



Short report

Racial resentment and smoking

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ABSTRACT

Racial resentment (also known as symbolic racism) is among the most widely tested measures of contemporary prejudice in political science and social psychological research over the past thirty years. Proponents argue that racial resentment reflects anti-black emotion obtained through pre-adult socialization. In light of affect-based models of substance use, this paper examined the association between racial resentment and smoking in a national sample of non-Hispanic white, black, and Hispanic respondents. Data come from the 2012 American National Election Study, which contained two measures of smoking. The results of ordinal logistic regression models indicate a positive association between racial resentment and smoking among non-Hispanic whites ($N = 2133$) that is not present among blacks ($N = 693$) or Hispanics ($N = 660$). Models controlled for age, education, income, gender, political ideology, region, and mode of interview. Furthermore, analyses indicated that a measure of race-related affect, admiration and sympathy towards blacks, partially mediated the association between racial resentment and smoking. For non-Hispanic whites, racial resentment appears to constitute a risk factor for smoking. Future studies should further specify the conditions linking substance use to the race-related affective component of racial resentment.

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1. Introduction

Over the past thirty years, political science and social psychological researchers have made racial resentment, or symbolic racism, one of the most frequently tested theories on contemporary racial prejudice. Originally conceived as symbolic racism, it is defined as “a blend of antiblack affect and the kind of traditional American moral values embodied in the Protestant ethic” (Kinder and Sears, 1981). Whether described as symbolic racism (Sears, 1988), racial resentment (Kinder and Sanders, 1996), or modern racism (McConahay, 1982), the underlying construct is measured using multiple item measures said to capture negative emotion towards blacks acquired during pre-adult socialization. According to the theory, this anti-black affect later influences white attitudes towards black mayoral candidates (Kinder and Sears, 1981), and policies such as affirmative action (Rabinowitz et al., 2009), welfare (Gilens, 1995), and criminal justice policy (L. D. Bobo and Johnson, 2004). This affective component involves “resentment towards Blacks for not pulling themselves up out of poverty by their collective bootstraps” (Rabinowitz et al., 2009).

Some social scientists argue that the measures used to capture

racial resentment do not necessarily reflect racial animus but rather longstanding American values and principles such as individualism and a limited role for government (Sniderman and Tetlock, 1986). As attitudinal measures can be multidimensional (L. D. Bobo and Tuan, 2006), the measures used to capture racial resentment could reflect both race-neutral beliefs as well as race-related affect. The present study focuses on racial resentment's purported emotional dimension in light of affect-based health research.

Affect plays a role in substance use. In this domain, health researchers have long suggested an association between emotions and substance use, including smoking (Kassel, 2010; Kassel et al., 2003). For example, depressive mood, which can include happiness and loneliness as scale items, has been linked to smoking among adolescent youth, calling for interventions that address “emotional needs” (Covey and Tam, 1990). While much research continues to examine and identify the mechanisms through which affect is associated with smoking at various stages (e.g. initiation, maintenance, cessation, relapse, etc.), several studies have nevertheless identified a relationship between emotion and smoking (Kassel et al., 2003).

The present study bridges these two emotion-centered literature to pose the question: is racial resentment, a collection of attitudes posited to reflect anti-black affect, associated with smoking? If so, does a direct measure of racial affect mediate this

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relationship? Because both racial attitudes and smoking can cluster among segments of the population (e.g. by race, education, region, etc.), the current study is important in determining whether negative racial affect is a social determinant of differences in population health, requiring strategies to address racial animus to improve population health. Given the focus on perceived discrimination as a social stressor, which relies on a stress mechanism, the social psychology of racial affect remains understudied in health. Using data from the 2012 American National Election Study, the present study examines the relationship between racial resentment and smoking. In particular, two hypotheses are tested: first, *as racial resentment increases, the likelihood of smoking increases*; second, *affect towards blacks mediates this association*.

2. Methods

2.1. Sample

The data come from the 2012 American National Election Study (ANES). The ANES, funded by the National Science Foundation, has been collected in every presidential election year since 1948, and is considered a gold standard survey of public opinion in the United States (Aldrich and McGraw, 2012). As a study whose purpose is to describe the U.S. electorate and test hypotheses about political attitudes and behaviors, respondents were U.S. citizens aged 18 and older (2 respondents were aged 17 at time of interview). For the 2012 study, data were collected using both face-to-face and Internet modes of interview, in English or Spanish, by Stanford University and the University of Michigan. Sampling for the face-to-face interviews involved address-based, stratified, multi-stage cluster sampling involving 125 census tracts. Sampling for Internet respondents entailed both address-based sampling and random digit dialing. Internet respondents who did not have Internet access were offered free software and hardware at the time of recruitment. Data collection took place between September 8, 2012 and January 24, 2013. Due to missing data on some variables and cases dropped to improve model specification (see next section), the sample consisted of 2133 white respondents, 693 black respondents, and 660 Hispanic respondents.

2.2. Measures

Smoking status was measured by combining two questions: a) "Have you smoked at least 100 cigarettes in your entire life?" and b) "Do you now smoke cigarettes every day, some days, or not at all?" Since smoking and racial animus tend to be resistant to change, former smokers (those who responded "not at all" to current smoking) are excluded from the analyses, as individuals who can successfully curb their smoking behavior may also have the unobserved characteristics to curb racial animus. Prior research on stigma and smoking suggests that the desire to avoid stigma may be stronger among both former smokers and never smokers compared to current smokers (Stuber et al., 2009); likewise, heightened stigma sensitivity could also motivate former smokers to attenuate racial animus (see bivariate tests of negative affect below). This resulted in a three response ordinal dependent variable: never smokers, occasional smokers ("some days"), and current daily smokers. The racial resentment scale (alpha reliability = 0.80) is constructed from four items that the ANES has asked since 1986 (Kinder and Sanders, 1996). The items, ranging on a five-point scale from disagree strongly to agree strongly, are:

- Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.

- Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class (Reverse-coded)
- Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve (Reverse-coded)
- It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.

Finally, the race-related negative affect measure (alpha reliability = 0.75) was constructed from two items capturing admiration and sympathy towards blacks (L. D. Bobo et al., 2012; Meertens and Pettigrew, 1997).

- How often have you felt sympathy for Blacks?
- How often have you felt admiration for Blacks?

Responses to these affect questions ranged across five categories: always, most of the time, about half the time, some of the time, and never. T-tests indicate no differences in negative affect between never and former smokers among whites and blacks, supporting the argument to omit former smokers, though Hispanic former smokers do express higher levels of negative affect compared to Hispanic never smokers. An alternative interpretation that does not rely on affect change might argue that former smokers initially have lower racial animus than current smokers, making racial animus less of a factor in reinforcing smoking behavior and impeding cessation.

Aside from age, education, gender, and conservative political ideology (Subramanian and Perkins, 2010), the models also adjust for income, region, and mode of interview. Family income was coded at the midpoint value of a 28-category ordered income scale. Region is included as a binary variable (1 = South) in light of South/Non-South regional differences in racial attitudes (Schuman et al., 1997). Because interviews were conducted face to face and via the Internet, mode of interview was also controlled (1 = Internet). Research indicates differences in expressions of racial attitudes linked to interview mode, likely due to social desirability and privacy concerns (Schuman et al., 1997).

2.3. Analyses

Ordinal logistic regression models were used to estimate unadjusted and adjusted models for white, black, and Hispanic respondents. Initial models involved listwise deletion of cases with missing values on pertinent variables. Data were missing for racial resentment (8%), age (1%), education (1%), income (3%), conservatism (8%), negative affect (8%), and smoking (0.2%). Use of survey weights did not reveal substantively different results between weighted and unweighted models. Multiple imputation methods were used to impute missing values and compare model estimates that included recovered cases (e.g. N = 2412 white respondents) to estimates obtained after listwise deletion (e.g. N = 2133 white respondents). With no substantive differences in results, unweighted models based on listwise deletion are presented, as they allow further mediation testing with a technique that is currently unavailable within a multiple imputation framework (see next section). Logistic regression diagnostics did not indicate leverage or outlier concerns. Though a Brant test suggested conservatism violated the parallel lines assumption, a generalized ordered logistic approach estimating a partial proportional odds model did not yield substantively different results.

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