

# Race and Subjective Well-being: Critical Race Perspective and Empirical Review of Key Predictors

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## Abstract:

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify what is currently known about subjective well-being (SWB) for racial groups in the United States, with a focus on common racial struggles and resilience in people of color. We organize the chapter by first summarizing the between-group and within-group studies of culture and SWB. We then provide a Critical Race perspective on studying SWB across racial groups with particular attention to how we define race, followed by a comprehensive review of empirical literature on four common race and ethnic specific predictors related to SWB: racial-ethnic discrimination, racial-ethnic identity, acculturation and enculturation, and racial-ethnic socialization. We conclude with suggestions for future research to advance theory and methodology in the study of race and SWB.

**Keywords: Race, Racism, Critical Race Theory, Subjective Well-being**

Subjective well-being (SWB) describes how individuals feel and think about their own life (Diener, 2000). It has gained increased popularity in psychology, including growing interest and study across cultures and nations (Diener, 2000; Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). In the United States, understanding how race contributes to the experience of SWB seems pressing, as some of the major issues affecting minority communities today are tightly linked to race (e.g., Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program repeal, Charlottesville white supremacy march and murder of an anti-protester, anti-Muslim bans, Standing Rock, Black Lives Matter, Flint water crisis). How is SWB defined and maintained in these communities? How do they promote resilience and increased SWB in face of adversities? How is SWB shaped by history of race and racism in the United States?

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify what is currently known about SWB for racial groups in the US. We narrowly focus this review on race in the US as the construction of race informed by history operates differently within and across nations (Omi & Winant, 2014). We approach our review from a Critical Race theory perspective (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), drawn from the interdisciplinary field of Ethnic Studies (Banks & Banks, 2009; Hu-DeHart, 1993), in order to *critically* advance the study of race and SWB. We organize the chapter by first briefly summarizing the between-group and within-group studies of culture and SWB. Second, we provide an Ethnic Studies perspective on studying SWB across racial groups with attention to how we define race, in particular. Third, we present a review of empirical literature of four common race and ethnic specific predictors related to SWB, including racial-ethnic discrimination, racial-ethnic identity, acculturation and enculturation, and racial-ethnic socialization. Finally, we conclude by providing suggestions for future research to advance theory and methodology in the study of race and SWB.

## Between- and Within-Group Studies of Culture and SWB

Cross-cultural studies have primarily examined mean-level differences on SWB across many different proxies for culture, including country, income, wealth and other economic factors, and between

individualistic and collectivistic societies (see Diener, 2000; Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; and Dolan, Peasgood, & White, 2008; for more detailed review). Many interpretations are provided for these differences including “tangible” resources (e.g., food, shelter), individual-level characteristics (e.g., approach and avoidance style, personality traits), measurement biases (e.g., self-serving biases), and broad cultural values (mainly focused on individualism and collectivism) (Diener, 2012; Diener & Diener, 1995; Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000; Suh, 2007). For instance, Dolan et al. (2008) reviewed economic factors contributing to SWB and found evidence that poor health, separation, unemployment, and lack of social contact are all strongly negatively associated with SWB. Diener et al. (2003) reported that differences in mean levels of SWB appear due to objective factors like wealth, to norms dictating appropriateness of feelings and importance of SWB, and to the relative approach versus avoidance tendencies of societies.

In particular, the role of individualistic and collectivistic values on thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with SWB has been extensively studied (e.g., Fulmer et al., 2010; Oishi & Diener, 2001; Oishi, Krochik, & Akimoto, 2010; Suh, 2007; Uchida & Kitayama, 2009); including, feeling and expressing positive emotions (Eid & Diener, 2001), differences in social support (Oishi & Schimmack, 2010), and differences in positivity (Diener, Scollon, Oishi, Dzokoto, & Suh, 2000). For instance, Diener and Diener (1995) investigated 31 countries and found that self-esteem is less strongly correlated with subjective well-being in those that were rated to be more collectivistic (e.g., East Asian) than in those rated to be more individualistic (e.g., European American).

When more closely examining racial group differences in the US (i.e., Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, African American, White, and Latinx) on SWB, there appear to be some group differences. For instance, Oishi and Diener (2001) found that European Americans were significantly more satisfied with their lives than Asian Americans. Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, and Broadnax (1994) found differential effects on the relationship between collective self-esteem components (private, public, membership, and identity) and well-being (personal self-esteem, life satisfaction, depression, and hopelessness) of African American, White, and Asian American college students. Some studies more broadly compare predictors and experience of SWB across White and “non-White” samples (e.g., Dush & Amato, 2005; Seder & Oishi, 2009).

There is growing literature and debate on interpreting racial group differences in self-esteem. Studies generally find African Americans tend to report higher levels of self-esteem than Whites. This has led some authors to raise doubts about the validity of the internalization of stigma perspective for racial minorities in the US (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000). However, in a more thorough literature review of racial differences in self-esteem (including Latinx, Asian American, and Native American), Twenge and Crocker (2002) found levels of self-esteem differed widely between racial groups - varying by type of self-esteem measured, year of data collection and age, sex composition, and SES of the sample. Given this cross-racial group heterogeneity, they argued that future research should move away from asking *why* racial group differences exist, and instead ask *how* SWB is constructed within these different racial groups.

Overall, there is a wide range of cultural differences in the experiences and predictors of SWB. Causal interpretation of these differences, however, can be problematic for a number of reasons. For instance, in their review of economic factors associated with SWB, Dolan et al. (2008) cautioned against drawing firm conclusions about the causes of SWB. Their review identified contradictory evidence, a lack of certainty on the direction of causality, and concerns regarding the impact on findings of potentially unobserved variables.

Also, the level of cultural analysis (e.g., national, socioeconomic, income/wealth, race, ethnicity, general cultural values, etc.) is often either unclear or terms are used interchangeably in these studies. This is related in part to the complexity and challenge in finding agreed upon, operationalized, and differentiated meaning in terms broadly captured by culture (Giraldeau, Lefebvre, & Morand-Ferron, 2007). Still, this leads to a challenge in drawing any meaningful conclusion regarding cross-cultural differences on SWB. For instance, there is growing research on the role of broad cultural values on SWB. Many cross-cultural studies compare SWB between individualistic and collectivistic societies, often interchangeably using North American and East Asian countries, respectively. Not only does this hinge on outdated stereotypes (Matsumoto, 1999; Takano & Osaka, 1999), but it also ignores the evidence of greater heterogeneity within than between these national (rather than cultural) groups (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). It further limits our understanding of culture to individualism and collectivism (Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions additionally include instrumental and expressive, uncertainty avoidance and tolerance, for instance).

In addition, the group comparison in these studies often overemphasizes cross-cultural differences in SWB, ignoring heterogeneity of cultural and racial groups. For instance, although there are many studies

that examine SWB across nations, there are few that examine differences within nations, including racial group differences within the US. An exception is a study conducted by Tay and colleagues (2014) that found racial differences in well-being among African American, White, Latinx, and Asian American in their workplace and in general (Tay, Ng, Kuykendall, & Diener, 2014). These racial differences in well-being measures, however, were not consistent. Further, studies that do assess SWB within nations often over-represent some racial groups and group comparisons (Whites, White and Asian, White and Black), while other groups and respective comparisons are under-represented (e.g., Native American, Latinx).

Finally, and most importantly, cross-cultural comparisons ignore the possibility that individual interpretations of SWB are unique to each culture, making it difficult to study across cultures. Cultural and indigenous psychology emphasize how all psychological phenomena (like SWB) are embedded within a particular cultural setting based on unique values, traditions, and history (Shweder, 1991). Further they are critical of the *imposed etic* research approach where culture-specific ideas (such as SWB) may be wrongly imposed on and generalized to other cultures (Berry, 1989; Pike, 1967). Lastly, White and WEIRD samples (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) are overly represented in viewpoint, cultural biases, and generalizability (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). We therefore focus our review on the experience of SWB for separate racial minority groups and evaluate their common, uniquely racialized risks and resilience. Our focus is further framed by an analytical lens offered by Ethnic Studies that emphasizes complexity and agency of racialized groups.

## Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Perspectives on SWB

Inspired by the 1960s U.S. Civil Rights movement, a joint coalition of Black, Latinx, Asian American, and Native American student groups led one of the longest student strikes in U.S. history in 1969 to demand fundamental changes in higher education (Banks & Banks, 2009). They challenged the prevailing academic power structure and the Eurocentric curricula of colleges and universities. They demanded for more scholarly programs, faculty, and staff who focused on the under-represented and under-studied histories and experiences of diverse racial minority groups, which led to the birth of Ethnic Studies (Maeda, 2009).

There are many ideas and debates of what Ethnic Studies is or should be, and conceptualizations can differ from campus to campus and change over time (Hu-DeHart, 1993). What is clear in its scholarship, however, is the specific or comparative focus on marginalized groups in America that often lacked equity, representation, and privilege. In particular, the field continually documents and emphasizes the self-determination, autonomy, and empowerment of racial minority groups, often in resistance and opposition to structural systems of oppression, colonialism, and inequity.

Today, Ethnic Studies pushes race-related scholarship, including more theories and methods to examine relations and intersections of power in race, class, gender, and sexuality (Hu-DeHart, 1993). It further expands across fields, level of education including K-12, and broadens the framework to include the effects of migration, assimilation, and accommodation of people moving between nations and borders. It considers new spaces, community, and identity forged by migrants across national boundaries (Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Szanton-Blanc, 1994).

Drawing on these principles, Critical Race theory can be helpful in clarifying and framing how race should be understood in the study of SWB. This theory developed in the early 1980s in response to the failure of critical legal studies to adequately address the impact of race and racism in the US jurisprudence. Legal scholars, including Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Alan Freeman, initially helped contribute to advancing this theory. They critiqued the system of racial oppression and emphasized need for agency and activism; ultimately, the end goal focused on structural change and social justice (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stafancic, 2012). Critical Race theory has now expanded across disciplines including history, women's studies, education, psychology, sociology, and political science. Central tenets of Critical Race theory include the significance of racism, racialization, intersectionality, and agency.

**Racism.** *Race* is a socio-political and legal construct based on perceived physical differences (e.g., skin color, facial features, and hair type), rather than inherent biological differences. It differs from *ethnicity*, which emphasizes the traditions, values, language, and history attached to a particular social group (Cokley, 2007). More importantly, race and racial differences were created and maintained to promote power and privilege attached to "whiteness." Whiteness is a racial ideology that is interchangeably used with what is normal, beautiful, and American (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Sue, 2005). It uses false narratives of biological and "cultural" inferiority of "non-Whites" to rationalize genocide, slavery, exclusion, and colonization of Black, Native, Pacific Islander, Latinx, and Asian Americans in the past (Miller & Garran, 2008; Takaki, 1993). Racism is systemic and maintains the racial status quo on an interpersonal, cultural, and institutional level, always seeking white supremacy and exclusion (Jones,

1997). Today, racial inequities continually persist as people of color are systematically disadvantaged compared to Whites across multiple domains of life, including health, education, work, and legal systems (Alvarez, Liang, & Neville, 2016; Lui, Robles, Leondar-Wright, Brewer & Adamson, 2006). Therefore, race and *racism*—a system of privilege and oppression based on racial hierarchy—are inextricably linked today and throughout history. Relevant to the study of SWB, racism raises questions, for instance, who gets to ask the questions? From what vantage point is the research conducted? Are studies of SWB comparably represented across racial groups? What groups are left out?

**Racialization.** Science has now debunked any notion of meaningful and distinct racial group differences, finding more within-group than between-group variations in phenotypic and biological characteristics (Betancourt & López, 1993; Carter & Pieterse, 2005; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Nevertheless, invariably conceptualized within historical contexts, individuals are *racialized* as race shapes group membership, meaning, experiences, and treatment of others (Helms, 1990; Helms & Cook, 1999; Omi & Winant, 2014). Further, the meaning and classification of race and racial groups is ever-changing, continually deconstructing and reconstructing to reinforce a power structure of systemic privilege that benefits Whites (Omi & Winant, 2014). For instance, the U.S. Supreme Court used varying definitions of race (e.g., biological vs. social) to deny citizenship to Asian Americans (e.g., regarding cases *Takao Ozawa v. US* and *Bhagat Singh Thind v. US*; López, 2006). Multiracials were classified and treated as non-Whites based on racist, legislative policies associated with the “one-drop rule” in efforts to maintain “racial purity” (Root, 2003). Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants were once considered racial “others” (non-White) and subjected to blatant forms of racism (Guglielmo & Salerno, 2003). However, their experiences were different compared to other racial minority groups in the US given their phenotypic proximity to whiteness. Further, these ethnic groups were later assimilated as part of whiteness. European immigrants of second and later generations subsequently had more opportunity to either choose or not choose to integrate their ethnicity into their daily lives without penalty (e.g., celebration of St. Patrick’s Day), a privilege not afforded to people of color (Gans, 1979). With the end of World War II and the beginning of the U.S. Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, expressions of racism grew from “old-fashioned” blatant, overt, and intentional expressions of white racial superiority to include “modern” color-blind, subtle, ambiguous, and unintentional reinforcement of the racial hierarchy (Devine, 1989; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Plous, 2003; Sue, 2005). Relevant to the study of SWB, racialization raises questions such as what are the unique racialized experiences of people of color that shape their experiences of SWB? How do roles of power and privilege, including structural inequities, influence how SWB is studied or interpreted with racial minority groups?

**Intersectionality.** *Intersectionality* highlights that oppressive systems—including but not limited to racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, xenophobia, and ableism—are interconnected and not merely hierarchical or additive; as such, they should not be examined separately (Crenshaw, 1991). As a framework for understanding how multiple interlocking systems of oppression and privilege operate at a structural level, it has now been applied to understand individual-level processes and outcomes (Cole, 2009). Illustrating this framework, Le Espiritu (2008) uses an intersectional lens to analyze how roles of race, class, gender, and sexuality of Asian Americans have been used throughout US history to maintain racial hierarchy of Whites and to justify structural racism against Asian Americans. In particular, Asian men and women are often cast in contrasting images to help define and maintain White male heteronormativity. Over the course of U.S. history, Asian men have been racialized as both hypersexual and more recently asexual, while Asian women have been viewed as both masculine and more recently super-feminine (Le Espiritu, 2008; Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2009; Takaki, 1989). Relevant to the study of SWB, intersectionality raises questions about how multiple identities are categorized and who is included. How do power and privilege shape multiple identities, their intersectionality, and what is their link to SWB?

**Agency.** Racism has been both intentionally and unintentionally violent towards racial minority groups both past and present (Alvarez et al., 2016; Lui et al., 2006). It is maintained by false beliefs in a natural order of biological and cultural differences, as Whites are assumed superior to people of color (Smedley & Smedley, 2005; Takaki, 1993). Despite the injustice, people of color have protested, resisted, and contributed to building a stronger, more equitable society in the US (Takaki, 1993). Critical Race points out that people of color are active agents creating their own personal narratives and directing their present and future lives (Lee, Kim, & Zhou, 2016). This theory proposes practices of counter-storytelling to reveal and contest the identity-infused base of everyday society. Relevant to the study of SWB, agency raises questions about whether cultural deficit models (including stereotype consistent models) are used to interpret racial differences. Do SWB studies include vantage points based on the unique perspectives and voices of racial minority groups? For people of color, what are unique forms of racialized resilience and their relation to SWB? How do critical consciousness and social activism relate to SWB?

# Empirical Review of Race- and Ethnicity-Specific Predictors of SWB

## Operationalized Definitions

There is a wide range of meaning in race and SWB in the psychological literature. Historically, scholars have differentiated race and ethnicity: *race* emphasizes a socio-political and legal construct based on perceived physical differences (e.g., skin color, facial features, and hair type) and *ethnicity* emphasizes the traditions, values, language, and history attached to a particular social group (Cokley, 2007). However, the use of these terms is often based on social convention rather than empirical definition. For instance, African American is typically thought of as racial while Latinx is typically thought of as ethnic - regardless of the context of the research question (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Further, operationalization and measurement of racial and ethnic constructs often overlap such that they can be difficult to distinguish (Cokley, 2007). Thus, we follow recent arguments for using the term “racial-ethnic” to capture this broad construct, and when possible, we use terms for specific aspects of each (Hughes et al., 2006; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Similarly, there was a wide range of interpretation in operationally defining well-being, often using a broad collection of “positive” outcome measures including self-esteem, happiness, positive self-perceptions, life satisfaction, and positive and negative affect (e.g., Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Smith & Silva, 2011). Given many definitions of well-being, we focus our review on studies that used “positive” psychological adjustment outcomes such as those listed above. We also do not focus on broader negative outcome or mental distress (e.g., depression, anxiety, stress) measures in our review as they are extensively reviewed elsewhere (e.g., Lee & Ahn, 2011, 2012, 2013). Finally, from a Critical Race perspective, interpreting racial group differences may lead to essentializing racial groups or worse, to reinforcing racist conceptions of human behavior (Zuckerman, 1990). Emphasizing agency in people of color as they create personal narratives during both struggles and resistance, we focus our review on some of the most commonly studied racialized psychological risks and resilience that may affect their experience of SWB. These include: racial-ethnic discrimination, racial-ethnic identity, acculturation and enculturation, and racial-ethnic socialization. Our review provides a broad and brief summary of related definitions and theories, empirical review as it relates to SWB, and limitations for each construct.

## Racial-Ethnic Discrimination

*Racial-ethnic discrimination* (RED) refers to the biased behavior and treatment of individuals based on their racial or ethnic background (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010; Ong, Burrow, Fuller-Rowell, Ja, & Sue, 2013; Paradies, 2006). It is one of many ways in which racism occurs at the individual level, along with *racial stereotype* that emphasizes cognitive overgeneralizations and *racial prejudice* that emphasizes emotions attached to the overgeneralization (Fiske, 1998; Paradies, 2006). Racism also functions on a cultural and institutional level: cultural, institutional, and legal practices operate and are structured in ways to benefit the dominant group (Jones, 1997). Although many operationalized definitions and measures of racism are provided in the literature (Essed, 1991; Jones, 1997; Harrell, 2000), most emphasize the centrality of power and privilege attached to whiteness. The experiences of RED for people of color consequently are often chronic and wide ranging, including direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional, and subtle or blatant, to name a few (Harrell, 2000). The empirical work on the experience and impact of RED for people of color started after the 1960s U.S. Civil Rights movement (Winston, 2004), as psychology shifted from predominantly studying the perpetrator’s experience of RED to including the target’s experience as well (see Fiske, 1998, for review). There is now a large body of research that focuses on the perceptions and psychological correlates of RED for people of color.

RED has been theoretically and empirically linked to mental health and SWB for people of color. According to the racism-related stress theory, a popular and often cited framework in this area, perception and experience of racism can be stressful, taxing an individual’s coping resources and consequently leading to higher distress and lower well-being (Harrell, 2000). This theory has been largely supported by empirical studies as multiple dimensions and domains of racism have been linked to a wide range of psychological distress and SWB outcomes. Although studied less frequently than maladjustment outcomes (Lee & Ahn, 2011, 2012, 2013), RED has been linked to a lower SWB (including lower self-esteem, life satisfaction, control and mastery, positive affect, and general well-being) for Asian, Latinx, and African heritage samples living the US and abroad. Similar results were found in one of the largest meta-analyses on the subject to date (293 studies from 333 articles) by Paradies et al. (2015) for African American (37%), Latinx (19%), Asian American (9%), and Native Americans, Arab Americans, or international students (less than 1% combined). Pieterse and colleagues (2012) also found this link in their meta-analyses focused on the SWB of African Americans. Finally, the RED-SWB link for people of color seems to vary considerably by the type of racism (e.g., subtle or blatant, Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991; personal or group, Taylor,

Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990), as well as a host of ecological factors (e.g., identity, family, school/work, society) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; García Coll et al., 1996).

From a Critical Race perspective, there are few limitations and gaps that if addressed could strengthen this area of research. Most of the sample and related measures of RED focused on African Americans, and less was clear on the unique socio-political and historical circumstances of RED that shaped the SWB of other racial minorities, particularly Native Americans. Also, despite the theoretical importance of structural racism, most measures and research in this area focus on individual-level perceptions and outcomes of racism. More research is needed to evaluate the impact of objective cultural and institutional forms of racism, including anti-race policies. For instance, Gee (2002) found individual, self-perceived racism and institutional racism of segregation and redlining differentially related to health outcomes in a large community sample of Chinese Americans.

### **Racial-Ethnic Identity**

*Racial-ethnic identity (REI)* is a broad construct associated with meaning, behaviors, and attachment towards a particular racial or ethnic group, although efforts to differentiate between the two are made (Helms, 2007). *Ethnic identity* is defined as the subjective sense of ethnic group membership that includes self-labeling, sense of belonging, knowledge, attitude, and group participation (Phinney, 1996). *Racial identity* is defined as the collective identity of any group of people socialized to think of themselves as a racial group (Helms & Cook, 1999). When researchers are interested in cultural beliefs, values, and behaviors on an individual, Cokley (2007) encourages the study of ethnic identity; when researchers are interested in response to an oppressive and highly racialized society, Cokley (2007) recommends the study of racial identity. Still, Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014) argued that the distinction between the *ethnic* and *racial* phrasing seems more artificial than intentional, and therefore a meta construct comprising both racial and ethnic identity should be used. REI is a multidimensional construct that taps into a variety of dimensions including, but not limited to, public regard, private regard, salience, pride, resolution, search, and participation (Lee & Yoo, 2004; Phinney, 1992; Roberts et al., 1999; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997; Umaña-Taylor, Yazedjian, & Bámaca-Gómez, 2004). Most common theories used to study REI and SWB include developmental models (Phinney, 1990), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and schema models (Helms, 1990).

REI is believed to be important to the development and resilience of racial minorities in the US, a proposition supported by numerous empirical studies. In a meta-analysis on the link between REI and mental health for people of color in North America, Smith and Silva (2011) found a positive relation between REI and general well-being ( $r=.19$ ;  $k=32$ ), and mental health more broadly defined ( $r=.17$ ;  $k=184$ ). This finding is supported by Rivas-Drake et al.'s (2014) meta-analysis that found a positive relation between REI and well-being ( $r=.20$ ;  $k=8$ ), and positive adjustment more broadly ( $r=.26$ ;  $k=27$ ), including positive social functioning (6 studies), self-esteem (21 studies), and well-being (8 studies). Although fewer studies focus on “positive” outcomes in comparison to “negative” outcomes, REI seems comparably important to the SWB of people of color. Further, these findings held similarly across racial minority groups (i.e., African, Asian, Latinx, Native) in both reviews; one limitation is that half of the 51 sample studies focused on African Americans, roughly 15% on Asian Americans and Latinx, and only 6% on Native Americans (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Finally, although there is a wide range of racial and ethnic identity measures (Cokley, 2007), most studies reviewed here relied on the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992) and the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; Sellers et al., 1997).

From a Critical Race perspective, there are few limitations and gaps that if addressed could strengthen this area of research. Although there are a large number of studies that focused on African Americans, there are fewer that focused on other racial minority groups, particularly Native Americans. Consequently, little is known about the effects of REI on SWB for Native Americans, particularly the unique meaning attached to REI based on values, resilience, and history. Furthermore, there are limited measures of REI that focuses on uniquely racialized experiences of specific racial minority groups grounded in their history and interlocking oppression. An exception is the number of Black measures that consider these larger historic and system factors, including the MIBI (Sellers et al., 1997) that measures the salience of identity; the centrality of the identity; the ideology associated with the identity (including subscales: Nationalist, Assimilation, Minority, and Humanist); and the regard in which the person holds African Americans (including subscales: Private Regard and Public Regard).

### **Acculturation and Enculturation**

Acculturation is a broad term that involves the process of one cultural group coming in contact with another cultural group and the associated change involved (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). However, in the field of psychology, for racial minorities and immigrants, *acculturation* is most often

viewed as the process of adapting and learning about the dominant, mainstream culture. *Enculturation*, in contrast, is the process of retaining and learning about one's culture of origin (Yoon et al., 2013). The literature long debated whether the process and adaptive outcome of psychological acculturation was either unidimensional (i.e., individuals reject their heritage culture to adapt to the host culture) or bidimensional (individuals reject/retain their heritage culture while also rejecting/retaining their host culture). Current evidence indicates that acculturation is bidimensional (Flannery, Reise, & Yu, 2001; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000). Berry and colleagues further theorized and empirically supported four acculturation strategies that individuals engage in while negotiating between two cultures (Berry, 1997; Sam & Berry, 2010). They include *assimilation* (rejecting the heritage culture, adopting the host culture), *integration* (retaining the heritage culture, adopting the host culture), *separation* (retaining the heritage culture, rejecting the host culture), and *marginalization* (rejecting both the heritage and the host cultures). These strategies neither represent the totality of acculturation strategies, nor are they all equally valid across groups (for a more thorough review of the acculturation literature, see: Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010).

Acculturation and enculturation have been repeatedly linked with positive mental health outcomes. Yoon et al. (2013) examined unilinear measures of acculturation and enculturation, along with bilinear measures of acculturation in a meta-analysis of 325 individual studies. Unilinear measures of acculturation were unrelated to positive mental health, while bilinear measures of acculturation were positively related to positive mental health ( $r=.18$ ;  $k=42$ ). Further analyses found that only the integration strategy was related to positive mental health ( $r=.10$ ;  $k=10$ ), and that positive mental health was significantly better for the integration strategy than assimilation ( $d=.33$ ;  $k=9$ ) and marginalization ( $d=.92$ ;  $k=9$ ). Lastly, enculturation was positively related to positive mental health ( $r=.14$ ;  $k=57$ ). These findings are similar to Nguyen and Benet-Martínez's (2013) meta-analysis that suggested a positive relation between biculturalism (similar to the integration strategy) and psychological adjustment (high self-esteem and low anxiety;  $r=.11$ ;  $k=52$ ). Although these studies were conducted with different racial minority groups, no significant or meaningful group differences were found between acculturation/enculturation and SWB (e.g., Yoon et al., 2013). Furthermore, Latinx and Asian American populations were studied more often than African Americans and other minority groups (e.g., Middle-Eastern/Arab Americans).

Acculturation theory has made advances over the last few decades, such as the incorporation of bilinearity and an increased emphasis on context. Nevertheless, from a Critical Race perspective, limitations and gaps exist in the literature. While integration of two cultures is assumed to be most adaptive (Berry, 1997), it can be complicated and context dependent (e.g., proportion of similar racial in-group members in the community) (Nguyen and Benet-Martínez, 2013). Furthermore, future research should examine beyond individual-level factors (e.g., personality) that shape the relationship between acculturation/enculturation and SWB, focusing on broader social context and institutional factors (e.g., redlining, segregation, race-related policies). Solely focusing on an individual's acculturation strategies in relation to mental health and SWB can place undue responsibility and blame on individuals (Yoon et al., 2013).

### **Racial-Ethnic Socialization**

In psychological and developmental literature, *parental racial-ethnic socialization (RES)* generally refers to the transmission of information from adults to children regarding race and ethnicity (Hughes et al., 2006). While the two aspects of "racial" (i.e., tapping into the racialized experiences of people of color) and "ethnic" (i.e., tapping into the dissemination of cultural knowledge) parental socialization have been well-studied for African American youth and families (Priest et al., 2014), scholars have only more recently begun to differentiate between racial and ethnic socialization processes for other racial minority families (Juang, Shen, Kim, & Wang, 2016). *Racial socialization* refers to the ways in which parents teach their children about the meaning that is associated with being from a certain race, for example, when one's racial group may be devalued in society, preparing children for challenges due to stereotyping and racism. *Ethnic socialization*, in contrast, refers to the preservation and transmission of cultural values, practices, traditions, language, and history. Hughes and Chen's (1997) most popular racial-ethnic socialization model and measure comprise of three dimensions that collectively describe the transmission of information regarding race and ethnicity. *Preparation for bias* emphasizes discussions about racism and how to cope with it. *Promotion of mistrust* emphasizes warning about interactions with racial out-group members. *Cultural socialization* emphasizes messages about the history, values, and pride of one's own racial and ethnic groups. Alternative terminologies have also been used for these RES strategies (Smith, Jacobson, & Juarez, 2011; Stevenson, Cameron, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2002), which further complicates understanding and comparison of results between studies.

Research in this area emphasizes the importance of RES in developing SWB and preparing

children to cope with barriers and inequalities present in American society (Hughes et al., 2006). Empirical studies, however, suggest the link between RES and SWB may be more complicated. It has been found to vary across a wide range of factors including the selected dimensions of RES and SWB, racial groups, agents of RES (e.g., parents, peers, mentors), and child characteristics (e.g., age, gender, skin color) (Hughes et al., 2006; Priest et al., 2014; Telzer & Vazquez Garcia, 2009). For instance, depending on domains of SWB measured, Constantine and Blackmon (2002) reported preparation for bias and cultural socialization were associated with higher family self-esteem, cultural socialization was associated with higher peer self-esteem, and mainstream socialization was associated with lower school self-esteem. Recent studies also found differential effects of RES dimensions on well-being for people of color. Cultural socialization for instance is generally positively related to well-being (Bynum, Burton, & Best, 2007; Juang et al., 2016; McHale et al., 2006; Rivas-Drake, 2011). Interestingly, preparation for bias seems to have a curvilinear relationship to adjustment, with low and high levels relating to poor adjustment and moderate levels relating to positive adjustment (Harris-Britt, Valrie, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2007; Seol, Yoo, Lee, Park, & Kyeong, 2016). In other words, too little or too much discussion about racial bias may relate to poor well-being with moderate amounts being most adaptive.

There are several gaps and limitations in this research area. There is an inconsistent use of terminology referring to racial and ethnic socialization messages and behaviors. For instance, often “racial socialization” is used almost exclusively with African Americans, while “ethnic and cultural socialization” is used more often with Latinx and Asian Americans (Hughes et al., 2006). The inconsistent use of different terms and definitions make it challenging for researchers to tease apart specific psychological effects and integrate findings from past research. RES is also extensively studied and measured with African Americans, while less attention is given to other racial minority groups (Priest et al., 2014). Finally, more studies are needed to examine the multiple social and environmental factors (e.g., family, school, neighborhood) and multiple influential agents (e.g., parents, teachers, peers, online) that may influence RES and its relationship to SWB.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation for Future Research**

Our review of the race and SWB literature (focusing on key predictors, racial-ethnic discrimination, racial-ethnic identity, acculturation and enculturation, and racial-ethnic socialization) highlights both the importance and challenges of studying this topic. Although at times, racial groups were compared with each other (e.g., comparing Latinx and Asian immigrants’ experience of acculturation), the majority of these studies focused on a specific racial minority group. Even though this literature is smaller in comparison to that of key predictors related to negative mental health outcomes (see, Lee & Ahn, 2012, 2013), our review finds that these racial risks and resilience are important to the SWB of people of color. Furthermore, by going beyond simple racial group comparison—that may further reinforce stereotypes of racial minority groups living in an oppressive system of racism (Zuckerman, 1990)—these studies illustrate that the contribution of race to SWB is complicated and there are many important, uniquely racialized risks and resilience that are multidimensional. We conclude our review by providing suggestions for future research to advance theory and methodology in the study of race and SWB. Grounded in Critical Race theory, they focus on the significance of racism, racialization, intersectionality, and agency.

### **Significance of Racism**

Given the system of racism that privileges Whites, our review narrowly focused on the racialized risks and resilience of racial minorities living in the US. That said, there were racial minority groups that were over-represented in some areas and under-represented in others. Research that focuses on “race” (including study of racial-ethnic discrimination, racial-ethnic identity, and racial-ethnic socialization) was conducted more frequently with African Americans while focus on “ethnicity” (including acculturation/enculturation) was studied more frequently with Latinx and Asian Americans. Native Americans, multiracials, and other marginalized minority groups (e.g., Arab Americans) were largely absent in this literature. Together, our review draws attention to these understudied groups and the accompanying stereotyped assumptions of significance in topic to specific racial minority groups (e.g., importance of race to primarily African Americans or ethnicity to Asian Americans or Latinx) that should be avoided.

Also, operationalization and measurement of racial and ethnic constructs often overlap, making it difficult to distinguish between them (Cokley, 2007) and easy to conflate results in regard to SWB. For instance, the same measures of identity and socialization may be defined as racial identity or racial socialization if studied with African Americans, but ethnic identity or ethnic socialization if studied with Latinx or Asian Americans (Juang et al., 2016; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Therefore, research questions, measures, and sample selection should be based on whether researchers are interested in ethnic-related constructs that emphasize cultural beliefs, values, and behaviors or race-related constructs that emphasize



response to an oppressive and highly racialized society (Cokley, 2007). Hence, a study might use a sample of Asian Americans when studying effects of racism-related stress, but specific Asian ethnic groups (e.g., Filipino American, Vietnamese, Asian Indian) when studying effects of acculturation gap. Similarly, operationalization and measurement of well-being was not consistent in this literature, often relying on a collection of “positive” psychological adjustment outcomes (e.g., self-esteem, positive affect). There is debate about whether there is a meaningful and measurable difference between SWB and psychological well-being (Chen, Jing, Hayes, & Lee, 2013); more importantly, few studies focused on understanding factor structure and invariance of SWB across racial groups or developing new theories and measures of SWB based on distinct racialized history and experiences of particular racial minority groups.

Finally, there are limited studies that investigate how the relationship between race-related risks/resilience and SWB is influenced by system-level factors (e.g., family, community, state). Most studies focused on individual-level factors (e.g., personality, coping strategy). Interestingly, many theories in this area of research (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Garcia-Coll et al., 1996; Harrell, 2000; Phinney, 1990) already emphasize the role of community and larger system factors (e.g., anti-race policies) on the individual. Incorporation of system-level factors in this area of research is needed to further understand how individuals and structures of oppression interact on SWB. Also, more studies are needed in understanding how race and SWB link relate to activism and ways that individuals engage in transforming a racist society (Klar & Kasser, 2009).

### **Significance of Racialization**

Racial groups are distinctly categorized and their unique process of racialization leads to different trajectories in maintaining white racism (Omi & Winant, 2014). For instance, Asian Americans are simultaneously viewed as hard-working (i.e., model minority) but un-American (i.e., perpetual foreigner); in contrast, African Americans are viewed as lazy and aggressive but more American (Kim, 1999). This calls for more attention to studies focusing on uniquely racialized experience of each racial minority group, many of which were missing across the reviewed risks and resilience factors. Research on race and SWB should also provide more relevant, historical, and socio-political context of race-specific constructs (Lee et al., 2016). Also, absent from the literature were many other marginalized racial minority groups (e.g., multiracials, Arab Americans) and their unique racialization processes. For example, Shih and Sanchez (2009) point out that studies on multiracials in psychology often rely on a cultural-deficit view, despite the many ways they successfully navigate between multiple racial identities and racism (Yoo, Jackson, Guevarra, Miller, & Harrington, 2016). Lastly, as racism is ever-evolving to maintain power and privilege attached to whiteness, new roles of migration shaped by colonialism and imperialism need to be examined. For instance, studies often operationalize migration histories in terms of acculturation, generational differences, or immigration status, failing to account for alternative migration histories including transnationalism and diaspora (Huber, 2010; Lee et al., 2016).

### **Significance of Intersectionality**

Research on the link between race and SWB would benefit from a broader framework that examines multiple and intersecting forms of oppression and identities (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality is a lens that critique how multiple social systems interlock to produce and sustain complex inequalities (Crenshaw, 1991). In psychology, there is a growing interest and body of work using intersectionality lens to examine how multiple identities is associated with a wide range of psychological outcomes; although there is growing concern that psychological outcomes of multiple social identities are being examined without critiquing systems of inequality or ways in which oppression is challenged (Moradi, 2016; Shin et al., 2017). Other scholars have examined unique experiences of intersecting multiple identities and how they adaptively cope with discrimination. For instance, Seaton, Caldwell, Sellers, and Jackson (2010) examined how combinations of ethnicity, gender, and age moderated the relationship between perceived discrimination and psychological well-being (depressive symptoms, self-esteem, and life satisfaction) in a nationally representative sample of African American and Caribbean Black adolescents. Szymanski and Lewis (2016) applied intersectionality framework to study how African American women in an institution of higher education cope with gendered racism. There is also a growing number of empirically validated measures of unique experiences across multiple intersecting identities and oppression, such as the LGBT People of Color Microaggressions Scale (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011), Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale for Black women (Lewis & Neville, 2015), and Foreigner Objectification Scale (Armenta, Lee, Pituc, Jung, Park, et al., 2013). Examining intersections of race, class, gender, and/or sexuality on SWB may also require methods that capture more nuanced relationships, including qualitative or mixed-method designs.

### **Significance of Agency**

Critical Race theory emphasizes the role of people of color as active agents creating their own

personal narratives within an interlocking, structural system of oppressions. The practice of counter-storytelling is encouraged to reveal and contest the identity-infused base of everyday society. Huber (2010), for example, uses the counter-storytelling method to explore intersectionality of race, gender, and migration on the educational experiences of undocumented Chicana college students. In addition, community-based participatory research designs (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011) involve community members as part of the research team to help inform the study questions, designs, interpretation, and dissemination of research. This design allows for self-determination and safeguards against the imposition of dominant narratives. For instance, Okazaki, Kassem, and Tu (2014) argued how community-based participatory research with Asian Americans can counter the homogenized portrait of Asian American communities by disaggregating populations, increasing cultural competence in service providers, improving mental health literacy, and decreasing stigma.

### Final Thoughts

Our review of race and SWB from a Critical Race perspective illustrates the significant and dynamic relationships among unique racial challenges, racial resilience, and SWB of people of color. It is important to remember that this relationship is situated within the broader system of racism, as advantages attached to whiteness and disadvantages attached to being a person of color manifests on individual, cultural, and institutional levels (Harrell, 2000; Jones, 1997). Today, racial inequities continually persist as people of color are systematically disadvantaged compared to Whites across multiple domains of life, including health, education, work, and the legal system (Alvarez et al., 2016; Lui et al., 2006). Research and policies that promote SWB for racial minority groups should also emphasize the need to dismantle these systems of interlocking oppression. However, the burden of responsibility in deconstructing racism should not only weigh on people of color. Although not reviewed here, there is a simultaneously growing field of Critical White studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997) that examines how to deconstruct roles of power and privilege attached to whiteness by examining its mechanisms (e.g., color-blind racial attitude; Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000), evaluating emotional and behavioral costs of White racism (Spanierman & Heppner, 2004), developing critical consciousness, and helping deconstruct systems of interlocking oppression related to race, class, gender, and sexuality (Shin, Ezeofor, Smith, Welch, & Goodrich, 2016). Studies could examine how this awareness and engagement in developing a broader social justice identity for Whites may also contribute to their SWB (Klar & Kasser, 2009; Waters, 2010). Similarly, the study of race and SWB should not be a separate discipline from the general study of SWB. Rather, Ethnic Studies can provide multiple analytical frameworks (e.g., Critical Race theory) that can be applied to all research studying SWB—thereby, advancing the field of SWB with more rigorous and rich research that carefully examines the role of race.

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