

The relationship between racial trauma and the student journey in Global Majority student populations in the UK

Olaide Phillips

Supervision Team: Samantha Banbury & Giovanni Moneta

London Metropolitan University - School of Social Sciences and Professions - Psychology

SUMMARY

While access to higher education has improved, minority ethnic students, particularly Black students, still face significant inequalities and barriers. The student experience is closely linked to broader societal issues, impacting well-being. One possible factor affecting the student journey is racial trauma. Investigating how racial trauma influences various aspects of the student experience including wellbeing which ultimately affects academic engagement, self-efficacy, and academic success could offer valuable insights into addressing the awarding gap. Existing literature on racial trauma within the UK student population is limited. Therefore, further exploration of this phenomenon as a potential determinant of student outcomes is warranted and may yield valuable insights.

INTRODUCTION

Racial Trauma

- Racial trauma arises from psychological reactions to persistent race-related stressors (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019).
- It can result from direct or vicarious racial discrimination, leading to PTSD symptoms (Williams et al., 2018).
- 24% of ethnic minority students and 45% of Black students experience racial harassment, a 9% increase from the previous year (UK Universities, 2023).

Impact on the Student Journey

- Ethnic minority students are less likely to obtain good degrees compared to white counterparts. The gap is greater for African, Caribbean, Other Black, and Gypsy or Traveller groups (OfS, 2018; 2023).
- Mental health and attainment among ethnic minority students are deeply influenced by institutional racism (Ardey, 2018).
- Hostile campus environments reduce a sense of belonging for "non-traditional" students, with 16% of Black students reporting racism (Johnson et al., 2007).
- Racism heightens mental health risks and dropout rates for Black students (Arday, 2020).
- Academic self-efficacy, shaped by racial identity and discrimination, impacts academic outcomes for Black students (Eccles et al., 2006; Butler-Barnes et al., 2017).

Current Study

This study explores racial trauma in the UK context to understand challenges faced by ethnic minority students and forms the basis for developing interventions to tackle the awarding gap.

Aims

- Explore levels of racial trauma in student populations across the UK.
- Examine the relationship between racial trauma, well-being, academic engagement, self-efficacy, and academic success.

Hypotheses

- H1: Black students will have higher levels of racial trauma than other minority groups.
- H2: Racial trauma will negatively affect academic engagement, well-being, self-efficacy, and academic success.
- H3: The relationship between racial trauma, academic engagement, and academic success will be mediated by self-efficacy and well-being.

METHOD

Design

An explorative correlational study using online self-report questionnaires

Participants

Participants must be 18 years or older, currently enrolled as undergraduates, postgraduates, or recent graduates (within the last 2 years) in the UK. Eligible participants must meet one of the following criteria: born in the UK, holding settled status or permanent residency, having indefinite leave to remain, or eligible for indefinite leave to remain (having resided in the UK for more than 5 years). This ensures homogeneity in lived experience.

Materials

- Academic Performance Questionnaire adapted assessment tool based on (Lauterbach et al., 2002)
- Racial Trauma Scale Short (Williams et al. 2022)
- Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scales (PWB) (Ryff & Keyes, 1995)
- The University Student Engagement Inventory (USEI) (Maroco et al., 2016)
- The Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) (Chemers, Hu & Garcia, 2001)

Procedure

Following ethical approval (03 - 2024), and adhering to the British Psychology Society's (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (2021), the form has been shared in academic networks and learning platforms. The form is based on Microsoft forms and takes approximately 20 minutes to complete. The survey is anonymous and each participant generates a participant ID which they can use to withdraw from the study. Data collection will continue until the target number of participants is reached.

REFERENCES

Arday J. (2018) Understanding mental health: what are the issues for black and ethnic minority students at university? *Soc Sci*7:196

Arday J. (2020) Fighting the Tide: Understanding the Difficulties Facing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Doctoral Students Pursuing a Career in Academia. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 53 (10): 972–979.

Butler-Barnes, S.T., Chavous, T.M., Hurd, N., & Varner, F. (2013). African American adolescents' academic persistence: A strengths-based approach. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 42(9), 1443–1458.

Chemers, M. M., Hu, L., & Garcia, B. F. (2001). Academic self-efficacy and first-year college student performance and adjustment. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93, 5564.

Comas-Diaz, L., Hall, G. N., & Neville, H. A. (2019). Racial trauma: Theory, research, and healing: Introduction to the special issue. *American Psychologist*, 74 (1), 1 – 5.

Eccles, J.S., Wong, C.A., & Peck, S.C. (2006). Ethnicity as a social context for the development of African-American adolescents. *Journal of School Psychology*, 44(5), 407–426.

Harrell, S. P. (2000). A multidimensional conceptualization of racism-related stress: Implications for the well-being of people of color. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 70(1), 42–57.

Office for Students (2023). *A statistical overview of higher education in England - Office for Students*.

Johnson, D. R., Soldner, M., Leonard, J. B., Alvarez, P., Inkelas, K. K., Rowan-Kenyon, H., & Longestbeam, S. (2007). Examining sense of belonging among first-year undergraduates from different racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(5), 525–542.

Lauterbach, D., Garcia, M., & Gloster, A. (2002). Academic Performance Questionnaire. Retrieved from PsycTESTS.

Maroco, J., Maroco, A. L., Bonini Campos, J. A. D., and Fredricks, J. A. (2016). University student's engagement: Development of the University Student Engagement Inventory (USEI). *Psicol. Reflex. e Crit*.29:21

Ryff, C., & Keyes, C. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 719–727.

Seaton, E. K., Caldwell, C. H., Sellers, R. M., & Jackson, J. S. (2010). The prevalence of perceived discrimination among African American and Caribbean Black youth. *Developmental Psychology*, 46(6), 1372–1379.

UK Universities (2023). *Survey data: What are students' experiences of racial harassment?*

Wei, M., Liao, K. Y., Chao, R. C. L., Mallinckrodt, B., Tsai, P. C., & Botello-Zamarron, R. (2010). Minority stress, perceived bicultural competence, and depressive symptoms among ethnic minority college students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 57(4), 411–422.

Williams MT, Metzger IW, Leins C, & DeLapp C (2018). Assessing racial trauma within a DSM-5 framework: The UConn racial/ethnic stress & trauma survey. *Practice Innovations*, 3, 1–19.

Williams, M. T., Osman, M., Gallo, J., Pereira, D. P., Gran-Ruaz, S., Strauss, D., Lester, L., George, J. R., Edelman, J., & Litman, L. (2022). Racial Trauma Scale. Retrieved from PsycTESTS.



FINDINGS

Demographics:

- 155 Female, 43 Male, 2 non-conforming, 1 transgender female, 1 transgender male and 1 prefer not to say.
- Aged between 18 and 57 (M=32.55, SD = 9.6)

Racial Trauma is correlated to:

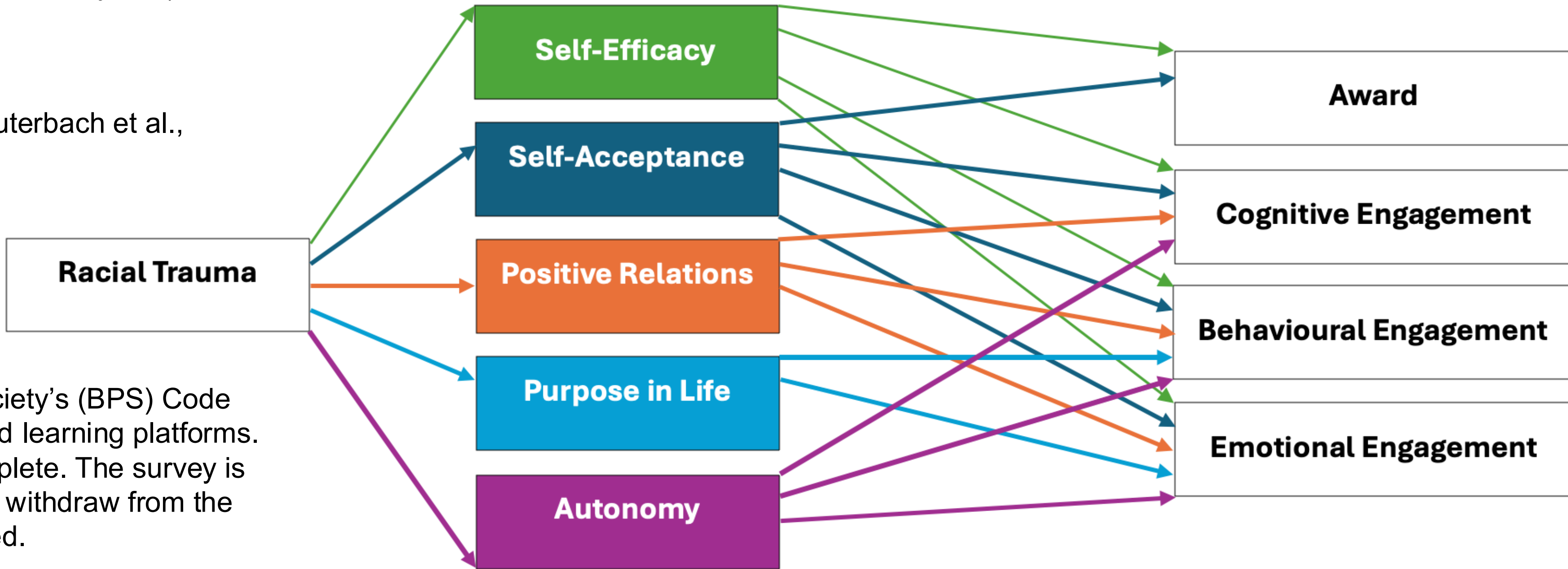
- Repeating assessments R(202)=.028, p,.001
- Repeating modules R(202)=0.23, p<.001
- Absenteeism R(202)=0.16, p=.022
- Mitigation claims R(202)=0.34, p<.001
- Autonomy R(202)=0.28, p<.001
- Environmental Mastery R(202)=0.391, p<.001
- Positive Relationships R(202)=0.21, p=.003
- Self Acceptance R(202)=0.30, p<.001
- Emotional Engagement R(202)=.19, p=.007
- Self Efficacy R(202)=.17, p=.019.

Levels of racial Trauma:

- All global majority students scored clinical levels of racial trauma.
- Those who identify as 'other ethnic group (M=21, SE = 4.23), Chinese (M=20.20, SE=8.50), Pakistani (M=20, SE= 8.16), Roma (M=19.75, SE=5.58) and Black African (M=18.93, SE=5.43), respectively scored the highest levels of racial trauma.
- Other white groups did not meet clinical levels of racial trauma (a score of 15 and above).

Mediation:

A mediation analysis using PROCESS (Model 4; Hayes, 2018) revealed significant indirect effects but no direct effects. The relationship between racial trauma and degree award was mediated by self-efficacy, $b = .08$, 95% CI [.02, .16], and self-acceptance, $b = .05$, 95% CI [.01, .11]. The relationship between racial trauma and cognitive engagement was mediated by self-efficacy, $b = .07$, 95% CI [.02, .15], self-acceptance, $b = .06$, 95% CI [.02, .12], positive relations, $b = .04$, 95% CI [.01, .09], and autonomy, $b = .03$, 95% CI [.01, .07]. For behavioural engagement, the indirect effects were significant via self-efficacy, $b = .06$, 95% CI [.02, .13], self-acceptance, $b = .05$, 95% CI [.01, .11], positive relations, $b = .04$, 95% CI [.01, .09], purpose in life, $b = .03$, 95% CI [.01, .08], and autonomy, $b = .02$, 95% CI [.00, .06]. Finally, the relationship between racial trauma and emotional engagement was mediated by self-efficacy, $b = .07$, 95% CI [.02, .14], self-acceptance, $b = .06$, 95% CI [.01, .12], positive relations, $b = .05$, 95% CI [.01, .10], purpose in life, $b = .04$, 95% CI [.01, .08], and autonomy, $b = .03$, 95% CI [.01, .06].



Discussion

Key findings

These findings highlight the mediating role of psychological well-being and self-beliefs in shaping students' academic experiences.

Links to existing literature

Consistent with prior research, racial trauma was associated with diminished self-efficacy, a mechanism shown to undermine academic outcomes (Wei et al., 2010). Contrary to expectations, racial trauma was also associated with higher self-acceptance, although previous studies suggest this may reflect adaptive coping or resilience processes in the face of discrimination (Seaton et al., 2010;). Together, these pathways predicted poorer academic outcomes, consistent with evidence that racism-related stress negatively impacts well-being and performance (Harrell, 2000).

Implications

Universities should consider culturally responsive support mechanisms to mitigate the negative impact of racial trauma on educational outcomes.

Next steps

While the quantitative model maps broad pathways, it cannot capture the nuances of lived experiences.

A qualitative study will explore how students make sense of racial trauma in relation to their well-being and academic engagement, illuminating subtle processes and coping strategies not evident in statistical models.

This mixed-methods approach will help build a richer understanding and inform targeted interventions for equity and inclusion in higher education.