress studies suggest that perceived discrimination is related uniquely to psychological distress when other stressors and background variables are considered.

Collado-Proctor (1999) developed the Perceived Racism Scale for Latinos (PRSL) to provide a more detailed assessment of the frequency of perceived discrimination events for this population. An important strength of the PRSL is that it was developed from qualitative data reflecting Latina/o persons' experiences and so assesses discrimination events that are salient for this population (e.g., presumptions about legal status, denigration of language style and skills). Using the PRSL, Collado-Proctor (1999) found positive correlations between perceived discrimination frequency and anxiety in her sample of Latina/o persons from diverse national backgrounds.

Perceived Discrimination and Psychological Well-Being of Latina/o Persons

As reviewed thus far, prior studies have focused on the link of perceived discrimination with psychological distress but not with the psychological well-being of Latina/o persons. Emerging research, however, points to the need to consider direct and indirect links of perceived discrimination with psychological well-being and the role of psychological well-being in the discrimination–distress link. Self-esteem is one of the most commonly examined indicators of well-being in the perceived discrimination–mental health literature. Support for a link between self-esteem and perceived discrimination, however, has been mixed across samples. Several studies found no significant direct relation between perceived discrimination and self-esteem with samples of primarily White women (e.g., Moradi & Subich, 2004) and African American women and men (e.g., Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000). Conversely, studies with Asian Indian, Korean American, and Arab American persons found a significant negative relation between perceived discrimination and self-esteem (Lee, 2003, 2005; Moradi & Hasan, 2004). Of the few studies that have examined the discrimination–self-esteem link with Latina/o samples, most have focused on children or adolescents and yielded mixed results, finding the link to be negative or nonsignificant (Gil & Vega, 1996; Shorey, Cowan, & Sullivan, 2002; Szalacha et al., 2003). Lack of consistent support for a direct link between perceived discrimination and self-esteem, however, does not preclude the possibility that an indirect relation exists between these variables.

In fact, extant theoretical perspectives and emerging empirical evidence suggest that an indirect link, through sense of control over one's life and environment, exists between perceived discrimination and self-esteem. In particular, Branscombe and Ellemers (1998) argued that although discrimination provides targets with an external attribution for negative events (Crocker & Major, 1989), targets are likely to feel that they cannot control perpetrators' prejudicial attitudes and behaviors. Thus, experiences of discrimination undermine targets' sense of control in their life and across situations (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995). Indeed, Ruggiero and Taylor (1997) found that perceived discrimination was related to lowered sense of personal control. Lowered sense of personal control, in turn, is conceptualized to relate to lower self-esteem and greater distress (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Ryff, 1989; Thompson, 1981), and empirical evidence supports such links (e.g., Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986; Kanner & Feldman, 1991; Larson, 1989; Ryff, 1989).

On the basis of Branscombe and Ellemers's (1998) proposition and related empirical support, Moradi and Hasan (2004) examined the role of sense of personal control in the links of perceived discrimination to self-esteem and psychological distress in a sample of Arab American persons. With this sample, sense of control fully mediated the link of perceived discrimination to self-esteem and partially mediated the link of perceived discrimination to psychological distress. In other words, relations of perceived discrimination to self-esteem and distress occurred in part or in whole through sense of personal control. In light of this prior conceptual and empirical literature, sense of control could be a key variable

through which perceived discrimination is related to greater psychological distress and lower self-esteem of Latina/o persons.

An additional consideration is that the role of personal control in the discrimination–distress link must be considered in the context of recent evidence of a potential mediating role of self-esteem in that link. In particular, Cassidy et al. (2004) found that self-esteem mediated the perceived discrimination–distress link in a sample of Chinese, Indian, and Pakistani residents of Scotland. However, Cassidy et al. (2004) did not examine the mediating role of personal control. We identified one study with Latina/o participants that examined concomitantly the links of perceived discrimination with self-esteem and personal control. In this study, Shorey et al. (2002) regressed perceived discrimination experiences on sense of personal control, self-esteem, and a number of other dispositional variables (e.g., individualism, collectivism, social dominance orientation) and found that perceived discrimination was related uniquely to perceived control but not to self-esteem. Shorey et al.'s (2002) findings support the importance of the link between perceived discrimination and sense of control but do not address relations of perceived discrimination, self-esteem, and personal control with psychological distress. Thus, it is not clear whether self-esteem and sense of personal control are simultaneous mediators of the discrimination–distress link or whether one serves as the critical mediator of this link. Also, the mediating role of self-esteem might vary across populations because a link between perceived discrimination and self-esteem (a precondition for mediation) has not been found consistently across samples. Thus, simultaneous examination of the potential mediating roles of sense of personal control and self-esteem in the perceived discrimination–distress link with Latina/o persons is warranted.

Role of Acculturation

Acculturation has been deemed important to consider in research with racial/ethnic minority populations (Kim & Abreu, 2001; Zane & Mak, 2003). Acculturation was originally conceptualized along a single continuum, ranging from adherence to culture of origin to adoption of the host culture (i.e., unilinear perspective). Presently, scholars conceptualize acculturation as a bidimensional process that captures separate low to high continua for adherence to indigenous and host cultures (i.e., bilinear perspective). The bilinear perspective accounts for the possibility of simultaneous high or low adherence to both indigenous and host cultures (Kim & Abreu, 2001). Although acculturation has been considered important to the mental health of racial/ethnic minority populations, empirical studies of such links with Latina/o persons have yielded mixed results, perhaps because of measurement limitations and reliance on unilinear conceptualizations of acculturation (Cuellar, 2000; Rogler, Cortes, & Malgady, 1991). Particularly relevant to the present research are studies that examined acculturation along with perceived discrimination and mental health. Such studies suggest that perceived discrimination emerges as a unique correlate of mental health, even when acculturation is accounted for (e.g., Alderete et al., 1999; Finch et al., 2000). Consistent with these studies, accounting for possible relations of Latina/o and U.S. acculturation with the variables of interest allows for a more stringent test of relations among perceived discrimination, psychological distress, and well-being in the present study.

Purpose of the Present Study

The present study aims to build on prior scholarship to advance research on Latina/o persons' perceived discrimination experiences and mental health in a number of ways. On the basis of accumulating conceptual and empirical literature, we examine direct and indirect relations of perceived discrimination to psychological distress and well-being. In addition, we examine the role of sense of personal control in the links of perceived discrimination to psychological distress and self-esteem. Finally, we explore whether the mediating role of sense of personal control in the discrimination–distress link persists in the context of a potential mediating role of self-esteem in that link. As such, we examine a model that tests the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Perceived discrimination is related (a) positively to psychological distress, (b) negatively to sense of personal control, and (c) negatively to self-esteem; given prior mixed support for a direct discrimination–self-esteem link, we explore both direct and indirect relations.

Hypothesis 2: Sense of personal control is related positively to self-esteem and negatively to distress.

Hypothesis 3: If tests of Hypotheses 1 and 2 support preconditions for mediation, we examine personal control as a mediator in the links of perceived discrimination to distress and self-esteem. On the basis of Cassidy et al.'s (2004) findings, we test the mediating role of personal control in the discrimination–distress link along with a simultaneous mediating role of self-esteem.

Finally, on the basis of the proposed importance of considering acculturation in research with racial/ethnic minority populations (Kim & Abreu, 2001; Zane & Mak, 2003), we include the potential roles of acculturation to Latina/o and U.S. cultures in the model. Mixed findings about acculturation–mental health relations and reliance on unilinear measures of acculturation in prior research with Latina/o persons (Cuellar, 2000; Rogler et al., 1991) preclude testing specific hypotheses about acculturation. Thus, our examination of the role of acculturation is exploratory and also serves to provide a more stringent test of our hypotheses.

Method

Participants

Data from 128 Latina/o American participants (63% women, 37% men) were analyzed in this study. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 71 years ($M = 30.77$, $SD = 14.82$, $Mdn = 23$). Race/ethnicity was assessed through self-report (rather than ratings of visible racial/ethnic characteristics, such as skin color); most participants selected Hispanic/Latina/o–White (75%), and the remainder selected Hispanic/Latina/o–Black (16%) or multiracial/other (9%; e.g., Chicana, Hispanic and Italian, Mestiza). Approximately 50% of participants were undergraduate students, 8% were graduate students, and 38% were not students (4% did not respond). Most participants identified as exclusively (94%) or mostly (2%) heterosexual, with 1% identifying as exclusively lesbian or gay (3% did not respond). Almost half of the sample (48%) identified as middle class, 20% identified as working class, 18% identified as upper middle class, 7% identified as lower class, and 4% identified as upper class (2% did not respond). Participants' self-reported national backgrounds were diverse, with the largest propor-

tions of participants identifying as Cuban (39%), Puerto Rican (15%), or Colombian (6%); many listed other (e.g., Guatemalan, Honduran) or multiple (e.g., Colombian and Peruvian, Nicaraguan and Mexican) national backgrounds. Approximately 39% of the participants were born in the United States, and the remaining 61% (including about half of those who identified as Cuban) were born elsewhere (e.g., Colombia, Cuba, Puerto Rico). Participants reported having lived in the United States from 1 year to 50 years ($M = 20.15$ years, $SD = 10.52$ years, $Mdn = 20$ years).

Instruments

Prior to data collection, we consulted four Latina/o persons (two students and two community members) about the clarity and appropriateness of our instruments for the population of interest (Quintana, Troyano, & Taylor, 2001). Consultants carefully reviewed all instruments and recommended modifications to formatting and instructions to increase clarity. Feedback about items and discussion of our modifications are integrated as appropriate in the description of instruments. The order of instruments was counterbalanced in the survey packet to control for order effects.

Psychological distress. The Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI; Derogatis, 1993) is a 53-item, self-report measure that assesses current level of psychological distress. Participants rate the extent to which they are bothered by symptoms (e.g., "nervousness or shakiness inside") on a 5-point continuum ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*). On the basis of the consultants' recommendation, we modified Item 17, "feeling blue," to "feeling blue or sad" to clarify the meaning of "blue" for non-native English speakers. Item ratings are averaged to produce a general severity index (GSI) that ranges from 0 to 4; higher scores indicate greater psychological distress.

BSI items tap physical and psychological symptoms associated with psychological distress, and the link between physical and psychological symptoms is considered an important aspect of Latina/o persons' conceptualization of mental health (Gloria et al., 2004). Evidence supports the reliability, factor structure, and validity of scores on the BSI and its variants with Latina/o samples (e.g., Aisenberg, 2001; Coelho, Strauss, & Jenkins, 1998; Martinez, Stillerman, & Waldo, 2005; Thoman & Suris, 2004). For example, Latina/o samples' level of distress as assessed with the BSI has been linked with acculturative stress (Thoman & Suris, 2004), financial strain, neighborhood problems (Prelow, Weaver, Swenson, & Bowman, 2005), and exposure to community violence (Aisenberg, 2001). Derogatis (1993) reported high convergence between BSI dimensions and corresponding Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (Hathaway & McKinley, 1983) and Symptom Checklist-90—Revised (Derogatis, 1977) scores and a 2-week test–retest reliability of .90 for GSI scores. With a sample of mostly Latina/o women, Rotheram-Borus et al. (1996) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .96 for the GSI. With the present sample, Cronbach's alpha for GSI items also was .96. Our sample's GSI mean and standard deviation ($M = 0.59$, $SD = 0.56$) fell between those for adult nonpatients ($M = 0.30$, $SD = 0.31$) and adult outpatients ($M = 1.32$, $SD = 0.72$) in the BSI normative sample (Derogatis, 1993).

Perceived discrimination experiences. The PRSL (Collado-Proctor, 1999) is modeled after McNeilly et al.'s (1996) Perceived Racism Scale for African American persons and consists of 34 self-report items that emerged from focus groups, in-depth interviews, and subsequent psychometric evaluation of data from Latina/o persons of diverse national backgrounds. The PRSL frequency of discrimination exposure scale assesses the frequency of perceived discrimination across settings (e.g., employment, academic, public). A sample item is "Because I am Latina/o, people assume that I do not have legal status in this country." On the basis of the recommendations of consultants, Item 6, "Teachers and students assume I am less intelligent . . .," was separated into 2 items: "Teachers assume I am less intelligent . . ." and "Students assume I am less intelligent . . .," which resulted in a total of 35 items. On the PRSL, participants report how often they have perceived each event on a range from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*several*

times a day) and indicate *not applicable* as appropriate (e.g., they are not in school, so they have not experienced discrimination in academic settings). We scored the PRSL on the basis of continuous ratings of items (as did Collado-Proctor, 1999, and McNeilly et al., 1996). Given that *not applicable* responses indicate no experience of perceived discrimination, they were coded as *never* (1), and item ratings were averaged to yield an overall score, with higher scores indicating greater perceived frequency of discrimination events.²

Collado-Proctor (1999) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .93 for perceived discrimination frequency scores. In terms of validity, Collado-Proctor (1999) found that PRSL discrimination frequency scores were related to greater anxiety. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for PRSL items was .92. We could not identify published descriptive data for the PRSL (or its African American version). However, the distribution of our sample's scores for PRSL items is consistent with patterns found in studies that used multi-item perceived discrimination frequency measures (e.g., Finch et al., 2000; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Landrine, Klonoff, & Fernandez, 2004; Moradi & Hasan, 2004). In these studies, perceived discrimination means for African American, Arab American, Latina/o, and Asian American samples typically have ranged from less than one to about one standard deviation above the *never* end of the frequency continuum. A similar pattern emerged in our sample ($M = 1.35$, $SD = 0.34$), with approximately 91% of participants reporting at least one discrimination event more than *never*.³

Self-esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10-item, self-report scale. A sample item is "At times I think I am no good at all." Response options range from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 4 (*agree strongly*). Appropriate items are reverse scored, and item ratings are averaged, with higher scores indicating greater self-esteem. With regard to validity with Latina/o samples, RSE scores have been linked with ethnic identity (Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997) and college students' academic stress (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005) but have been shown to be unrelated to social desirability (Valentine, 2001). Across other samples, RSE scores have been linked negatively to depressive affect, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, and interpersonal insecurity (Wylie, 1989). Wylie reported Cronbach's alphas ranging from .74 to .87 and test–retest reliabilities ranging from .63 to .91 across studies. In studies we reviewed that used the RSE with Latina/o adult samples, alphas ranged from .76 to .94 ($M = .83$, $SD = .07$; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005; Prelow et al., 2005; Shorey et al., 2002; Valentine, 2001). With the present sample, Cronbach's alpha fell near the average of this range (.82). Our sample's RSE scores ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.43$) were similar to scores for Cervantes et al.'s (1991) immigrant ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.41$) and U.S.-born ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 0.45$) Latina/o participants.

Sense of personal control. Ryff (1989) developed the 14-item Environmental Mastery (EM) Scale to assess the theoretically based dimension of well-being that corresponds with sense of personal control. A sample item is "In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live." Response options range from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 6 (*strongly disagree*). Appropriate items are reverse scored, and item ratings are added or averaged, with higher scores indicating greater sense of personal control in one's life and environment (Ryff, 1989). The EM Scale taps one's sense of control in the contexts of one's community, relationships, and social and

² We examined two alternative scoring methods by computing PRSL scores as (a) the average of applicable items (i.e., treating not applicable responses as missing) and (b) the number of perceived discrimination experiences (i.e., total number of items rated as more than "never"). These scoring methods yielded scores that were highly correlated with scores described in the study (Method a: $r = .91$, $p < .001$; Method b: $r = .89$, $p < .001$), and correlations between PRSL scores and other variables of interest were very similar across the different scoring methods.

³ Details about the frequency of discrimination experiences at the item level are available on request.

personal responsibilities; attention to relational aspects of well-being has been deemed important for Latina/o persons (Gloria et al., 2004; Romero, 2000). In terms of validity, EM scores were related to greater life satisfaction and internal locus of control and to lower belief in the control of powerful others and chance (Ryff, 1989). Ryff's (1989) well-being scales have yielded meaningful results with samples from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds, including Latina/o (Bonnin & Brown, 2002; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Ryff, Keyes, & Hughes, 2003, 2004), African American (Ryff et al., 2003, 2004), and Arab American (Moradi & Hasan, 2004) persons. In her sample, Ryff (1989) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .90 and a 6-week test-retest reliability of .81. Also, Gloria, Castellanos, and Orozco (2005) reported Cronbach's alphas for composite well-being scores (composed of marker items from the EM Scale and Ryff's five other well-being dimensions) that were in the low .70s. Cronbach's alpha with our sample was .83. Our sample's EM scores ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 0.75$) were comparable to scores in Ryff's (1989) samples of young, middle-aged, and older adult women ($M_s = 4.41$ – 4.69 , $SD_s = 0.73$ – 0.78) and men ($M_s = 4.48$ – 4.87 , $SD_s = 0.58$ – 0.61).

Acculturation to U.S. and Latina/o cultures. We used the Abbreviated Multidimensional Acculturation Scale (AMAS; Zea, Asner-Self, Birman, & Buki, 2003) to assess acculturation to Latina/o and U.S. cultures. In a review of acculturation measures, Zane and Mak (2003) called for acculturation measures that tap multiple aspects of acculturation to the host culture and the culture of origin. The AMAS was developed to address this need and, as called for (Kim & Abreu, 2001), assesses separately adherence to indigenous and host cultural values. The AMAS is a 41-item instrument that was developed and evaluated with Latina/o persons from diverse backgrounds. It assesses Latina/o and U.S. acculturation in terms of cultural identification, language proficiency, and cultural knowledge. Sample items are "I have a strong sense of being Hispanic/Latina/o" and "How well do you know the history of your native culture?" for the Latina/o acculturation scale. Parallel items replacing references to "Hispanic/Latina/o" or "native culture" with references to "U.S. American culture" assess U.S. acculturation. Items are rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree/not at all*) to 4 (*strongly agree/extremely well*), and item ratings are averaged to yield separate Latina/o and U.S. acculturation scores. Across samples, Zea et al. (2003) reported Cronbach's alphas in the high .80s and .90s for Latina/o and U.S. acculturation scores, respectively. With regard to validity, Zea et al. (2003) found that Latina/o acculturation scores were correlated negatively, whereas U.S. acculturation scores were correlated positively, with years of residence in the United States. Latina/o acculturation scores also were correlated positively with Latina/o ethnic identity (i.e., knowledge, sense of affirmation and belonging), whereas U.S. acculturation scores were correlated positively with other group orientation (affiliation with other groups). Cronbach's alphas for Latina/o and U.S. acculturation both were .93 in our sample. Our samples' scores on Latina/o ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.49$) and U.S. ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.51$) acculturation fell within the range of scores that Zea et al. (2003) found for Latina/o ($M_s = 2.82$ – 3.45 , $SD_s = 0.55$ – 0.47) and U.S. ($M_s = 2.56$ – 3.50 , $SD_s = 0.55$ – 0.41) acculturation.

Procedures

Cristina Risco networked extensively in the Latina/o community in north central Florida. She contacted student and community organization members and attended events to announce the study and distribute surveys to interested participants. Participants were recruited from Latina/o social and cultural organizations, from local churches with predominantly Latina/o membership, at Latina/o social events, through personal contacts, and by snowball sampling. Participants were informed that they had to identify as Hispanic or Latina/o and be 18 years of age or older to participate. Interested individuals were given a survey packet and were informed that the survey took approximately 30–40 min to complete and included questionnaires about their identities, life experiences, and well-being. Surveys were administered in English. Participants completed the survey at that time or later at their convenience and returned it to the researcher. Participants who preferred to complete the survey at another time were given a self-addressed, stamped envelope to return the completed survey and received reminders (as needed) to return the survey. Of 157 surveys distributed, 132 were completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 84%. One participant who was under 18 years old and 3 participants with more than 20% of items missing on a measure of interest were excluded from analyses, resulting in a sample size of 128 for the present analyses. Casewise mean substitution was used to replace missing item values for participants who were missing less than 20% of items on a measure.

Results

Intercorrelations Among Variables of Interest

As indicated in Table 1 and consistent with our hypotheses, perceived discrimination experiences correlated positively with psychological distress and negatively with sense of personal control (Hypotheses 1a and 1b). Also, sense of control correlated positively with self-esteem and negatively with psychological distress (Hypothesis 2). Conversely, perceived discrimination was not correlated with self-esteem (Hypothesis 1c). Finally, acculturation to Latina/o culture and acculturation to U.S. culture generally were not correlated with other variables, with the exception of a positive correlation between U.S. acculturation and self-esteem.

We explored the impact of skewness and kurtosis on intercorrelations among variables of interest by performing appropriate transformations to reduce skewness and kurtosis and reexamining intercorrelations. Consistent with indications that deviations from normality have minimal impact in sample sizes of 100 or more (Cohen & Cohen, 1983; Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996), we found that the magnitudes of intercorrelations with transformed scores were very similar and that the significance decisions were identical to

Table 1
Summary Statistics and Intercorrelations Among Variables of Interest

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	Possible range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
1. Psychological distress	—	-.54***	-.62***	.45***	-.03	-.04	0–4	0.59	0.56	.96
2. Self-esteem		—	.61***	-.15	.03	.23**	1–4	3.59	0.43	.82
3. Personal control/environmental mastery			—	-.33***	.16	.15	1–6	4.69	0.75	.83
4. Perceived discrimination				—	-.03	-.05	1–5	1.35	0.34	.92
5. Latina/o acculturation					—	-.32***	1–4	3.37	0.49	.93
6. U.S. acculturation						—	1–4	3.38	0.51	.93

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

those with untransformed scores. These transformations also improved multivariate normality but, again, did not change subsequent results. Thus, we present findings with original untransformed data to preserve the original directionality of the scores and the meaning of their interrelations.

Path Analysis Examining Direct, Indirect, and Mediated Relations

To test the potential indirect relation of perceived discrimination with self-esteem (Hypothesis 1c) and the mediating role of sense of personal control (Hypothesis 3), we used Amos 4.01 (Arbuckle, 1999) to conduct a path analysis of a model that included the hypothesized direct and indirect links among the variables of interest. We used maximum-likelihood estimation with the covariance matrix of the variables of interest as input. Use of path analysis was particularly appropriate because it allowed us to (a) test our hypotheses while exploring links of acculturation variables to all other variables in the model, (b) estimate simultaneously direct and indirect links of perceived discrimination to self-esteem and psychological distress, and (c) examine the mediating role of sense of control in the discrimination–distress relation in the context of a potential simultaneous mediation by self-esteem (Hypothesis 3). These aims required that we estimate all possible direct and indirect paths, which resulted in a *justidentified* (i.e., fully recursive, saturated) model and a perfect data–model fit (e.g., goodness-of-fit index, comparative fit index, and normative fit index all equaled 1.0). Klem (1995) pointed out that when just-identified models are tested, as is the case in the present analyses, magnitudes of the parameter estimates, rather than fit index values, are of interest. The model tested in the present study accounted for 40% and 52% of the variance in self-esteem and psychological distress, respectively.

Indirect link between perceived discrimination and self-esteem. The standardized path coefficient between perceived discrimination and self-esteem was not significant, indicating no direct unique link. However, effect decomposition yielded a significant indirect link from perceived discrimination to self-esteem. In particular, we multiplied standardized path coefficients (a) between perceived discrimination and personal control and (b) between personal control and self-esteem to compute the magnitude of the indirect link from perceived discrimination to self-esteem (Cohen & Cohen, 1983) and used Sobel's formula⁴ to test the significance of the indirect relation (see Baron & Kenny, 1986; Frazier, Tix, & Barron, 2004). Consistent with Hypothesis 1c, perceived discrimination had a significant indirect link of $-.19$ with self-esteem (i.e., $-.31 \times .61$; $z = -3.43$, $p < .001$) through personal control. It is important to highlight that, given the lack of a significant correlation between perceived discrimination and self-esteem (a precondition for mediation), personal control did not mediate the discrimination–self-esteem link. Nevertheless, a significant indirect relation can exist without significant mediation (but significant mediation requires a significant indirect relation).

Mediating role of sense of personal control in the discrimination–distress link. Zero-order correlations and path coefficients indicated that sense of personal control met preconditions for mediation in the link between perceived discrimination and psychological distress (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Frazier et al., 2004). That is, perceived discrimination (predictor) was correlated

significantly with psychological distress (criterion) and sense of control (potential mediator), and sense of control (potential mediator), in turn, was related significantly with psychological distress (criterion) when perceived discrimination was accounted for in the path model. If these conditions are satisfied, a variable is a mediator to the extent that it accounts for the relation between the predictor and the criterion (i.e., relation of perceived discrimination to psychological distress). Again, we used Sobel's formula to test significance of mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Frazier et al., 2004) and found that, in addition to its significant direct link with psychological distress, perceived discrimination had a significant indirect link of $.11$ (i.e., $-.31 \times -.37$; $z = 2.90$, $p < .01$) to psychological distress through personal control. Thus, sense of control partially mediated the link of perceived discrimination with distress.

Mediating role of self-esteem. Given that there was no significant correlation between perceived discrimination and self-esteem, self-esteem failed to meet a precondition for mediation of the discrimination–distress link. However, the path model suggested that self-esteem might serve as a partial mediator of the link between perceived control and distress. Thus, we explored this possibility. First, we determined that preconditions for mediation were met: Sense of personal control (predictor) was correlated with distress (criterion) and self-esteem (potential mediator), and self-esteem (potential mediator) was related uniquely with distress (criterion). Next, we tested the significance of the indirect link from sense of control to distress through self-esteem. In addition to its significant direct link with distress, sense of control had a significant indirect link of $-.19$ (i.e., $.61 \times -.31$; $z = -3.47$, $p < .001$) to distress through self-esteem. Thus, self-esteem was a partial mediator of the link between sense of control and distress.

Role of acculturation. In addition to testing our hypotheses, our path model allowed us to explore direct and indirect links between acculturation and mental health variables with Latina/o and U.S. acculturation considered concomitantly rather than separately (as done with zero-order correlations). As indicated in Figure 1, the path model yielded unique links involving Latina/o and U.S. acculturation that were not significant as zero-order correlations. In particular, the only significant zero-order correlation involving acculturation was the positive association between U.S. acculturation and self-esteem. By contrast, when examined together in the path model, both Latina/o and U.S. acculturation were related uniquely and positively with personal control, and U.S. acculturation was related uniquely and positively with distress. Effect decomposition and significance testing (in accordance with the procedures we have described) indicated that, through sense of control, Latina/o and U.S. acculturation had (a) significant positive indirect links with self-esteem (i.e., Latina/o: $.13 = .22 \times .61$; $z = 2.46$, $p < .05$; U.S.: $.13 = .21 \times .61$; $z = 2.33$, $p < .05$) and (b) significant negative indirect links with psychological dis-

⁴ Sobel's formula is $z = ab/\text{SQRT}(b^2s_a^2 + a^2s_b^2)$, where a is the unstandardized regression coefficient for the association between predictor and mediator, s_a is the standard error of a , b is the unstandardized regression coefficient for the unique association between the mediator and the criterion when the predictor is entered in the equation, and s_b is the standard error of b .

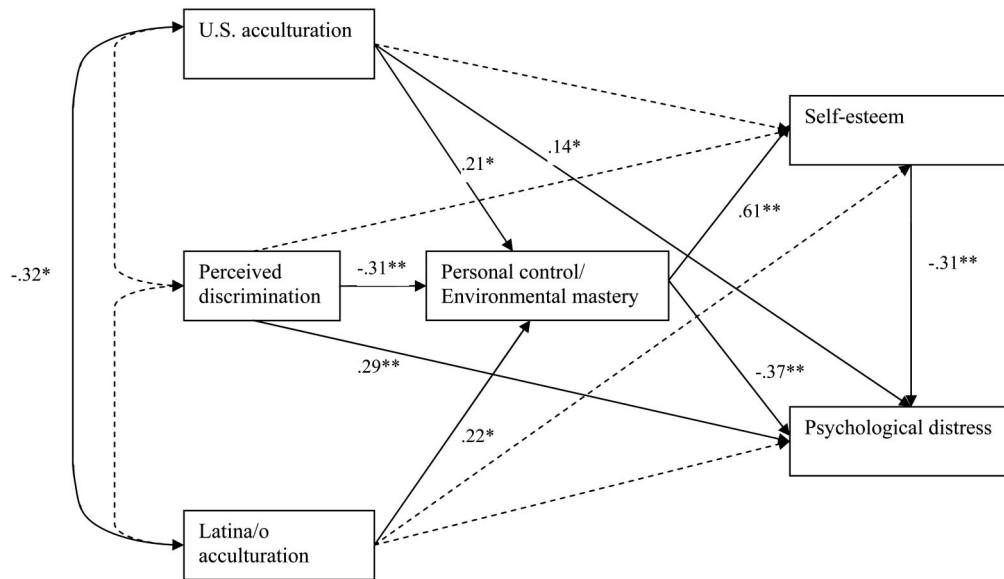


Figure 1. Path model testing direct, indirect, and mediated relations among variables of interest. Values reflect standardized coefficients. Nonsignificant paths are indicated with dashed lines. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

tress (i.e., Latina/o: $-.08 = .22 \times -.37$; $z = -2.24$, $p < .05$; U.S.: $-.08 = .21 \times -.37$; $z = -2.14$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

The present study extends the literature on the link between perceived discrimination experiences and mental health of Latina/o persons by examining a model that (a) includes both psychological distress and well-being indicators of mental health; (b) tests direct, indirect, and mediated links to advance understanding of the complex interrelations among these variables; and (c) explores the roles of Latina/o and U.S. acculturation in perceived discrimination–mental health links. The generalizability of the present findings needs to be interpreted in light of the sample's characteristics, particularly given the heterogeneity of the U.S. Latina/o population. With sample characteristics in mind, the present results can inform research and practice in a number of ways.

First, our results add to accumulating evidence that perceived discrimination is related to greater psychological distress in samples of primarily White women (e.g., Landrine et al., 1995; Moradi & Subich, 2002, 2004); African American women and men (e.g., Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Moradi & Subich, 2003; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996); women and men of Asian origin (e.g., Korean, Indian, Arab; e.g., Lee, 2003, 2005; Moradi & Hasan, 2004); and lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons (e.g., Waldo, 1999). This growing literature suggests a consistent link between perceived discrimination and psychological distress, with zero-order correlations ranging from the mid .20s to the mid .40s (our results fall toward the high end of this range). In the context of these findings and building on studies that assessed Latina/o persons' perceived discrimination experiences as an aspect of acculturative stress (Alderete et al., 1999; Finch et al., 2000; Salgado de Snyder, 1987), our results highlight the importance of attending to the unique link between perceived discrimination and psychological distress of

Latina/o persons in future research. Similarly, our results suggest the need to consider the role of perceived discrimination in case conceptualization, intervention, and treatment planning with Latina/o clients, given empirical evidence that such experiences may be related to clients' distress.

In contrast to fairly consistent support for the perceived discrimination–distress link, prior research has yielded mixed findings about the link between perceived discrimination and self-esteem (e.g., Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Lee, 2003; Moradi & Hasan, 2004; Utsey et al., 2000). In particular, studies with samples of primarily White women and samples of African American and Latina/o women and men (including our study) have not yielded consistent direct links between perceived discrimination and self-esteem (e.g., Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Moradi & Subich, 2004; Szalacha et al., 2003; Utsey et al., 2000). Conversely, studies with persons of Asian origin (e.g., Lee, 2003, 2005; Moradi & Hasan, 2004) point to positive and significant direct relations between perceived discrimination and self-esteem. With our sample of Latina/o participants, we found a significant indirect relation, but not a significant direct relation, between perceived discrimination and self-esteem through sense of personal control. Differences in findings across studies suggest that the model we tested may not apply across groups. Just identified models, like the one tested in the present study, are a useful baseline against which alternative models can be tested (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2000) but are limited in that their fit cannot be tested, and more parsimonious overidentified (i.e., less than saturated) models may be plausible. Thus, replication, modification, and extension of extant models, including the one tested in our study, are needed to examine the generalizability of parameter estimates and fit of more parsimonious models.

Furthermore, our findings and the larger pattern of evidence supporting the link between perceived discrimination and psychological distress point to the need to explore more complex models

that include simultaneous examination of mediators that “explain how external physical events take on internal psychological significance” (Baron & Kenny, 1986, p. 1176). Identifying such intervening variables is critical for targeting limited resources toward the most fruitful points for prevention and intervention. The present findings build on prior work to contribute to such understanding. In particular, consistent with prior conceptualizations and data (e.g., Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Moradi & Hasan, 2004; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995), we found that sense of personal control partially mediated the link of perceived discrimination events to psychological distress. In other words, perceived discrimination was related to lower sense of control over one’s life, and lower control, in turn, was related to greater psychological distress. This finding is consistent with Moradi and Hasan’s (2004) results pointing to personal control as a partial mediator of the perceived discrimination–distress link with Arab American persons. These correlational findings do not test causal directions but are consistent with Branscombe and Ellemers’s (1998) conceptualization that loss of perceived control may play a partial role in translating perceived discrimination into increased psychological distress.

The importance of the role of personal control as a partial mediator in the discrimination–distress link is further supported in our study because sense of personal control emerged as a partial mediator when examined concomitantly with a previously observed mediating role of self-esteem (Cassidy et al., 2004). With our sample of Latina/o persons, sense of control but not self-esteem partially mediated the perceived discrimination–distress link. Nevertheless, our results also point to the importance of continued attention to self-esteem as a mental health criterion and mediator. In particular, we found a significant indirect relation between perceived discrimination and self-esteem. In addition, although self-esteem did not mediate the discrimination–distress link, it did partially mediate the relation of sense of control to distress. Thus, our findings suggest that the overall pattern of direct, indirect, and mediated relations among perceived discrimination, personal control, self-esteem, and distress is critical to consider in research and practice with Latina/o persons. It is important to note that the significant relations found in the present study emerged when Latina/o and U.S. acculturation also were considered.

Exploring the role of acculturation in the model yielded additional noteworthy findings. Our results suggest that examining Latina/o and U.S. acculturation concomitantly rather than in isolation can yield a different pattern of relations with mental health variables. For example, when examined in isolation (with zero-order correlations), neither Latina/o nor U.S. acculturation was related to personal control, but when they were examined together in the path model, both Latina/o and U.S. acculturation were related uniquely to greater sense of personal control (an indicator of well-being). Also, through personal control, both acculturation variables had significant indirect links to greater self-esteem and lower distress. For acculturation to U.S. culture, however, the negative indirect link with psychological distress occurred in the context of a positive direct link with distress. Thus, U.S. acculturation was related to lower distress to the extent that it was linked with greater sense of personal control but was related to greater distress independently of the role of personal control. The different pattern of findings for Latina/o versus U.S. acculturation is con-

sistent with previous calls that acculturation to indigenous and host cultures need to be assessed separately (e.g., Kim & Abreu, 2001).

We might have missed these direct and indirect relations of Latina/o and U.S. acculturation with mental health variables if we had not moved beyond examining zero-order correlations. Thus, previous mixed findings regarding the link between acculturation and mental health of Latina/o persons (e.g., Cuellar, 2000; Rogler et al., 1991) might be due, in part, to the fact that Latina/o and U.S. acculturation were not assessed separately and considered concomitantly. Concomitant examination of the unique roles of Latina/o and U.S. acculturation seems more meaningful than examination of zero-order correlations, given that these dimensions of acculturation exist together in persons’ experiences. Furthermore, the present results suggest that acculturation variables are linked in opposite directions to psychological well-being and distress aspects of mental health. Thus, mental health measures that collapse distress and well-being might mask important links with acculturation and obfuscate analysis of potential indirect relations. The present findings suggest that using bilinear measures to examine the concomitant roles of acculturation to host and indigenous cultures, assessing separately psychological well-being and distress aspects of mental health, and attending to potential indirect relations can clarify important nuances in relations of acculturation dimensions with mental health indicators. Similarly, the present data suggest the need to consider the unique roles of acculturation to Latina/o and U.S. cultures in the distress and well-being of Latina/o clients.

The findings of the present study must be interpreted in light of a number of limitations. First, our sample consisted primarily of young, at least high-school-educated, middle-class, Latina/o persons who resided in Florida. On average, participants had high English competency and high Latina/o and U.S. acculturation. Also, Mexican American persons represent the largest group of Latina/o Americans (59%; Ramirez, 2004) but were underrepresented in our sample. By contrast, 39% of our sample were Cuban-Americans, compared with 3.5% of U.S. Latina/o population (Ramirez, 2004). Thus, additional studies are needed to examine the replicability of our findings in samples that include different compositions of Latina/o persons. Developing and administering surveys in Spanish might also capture greater variability in terms of U.S. acculturation. Replication efforts are particularly critical because of the diversity of the U.S. Latina/o population. Also, given geographic differences in the composition of U.S. Latina/o population, most single studies are unlikely to capture a fully representative sample of Latina/o persons. Thus, accumulation of data across studies with different samples is critical for advancing understanding of the link between perceived discrimination and mental health of Latina/o persons of diverse backgrounds. The present study represents one step in this effort.

In addition to considering how background characteristics and identities of targets might shape perceived discrimination and mental health, a fruitful area for exploration might be to examine how detectible characteristics of targets shape such experiences. For example, how do visible characteristics such as skin color shape discrimination experiences for Latina/o persons? U.S. Census Bureau (2004) data suggest that assessing the self-reported racial category (e.g., African American/Black, Native American, Caucasian/White) of Latina/o persons does not address this issue because approximately 94% of Latina/o persons select the “White”

category. Also, for Latina/o persons, variables in addition to skin color can shape racial categorization and discrimination. Indeed, Carter and Pieterse (2005) observed that “language has been used to define and identify Hispanics and Latinos as a functional racial group to distinguish them from Whites” (p. 42). Consistent with this point, Collado-Proctor’s (1999) focus group and interview participants identified having an accent, limited English skills, and other nonphysical characteristics as factors that elicited discrimination. Perpetrators might be more likely to target individuals whose Latina/o identity is detectible through physical (e.g., skin tone) and nonphysical characteristics (e.g., detectible accent, recognizably Latina/o name) than to target individuals whose Latina/o identity is not detectible. Limited inclusion of participants with detectible racial/ethnic minority characteristics might contribute to low rates of perceived discrimination experiences observed across studies (including in ours). Thus, assessing the detectability of racial/ethnic minority characteristics might be fruitful in future research.

Second, in our sample, significant relations among the variables of interest emerged despite the restriction in range of several assessed variables. Such range restriction can attenuate observed relations among variables but is typical in research on perceived discrimination and mental health. It is important to recognize that, despite such range restriction across samples, studies are yielding fairly consistent support for a significant link between perceived discrimination and psychological distress. Nevertheless, replication of our findings is critical for testing the robustness of the relations observed with the present sample.

Third, a limitation of our study that also applies to the present state of the art in discrimination–mental health research is that correlational designs do not test the direction of causality among variables. For example, perceived discrimination experiences might result in loss of control, lower sense of control might result in perception of more discrimination, or there could be a circular relation between these variables. Correlational research provides a useful preliminary step in identifying links that can be explored further with longitudinal and experimental studies designed to evaluate the directional relations implied in much of the extant empirical and theoretical literature on perceived discrimination and mental health (Basic Behavioral Science Task Force of the National Advisory Mental Health Council, 1996; Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995).

An additional limitation of our study, which applies to much of the prior research on the discrimination–mental health link, is that we focused on the mental health correlates of experiences perceived as or attributed to discrimination. Such a postattribution focus can inform research and practice related to persons’ perceptions of discrimination. Indeed, persons’ perceptions are often the only data that researchers and practitioners have to work with. The focus on perceptions does not negate, however, the importance of research aimed to understand individual differences (e.g., target’s affect, target’s knowledge about prejudice) and contextual variables (e.g., gender and race of perpetrator) that may shape persons’ perceptions of events as discrimination (Barrett & Swim, 1998; Sechrist, Swim, & Mark, 2003; Stangor et al., 2003). Differential perceptions of events (e.g., discrimination vs. no discrimination) may, in turn, have different mental health consequences. Thus, pre- and post-perception/attribution studies are complementary

approaches to advancing understanding of the discrimination–mental health link, and both approaches are necessary for informing educational and therapeutic interventions.

Despite these limitations, in the context of the larger body of literature, our findings provide useful information for research and practice. Overall, our findings highlight the importance of attending to the complex interrelations among perceived discrimination, psychological distress, and well-being of Latina/o persons. These findings and the larger body of literature in which our study is grounded suggest the continued importance of attending to perceived discrimination experiences in research and practice aimed to understand and improve the mental health of minority populations.

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