



The Impact of Racial Discrimination on African American Fathers' Intimate Relationships

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Abstract

African Americans have a lower marriage rate and report lower relationship quality than whites. Experiencing stress associated with racial discrimination and financial strain may impact the intimate relationships of African American fathers, yet this topic is underexplored. We used a clinic-based sample of African American fathers in Baltimore, MD, and Washington, DC ($N = 203$), to examine (1) the relationship between socioeconomic factors and experiences of racial discrimination and (2) the extent to which racial discrimination, financial stress, and perceived stress are associated with marital status and intimate relationship quality for African American fathers. Education was positively associated with the racial discrimination, and relationship quality was negatively associated with perceived stress and racial discrimination. Perceived stress mediates the relationship between racial discrimination and relationship quality. Addressing interpersonal and institutional racism may impact relationship quality for African American men.

Keywords African Americans · Marriage · Discrimination · Fathers · Intimate relationships · Racism

Introduction

African Americans are less likely to get married (Adimora and Schoenbach 2005), report lower marital quality (Bulanda and Brown 2007; Corra et al. 2009), and are more likely to divorce (Bramlett and Mosher 2002) than whites. Marital discord and relationship dissatisfaction can result in negative health and well-being for parents and their progeny (Amato and Sobolewski 2001; Umberson et al. 2006),

including poorer general health and greater risk of short- and long-term psychological disorders in youth (Amato 2010). Children in these circumstances experience financial distress and its unfavorable consequences (Amato 2010; Ranjith and Rupasingha 2012). Given these outcomes, there is interest in promoting healthy familial relationships and identifying factors associated with family disruption in African American communities.

Stress diminishes relationship quality and promotes marital dissolution (Karney et al. 2005; Karney and Bradbury 1995; Randall and Bodenmann 2009). Both acute (major) and chronic (frequent) stressors contribute to marital dissatisfaction (Bodenmann 2005; Karney and Bradbury 1995). Extramarital stressors may spill over and affect marriage quality (Bryant et al. 2010; Neff and Karney 2004; Riina and McHale 2010; Schulz et al. 2004). This is particularly concerning for African Americans as stress may impact African American intimate relationships and, by extension, the well-being of African American families.

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Racial Discrimination and Intimate Relationships

Racial discrimination is notable stressor affecting African Americans. Despite legislative and social efforts to promote civil rights, African Americans continue to report more unfair treatment based on race or ethnicity than whites (Soto et al. 2011; Williams et al. 1997). For example, one study found that approximately 41% of African Americans reported experiencing racial discrimination compared to 8% of whites (Soto et al. 2011). In terms of gender, African American men report more frequent experiences of discrimination than African American women (Kessler et al. 1999; Riina and McHale 2010).

The stress that these men experience may impact family life as experiencing discrimination negatively affects parent–adolescent relationships, co-parenting relationships, and the quality of intimate relationships (Bryant et al. 2010; Murry et al. 2001; Riina and McHale 2010). Racial discrimination may negatively impact familial relationships more for fathers than for mothers, because women tend to adopt coping strategies that strengthen familial bonds, while men are more apt to employ coping strategies that involve withdrawal from others, which contributes to relationship dissolution (Riina and McHale 2010). Moreover, the stress that these fathers experience and its aftereffects on family relationships (Karney et al. 2005; Karney and Bradbury 1995; Randall and Bodenmann 2009) may engender negative outcomes for their offspring (Amato and Sobolewski 2001; Umberson et al. 2006). Although racial discrimination is a ubiquitous stressor that may partially explain the higher divorce and lower marriage and relationship satisfaction rates among African Americans compared to whites, there is a paucity of research on this topic.

Socioeconomic Factors and Intimate Relationships

In addition to racial discrimination, economic hardship has been linked to lower intimate relationship quality and survival (Conger et al. 1999; Cutrona et al. 2011; Hardie and Lucas 2010). The African Americans unemployment rate is double that of whites (10.7 versus 5.3, respectively; U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics 2015). African Americans also experience more employment discrimination than whites based on criminal charges (Alexander 2010). Employed African Americans may experience wage discrimination, as African Americans earn an estimated 15% less money than comparable white workers (Goldsmith et al. 2007; Grodsky and Pager 2001). As a consequence of these and other economic and social disparities, African

Americans have a higher rate of poverty than whites (Denavas-Walt et al. 2011). Thus, African Americans are at heightened risk relative to their white counterparts for experiencing intimate relationship discord attributable to financial stress. This financial stress may increase general propensity for hostility among men in particular and consequently have an indirect detrimental impact on their intimate relationships (Conger et al. 1999).

Heterogeneity within the African American community is under-examined in research focusing on stress factors of racism, financial strain, and relationship status and quality. For example, although the earning power of African Americans is generally lower than that of whites, striking income inequality exists within African American populations (Nembhard et al. 2005; U.S. Census Bureau 2014a), income inequality among African Americans is precipitously greater than among whites (Nembhard et al. 2005; U.S. Census Bureau 2014a; U.S. Census Bureau 2014b; U.S. Census Bureau 2014c), and socioeconomic status may moderate the frequency of chronic and acute discrimination experiences (Kessler et al. 1999), exposure to financial stress (Bryant et al. 2010), and access to resources (Bryant & Wickrama 2005) within African American communities. In turn, these factors may affect intimate relationship quality and survival. Advancing this line of inquiry offers potential for addressing intimate relationship and family-life challenges for economically distressed African American men.

Theoretical Framework

Although not developed specifically for African American families or cross-sectional research, Kary and Bradbury's (1995) vulnerability-stress-adaptation model may help explain how these factors impact intimate relationships. In short, this model posits that three factors reciprocally influence one another: (a) enduring vulnerabilities (the consistent demographic, personality, and historical factors and experiences that individuals bring into their intimate relationships), (b) stressful events (the acute or chronic negative situations that individuals and couples encounter), and (c) adaptive processes (skill and effectiveness in navigating individual and collective difficulties). Relationship quality, in turn, has a reciprocally influential relationship with adaptive processing. Ultimately, relationship quality influences relationship stability. The present study adopts this model and adapts it for African American fathers. Specifically, enduring vulnerabilities (socioeconomic factors) are hypothesized to influence stress factors (i.e., racial discrimination, financial strain, and perceived stress), which are regulated by adaptive processes that influence relationship quality.

The Current Investigation

The present study examines the impact of racial discrimination and other stressors on intimate relationship status and quality, as well as the role of socioeconomic differences on these factors, among African American men. Despite the impact on African American families and children, there is little quantitative research examining the impact of race-based discrimination on relationship status and quality. Furthermore, there is a paucity of research examining intra-group socioeconomic differences of discrimination experiences in the context of intimate relationships. Finally, few studies quantitatively explore interactions between different stressors on intimate relationships for African American fathers. This research sought to identify stress pathways in which exogenous stressors can impact individuals and, in turn, affect relationship stress and increase negative social and health outcomes. The study addresses deficits in the scientific literature by (1) utilizing a multisite, database that oversamples African American families, (2) examining the perspectives of African American men, (3) exploring how financial status contributes to differences in relationship status and quality, and (4) investigating the effects of discrimination experiences—both the amount and types—on relationship status and quality within a heterogeneous African American sample. We hypothesize that (a) socioeconomic status is associated with the frequency and type of racial discrimination encountered by African American men, and (b) the frequency and type of racial discrimination encountered is associated with marital status and relationship quality among African American men. More specifically, concerning relationship status and quality, we expect that higher reported frequencies of racial discrimination experiences will be associated with less likelihood of being married and poorer relationship quality among those who are married.

Methods

Sample

Data are from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's (NICHD) longitudinal Child Community Health Network study (CCHN). A comprehensive description of the study can be found elsewhere (Schetter et al. 2013), but briefly, this study examines the effects of community and familial factors on maternal allostatic load during the postpartum period. For this paper, data from two of the five study

sites—Baltimore, MD and Washington, DC—were used for this analysis because they provided the largest samples of African American men and similarity in demographics (majority black cities; USA Census Bureau 2012), geography (Mid-Atlantic), and social context (large urban centers with similar poverty levels; USA Census Bureau 2012). The three sites not included are Lake County, IL, Los Angeles, CA, and rural eastern North Carolina. Fathers' data were used to examine factors related to financial stress, discrimination, relationship status, relationship quality, and all other variables of interest.

Demographic Information

A total of 203 participants were included in analysis. Demographics are reported in Table 1. The greatest percentage of fathers had greater than a high school education (43%), lived at greater than 200% poverty (51%), lived with the child's mother (73%), and were in a relationship (not married) (72%). Mean age was 27 years (range of 19–58 years).

Procedures

Mothers were pre-enrolled prenatally or enrolled postnatally within one month postpartum. Follow-up interviews were conducted at approximately one month postpartum at home or at an agreed-upon location. Fathers were recruited after engagement with the mother, because mothers recruited fathers into the study.

Table 1 Child and Community Health Network data on African American fathers from the Baltimore and Washington DC sites

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Poverty level		
= 100% FPL ^a	55	27.09
> 100–200% FPL	44	21.67
> 200% FPL	104	51.23
Father's education		
< High school	39	19.21
High school	77	37.93
> High school	87	42.86
Relationship status		
Married	44	21.67
Relationship (not married)	146	71.92
No relationship	13	6.40
Living with Child's Mother		
No	55	27.23
Yes	147	72.77

Frequencies and percentages of education, poverty, living with mother, and relationship status

^aFPL federal poverty level

Mothers and fathers were interviewed separately. Interviewers were trained in procedures to maximize participant privacy and comfort, to minimize interruptions, and to ensure their own safety during the interview process. Most interviewers were community members; all received training in community research, and many were experienced in participating in research and data collection. They conducted interviews using a standardized protocol for each assessment. Interviews lasted an average of 1–2 h (Schetter, et al. 2013). The data used for this study are exclusively from African Americans. A total of 371 surveys were collected. A total of 168 participants were eliminated due to non-response.

Measures

Income and Education

Participants were classified into three income categories—less than 100% of the Federal poverty level (FPL), between 100 and 200% of the FPL, and greater than 200% of the FPL—according to the father’s reported annual household income and size. 7

Financial Stress

The financial stress scale was developed for the parent study. More details about measure construction can be found elsewhere (Schetter et al. 2013), but the financial stress score was computed from five interview items. Examples of questions include: (1) “How difficult is it for you (your household) to meet the monthly payments on your (household’s) bills? (*not at all difficult* [0], *somewhat or slightly difficult* [0.5], *extremely or very difficult* [1]); (2) “How much do you worry that your total (household) income will not be enough to meet your (household’s) expenses and bills? (*not at all* [0], *a little* [0.5], *a great deal or a lot* [1]); and; (3) “In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn’t eat because you couldn’t afford enough food?” (response options were *no*[0] and *yes* [1]). The financial stress score was calculated by summing the scores for these five questions, resulting in total possible scores ranging from 0 to 5 and higher scores corresponding with more financial stress. The internal reliability (Cronbach alpha) for this scale was .68 (Schetter et al. 2013).

Perceived Stress

The ten-item version of the *Perceived Stress Scale* (PSS; Cohen and Williamson 1988) was used to capture appraisals of stress level. The scale assessed perceptions of life

approximately one month after delivery as being unpredictable, uncontrollable, or overwhelming since the birth of the baby. Examples include “In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?” and “In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and ‘stressed?’”. Five response options anchored by *never* and *almost always* were provided for each, and higher scores correspond with more perceived stress. The Cronbach alpha for this scale was .81 (Schetter et al. 2013).

Discrimination

The *Everyday Discrimination Scale* (Williams et al. 1997) measures perceived frequency of nine forms of unfair treatment in the respondent’s day-to-day life: being treated with less courtesy, less respect, receiving poorer services than others in restaurants or stores, people acting as if you are not smart, are better than you, or are afraid of you, thinking you are dishonest, being called names or insulted, or being threatened or harassed. Each item is rated on a six-point scale. A final item assessing being followed in a store was also included. Everyday discrimination was evaluated as a function of attributions to race, skin color, ancestry, or accent, or any combination of these. Scores were transformed to create a range from 0 to 40. The Cronbach alpha for this measure was .89 (Schetter et al. 2013). Higher values indicate more experiences of discrimination.

Racism

The Racism and Life Events Scale (RALES) measures several dimensions of racism, including personal, education, employment, law enforcement, healthcare, and housing (Utsey 1998). The RALES measures discrimination attributed to race, skin color, accent, and national origin. An index was created from the sum of the number of times participants made attributions to either ancestry, race, shade of skin or language/accent across the six domains. Scores ranged from 0 to 6. Higher values indicate more discrimination experiences.

Relationship Status and Quality

Relationship status was measured with a single item asking “What is the current status of your relationship with your baby’s mother?” Response options were married; not married but in a romantic relationship (not married); and not married and not currently in a romantic relationship (no relationship). Participants were also asked a question regarding cohabitation with the child’s mother. Response options (yes, all the time; yes, some of the time; no) were dichotomized into “yes” and “no.” Relationship quality between father and the child’s mother was assessed with an item to describe

relationship satisfaction. Response options ranged from 1 (very unhappy) to 5 (very happy).

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were generated to characterize the sample and determine the distribution of variables of interest. To determine the effects of missing data on variables of interests, the likelihood of participants having missing data for predictor variables was examined by major outcome variables (relationship status and quality) using logistic regression. There were no differences in likelihood missing data by these outcomes.

Multiple regression assessed differences in racial discrimination experiences (RALES and Williams) by perceived stress, education, and poverty categories. Multiple regression was executed again with perceived stress eliminated from the model to determine the impact of perceived stress on other stress variables in relation to relationship quality. Analysis of variance determined differences in discrimination by education and poverty category. Multinomial logistic regression determined differences in relationship status by education, poverty category, discrimination experiences (RALES and Williams), perceived stress, and financial stress (as reported by mothers and fathers). “No relationship” was the reference group.

Multiple regression determined differences in relationship quality by the discrimination scales, perceived stress, and financial stress controlling for aforementioned independent variables. Separate analysis of variance was conducted to determine differences in relationship quality by nominal independent variables. Analyses controlled for age. Analyses were performed in SAS 9.4.

Results

Discrimination Scales

Mean scores for the Williams and RALES discrimination scales were 5.00 and 1.10, respectively (not tabled). Scores for the Williams discrimination scale increased as educational attainment increased (less than high school = 2.23, high school = 4.94, greater than high school = 6.29). Williams discrimination scores increased as income increased (> 200% FPL = 5.21, > 100–200% FPL = 4.82, = 100% FPL = 4.74). Fathers with greater than a high school education had the greatest RALES mean score (1.19), followed by less than high school (1.14) and high school only (0.97). RALES discrimination scores were similar across income levels (> 200 FPL = 1.10, > 100–200% FPL = 1.11, and = 100% FPL = 1.09). Analysis of variance indicates significantly greater discrimination experiences (Williams)

between persons with less than a high school education and high school graduates ($p \leq 0.05$) and persons with greater than high school education ($p \leq 0.01$; not tabled).

Relationship Status and Relationship Quality

Fathers with lower educational attainment were less likely to be married (RALES: aOR = 0.02; 95% CI = 0.00–0.23; Williams: aOR = 0.03; 95% CI = 0.00–0.28) or be in an intimate relationship (RALES: aOR: 16; 95% CI = 0.03–0.92) (Table 2). Relationship quality was negatively associated with perceived stress ($p \leq 0.0001$) and discrimination (RALES) ($p \leq 0.05$) (Table 3).

Following logistic regression, path analysis was performed to determine direct and indirect relationships between the RALES racial discrimination measure, perceived stress, and relationship quality (Fig. 1). Estimates for direct effects for discrimination and perceived stress on relationship quality were -0.07 and -0.35 ($p \leq 0.0001$), respectively (Fig. 2). With an estimate of -0.06 , there was a significant indirect effect of racial discrimination on relationship quality through perceived stress ($p \leq 0.05$).

Discussion

This paper contributes to a growing body of research examining the effects of racial discrimination on relationship dynamics among African Americans. Previous studies indicate lower-quality intimate relationships among African Americans compared to whites (Bulanda and Brown 2007; Corra et al. 2009). Results of this study suggest that African American fathers experiencing racial discrimination report poorer relationship quality and that heightened racial animus likely contributes to disparities in intimate relationship quality between African Americans and whites. Evidence from this study counteracts deleterious narratives of dysfunctional African American family dynamics as an extension of implied cultural deficits within the African American community. Rather, racism persists in American society and it negatively affects African American relationships and potentially families.

The majority of fathers in this study were unmarried, although most participants remain romantically involved with their partners. Despite the low marriage rate in this sample, scores for relationship quality were favorable and most fathers (73%) cohabitated with their child’s mothers. Previous research examining why marriage rates are lower in the African American community is mixed. Research suggests that the scarcity of suitable partners [owing in part to (1) high incarceration rates and disparate education of males and (2) greater infant mortality among African American males] limits the selection pool for heterosexual African

Table 2 Multinomial logistic regression for three categories of relationship status[†] for African American fathers

Characteristics	Relationship/NM ^a		Relationship/NM ^a		Married		Married	
	aOR ^b	95% CI	aOR ^b	95% CI	aOR ^b	95% CI	aOR ^b	95% CI
Education								
< High school	0.19	0.03–1.03	0.16*	0.03–0.92	0.03**	0.00–0.28	0.02**	0.00–0.23
High school	0.42	0.07–2.44	0.43	0.08–2.42	0.19	0.03–1.28	0.18	0.03–1.13
> High school	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
Poverty category								
> 200% FPL ^c	0.58	0.16–2.12	0.48	0.11–2.06	7.83	0.83–73.55	8.11	0.74–88.95
> 100–200% FPL	1.07	0.21–5.52	0.99	0.18–5.59	7.59	0.64–90.62	8.52	0.66–110.3
= 100% FPL	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
Discrimination								
Williams	1.04	0.93–1.15		1.04	0.94–1.17			
RALES		1.57	0.91–2.68		0.97	0.50–1.91		
Perceived stress	0.96	0.88–1.06	0.96	0.88–1.05	0.95	0.85–1.07	0.96	0.86–1.07
Financial stress	0.77	0.42–1.41	0.71	0.36–1.37	1.49	0.72–3.07	1.60	0.72–3.57

Child and Community Health Network data on African American fathers from the Baltimore and Washington DC sites (N = 203)

[†] “No relationship” is reference group

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

^aRelationship/NM: In a relationship but not married

^bAdjusted odds ratio

^cFPL federal poverty level

Table 3 Multiple regression for associations of relationship quality for African American fathers in Baltimore and Washington, DC (N = 203)

Characteristics	Williams		RALES	
	Estimate	95% CI	Estimate	95% CI
Discrimination	– 0.01	– 0.03 to 0.01	– 0.12*	– 0.23 to 0.00
Perceived stress	– 0.05***	– 0.07 to – 0.03	– 0.05***	– 0.07 to – 0.03
Financial stress	0.03	– 0.10 to 0.16	0.06	– 0.07 to 0.20
Education				
< High school	0.13	– 0.24 to 0.50	0.16	– 0.20 to 0.52
High school	– 0.04	– 0.31 to 0.23	– 0.06	– 0.32 to 0.21
> High school	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
Relationship status				
Married	1.71***	1.14–2.27	1.68***	1.13–2.24
Relationship (not married)	1.65***	1.15 – 2.14	1.68***	1.19 – 2.17
No relationship	Ref	Ref	Ref	ref
Poverty category				
> 200% FPL ^a	0.15	– 0.17 to 0.46	0.19	– 0.13 to 0.50
> 100%–200% FPL	0.17	– 0.17 to 0.51	0.18	– 0.16 to 0.52
= 100% FPL	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < 0.0001$

^aFPL federal poverty level

American women (Adimora and Schoenbach 2013). Consequently, women’s negotiation power within relationships diminishes, and men may have greater latitude to resist monogamy. Other research concludes that despite having favorable attitudes toward marriage, many low-income minority women are reluctant to marry economically

disadvantaged partners. In fact, rather than commit to marriage threatened by financial insecurity and unreliable male providers, many impoverished women focus on raising their children by leveraging their relationships with more consistent extended kin networks characterized by mutual aid and spreading human capital (Edin and Kefalas 2005).

Fig. 1 Path analytic model for the relationship between discrimination, perceived stress, and relationship quality

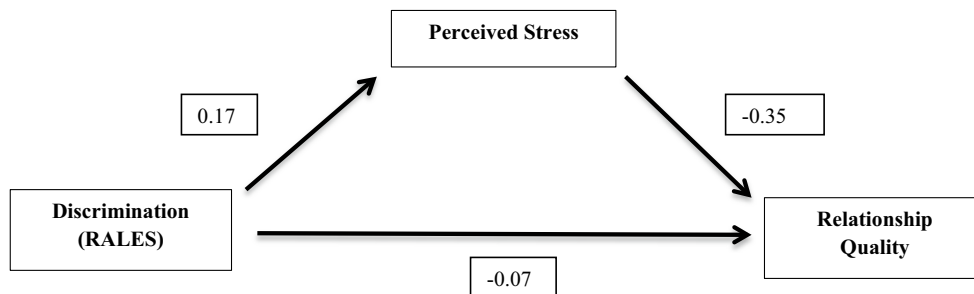
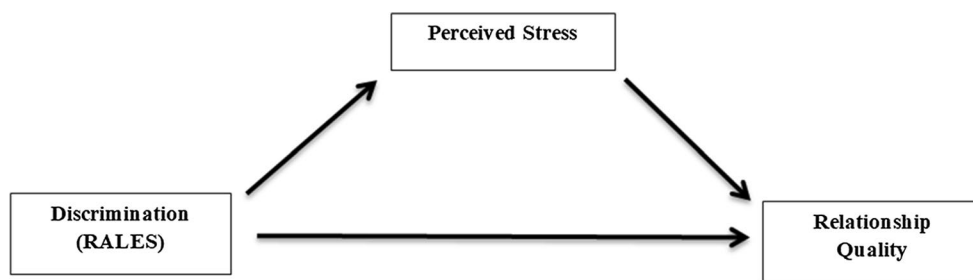


Fig. 2 Path analysis for discrimination, perceived stress, and relationship quality

Several marriage impediments are facilitated by institutional racism. According to Jones (2000), institutional racism is a system of inequities that are often codified by law, custom, or practice. In this instance, structural inequities (e.g., disparate education between males and females, higher incarceration rates among African American males, inequitable hiring practices) may influence partner availability, marriage rates, and relationship quality among African Americans. Thus, remediating these inequities through a collection of large-scale structural interventions (e.g., criminal justice reform, school reform, affirmative action) may have an ancillary benefit of increasing marriage prevalence in African American communities.

A highlight of this study is the examination of intra-group differences of racial discrimination by socioeconomic indicators. Everyday interpersonal discrimination (Williams et al. 1997) was lower than expected. It is probable that most of these individuals are residentially segregated from whites and have limited interaction with this group in their social environment. They may also have limited interaction with people of other races in their work environment as neighborhood racial composition and associated stereotypes influence corporate decisions on placement of employment facilities (Williams 1999). Limited interactions with other races/ethnicities may shield these fathers from interpersonal racism.

Frequency of racial discrimination experienced by African Americans would vary across socioeconomic status. Interestingly, fathers' income was not associated with discrimination experiences. The reasons for this warrant further

investigation. Although education and income are often synergistic, it is probable that education impacts cognitive processes that affect perceptions of discrimination and racism more than income. For example, Ross and Huber (1985) attribute differences in economic hardship among differentially educated people with similar incomes to greater ability to gather and interpret information. Perhaps education, and not income, was a more appropriate predictor of exposure to and perception of racist societal elements.

Persons with higher education reported greater racial discrimination experiences. It is probable that fathers who are more educated work in more racially/ethnically diverse environments. As education helps facilitate entry into high-occupation-status professions with greater racial/ethnic variety, these fathers have more opportunities to interact with more racist societal elements than African Americans restricted to other occupations. African Americans in high occupational status professions experience tokenism, racial discrimination, and the "glass ceiling" (Cole and Omari 2003; Hall et al. 2012). Moreover, middle-class African Americans are more likely to attribute inequality to socio-structural causes (Hwang et al. 1998; Cole and Omari 2003). Thus, elevated reporting of racial discrimination is likely a function of exposure to different races/ethnicities as well as perspectives that construe racial inequality as socially prevalent.

The variety of stressors that African American fathers experience differentially impact their relationship quality. Unlike other research, financial hardship was not significantly associated with relationship strain (Williams et al. 2015). Although financial stress was not associated with

fathers' assessment of their relationships, men reporting greater racial discrimination and perceived stress had poorer relationships. Perceived stress had the greatest impact on relationship quality and accounted for some of the impact of racial discrimination. Despite this, the stressor of racial discrimination remained significant even when accounting for perceived stress.

Path analysis indicates that racial discrimination impairs relationship quality through perceived stress. This is in line with other research that detected an inverse relationship between racial discrimination and relationship quality that was mediated by one's appraisal of stress (Doyle and Molix 2014). The relationship between discrimination and relationship quality may also operate through emotional dysregulation and psychological burden (Doyle and Molix 2014). These findings implicate racial discrimination as a deleterious factor in the functioning of intimate African American relationships. It appears that racial discrimination stress overwhelms the personal adaptive coping processes of African American men to a point where it is difficult to repel its negative effects on intimate relationships. Not only does discrimination affect fathers' perception of relationship quality, husband's discrimination experiences negatively predict spouses' reported marital quality as well (Trail et al. 2012). Previous findings with African American mothers suggest that racial discrimination intensifies the negative relationship between psychological distress and intimate relationship quality (Murry et al. 2001). The effects of racial discrimination on one individual likely extend through the rest of the home and negatively affect interpersonal relationships and family dynamics.

Finally, consistent with previous studies, less educated fathers are less likely to be married (Cherlin 2012; Schneider 2011). They were also less likely to be in a relationship. More education is not only associated with varying aspects of increased marital quality (Bulanda and Brown 2007), but it also impacts economic considerations that inform decisions to marry. For example, wealth appears to be an important prerequisite for men in considerations of marriage (Schneider 2011). As such, men with lower education may not be confident enough in their financial security to marry. Similarly, African American women emphasize economic security as a factor influencing choice of potential partners

(Schneider 2011). However, education often precludes wealth acquisition. Since there is an education gap between African American men and women, and people typically assortatively select partners (socioeconomically) (Adimora and Schoenbach 2005; Laumann et al. 1994), marriageable male partners may be at a premium. Thus, the prospect of marriage or intimate relationships may be less available for men with less education.

This study has limitations. Results may not be generalizable to other populations, as they reflect the experiences of a regionally distinct population of relatively economically disadvantaged African American men. The study design encourages enrollment of fathers who are on good terms with mothers, and this may have disproportionately excluded individuals who are not in an active relationship with the child's mother. This study highlights the effects of racial discrimination on African American fathers, but measuring racial discrimination remains challenging because of its multidimensional nature. The study sought to address this by employing multiple validated instruments with demonstrated usefulness in previous research. Data were also self-report and therefore subject to social desirability bias. Finally, this study utilizes a cross-sectional study design and causality cannot be determined.

This study examined the effects of racial discrimination on intimate relationships for African American fathers. Racial discrimination may negatively impact their romantic relationships through structural and psychological pathways. This may have negative effects on fathers, their partners, and offspring. There should be more research to examine differences in experiences of racism and racial discrimination among African Americans of varying socioeconomic positions as well as how racial discrimination affects African American families. Moreover, there should be more in-depth explorations into how stress associated with racial discrimination and financial hardship affects individuals within intimate relationships. Finally, future studies should examine these topics among other races/ethnicities as well as provide more explicit delineation of how these pathways operate.

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