



Place of birth effects on self-reported discrimination: Variations by type of discrimination



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ABSTRACT

Researchers have suggested that perceptions of discrimination may vary depending on place of birth and the length of time spent living in the U.S., variables related to acculturation. However, the existing literature provides a mixed picture, with data suggesting that the effects of acculturation on perceptions of discrimination vary by race and other sociodemographic factors. This study evaluated the role of place of birth (POB: defined as U.S.-born vs. foreign-born), age at immigration, and length of residence in the U.S. on self-reported discrimination in a sample of urban-dwelling Asian and Black adults ($n = 1454$). Analyses examined POB effects on different types of discrimination including race-related stigmatization, exclusion, threat, and workplace discrimination. Sociodemographic variables (including age, gender, employment status and education level) were tested as potential moderators of the relationship between POB and discrimination. The results revealed a significant main effect of POB on discrimination, with U.S.-born individuals reporting significantly more discrimination than foreign-born individuals, although the effect was reduced when sociodemographic variables were controlled. Across the sample, POB effects were seen only for race-related stigmatization and exclusion, not for threat and workplace discrimination. With the exception of limited effects for gender, sociodemographic variables did not moderate these effects. Younger age at immigration and greater years of residence in the U.S. were also positively associated with higher levels of perceived discrimination. These findings suggest increasing acculturation may shape the experience and perception of racial and ethnic discrimination.

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Substantial data suggest that members of ethnic and racial minority groups are vulnerable to being targeted for racism and/or ethnic discrimination (Lauderdale, Wen, Jacobs, & Kandula, 2006; Lyles et al., 2011; Ro & Choi, 2009; Shariff-Marco, Klassen, & Bowie, 2010). The prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behavior may take many forms. On an interpersonal level, discrimination may be experienced as directly perceived episodes of social exclusion, workplace discrimination, and verbal or physical threat and harassment (Brondolo et al., 2005; Krieger, Kosheleva, Waterman, Chen, & Koenen, 2011; Kwok et al., 2011).

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Theories of intersectionality suggest that the experiences of discrimination facing an ethnic or racial minority group member may depend on membership in or identification with other groups defined by ethnicity, gender or social class, among other variables. These different status groups may influence the social context in which an individual experiences discrimination. In addition, both membership in different status groups and the context in which the maltreatment occurs may change the perception or attributions of the causes for this maltreatment (Cole, 2009; Reisen, Brooks, Zea, Poppen, & Bianchi, 2013; Seng, Lopez, Sperlich, Hamama, & Reed Meldrum, 2012).

One social category that may influence the experience or perception of discrimination is immigration status or place of birth (POB).¹ The theory and evidence are unclear about the ways in which membership in a group based on POB influences the experiences and reports of discrimination among those who belong to racial or ethnic minority groups. Foreign-born individuals may be targeted for discrimination more than U.S.-born individuals not only because of existing stereotypes about the nature of their ethnic or racial group, but also because of characteristics associated with immigration itself (Deaux et al., 2007; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Foreign-born individuals may lack English language fluency, and barriers to communication may render them more vulnerable to discriminatory behavior (Goto, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2002; Perez, Sribney, & Rodríguez, 2009; Torres, Driscoll, & Voell, 2012). The dress, eating habits, and social communication of immigrant individuals may differ from those of U.S.-born individuals and lead others to exclude or reject them (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Waters, 1994; Ying, Lee, & Tsai, 2000). Immigration may increase contact with members of different racial or ethnic groups, and this increase in the frequency of cross-race interactions may potentiate the possibility of encountering discrimination (Goto et al., 2002; Pérez, Fortuna, & Alegria, 2008).

POB may also effect the attributions individuals make about the causes for episodes of maltreatment. Foreign-born individuals may have been raised in societies where their ethnic or racial group formed the majority, and therefore may be more likely to attribute discriminatory behavior to other causes (e.g., to social class or religion) (Waters, 1994). They may also believe that others hold more favorable opinions about their specific ethnic group than is actually the case, making them less likely to assume that racial or ethnic prejudice drives maltreatment (Deaux et al., 2007; Wiley, Perkins, & Deaux, 2008).

Foreign-born individuals in the U.S. may be less aware of the collective representations held by other U.S. residents about their group. Differences in collective representations, including negative stereotypes, associated with different ethnic or racial groups may influence the types of discrimination members of these groups face. The awareness of these collective representations held about one's group can also modify the degree to which individuals attribute particular types of maltreatment to the perpetrator's prejudice. For example, when an individual is aware that he or she is a member of a racial/ethnic group that has been stereotyped as dishonest, the targeted individual may be more likely to view actions such as clutching a purse or being followed in a store as evidence of discrimination. The data suggest that over time, immigrants acquire an understanding of the collective representations of their group and the implications for their own experiences (Wiley et al., 2008).

POB may also influence individuals' perceptions of the salience of race-based maltreatment (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Goto et al., 2002; Perez et al., 2009; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Spencer, Chen, Gee, Fabian, & Takeuchi, 2010; Torres et al., 2012; Tummala-Narra, Inman, & Ettigi, 2011; Yoo & Lee, 2009). Racial bias as a cause of maltreatment may be more salient to those born in the U.S. Race is a salient social category in the U.S., and issues related to race-based discrimination are widely discussed. Qualitative studies have shown that U.S.-born youth identify egalitarianism (i.e., equal treatment of all) as an important part of American identity and are distressed when the norms of egalitarianism are violated (Deaux et al., 2007).

Previous research on the relationship between POB and racial/ethnic discrimination presents a complex picture. To systematically review this literature we searched EBSCO databases including PsychInfo and Medline and the reference sections of available papers and found 24 studies which explicitly examined the effects of POB on perceived discrimination. Eleven of the 24 articles found that U.S.-born participants reported more perceived discrimination than did foreign-born (Brondolo et al., 2005, 2011; Cook, Alegria, Lin, & Guo, 2009; Dominguez, Strong, Krieger, Gillman, & Rich-Edwards, 2009; Krieger et al., 2011; Kuo, 1995; Mossakowski, 2007; Pérez et al., 2008; Perez et al., 2009; Tillman & Weiss, 2009; Yoo, Gee, Lowthrop, & Robertson, 2010). In contrast, eight studies found the reverse, with foreign-born participants reporting more discrimination than U.S.-born participants (Finch, Kolody, & Vega, 2000; Goto et al., 2002; Lauderdale et al., 2006; Shariff-Marco et al., 2010; Ying et al., 2000; Yip, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008; Yoo, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2009; Zemore, Karriker-Jaffe, Keithly, & Mulia, 2011). Five studies found no difference between foreign-born and U.S.-born in reports of discrimination (Kim & Spencer, 2011; Lyles et al., 2011; Ro & Choi, 2009; Ryan, Gee, & Laflamme, 2006; Torres et al., 2012).

Reconciling conflicting findings on the effects of POB on perceptions of discrimination has been difficult. In part, the effects appear to vary depending on the racial/ethnic group being studied, although the pattern of effects is not completely clear. There is a consistent effect for Black individuals: U.S.-born Black individuals report more discrimination than foreign-born Black individuals (Dominguez et al., 2009; Krieger et al., 2011). The evidence is less clear for Asian and Latino(a) individuals. Of the seven studies which conducted analyses specifically on Latino(a) individuals, four found that U.S.-born Latino(a)s experienced more discrimination than foreign-born Latino(a)s (Cook et al., 2009; Pérez et al., 2008; Perez et al.,

¹ POB: place of birth; defined as U.S.-born vs. foreign-born.

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