



Hope Above Racial Discrimination and Social Support in Accounting for Positive and Negative Psychological Adjustment in African American Adults: Is “Knowing You Can Do It” as Important as “Knowing How You Can”?

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Published online: 1 August 2018
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Abstract

In the present study, we examined the role of racial discrimination, social support (viz., family and friends), and hope (viz., agency and pathways) in accounting for negative psychological adjustment (viz., anxious and depressive symptoms) and positive psychological adjustment (viz., vitality and life satisfaction) in a sample of 249 African Americans. Overall, results of conducting a series of hierarchical regression analyses provided some evidence for the role of racial discrimination and social support in accounting for both negative and positive psychological adjustment. Noteworthy, the inclusion of hope was found to significantly augment the prediction models of psychological adjustment. Within the hope set, agency was consistently found to uniquely account for adjustment. In contrast, pathways was only found to uniquely account for vitality. Beyond affirming the importance of racial discrimination and social support, the present findings highlight the added value of considering hope, especially agency, in understanding positive and negative psychological adjustment in African Americans. Implications of the present findings for understanding the role of racial discrimination, social support, and hope in the psychological adjustment of African American adults are discussed.

Keywords Racial discrimination · Social support · Hope · Psychological adjustment · African Americans

*There is in this world no such
force as the force of a man
determined to rise.
—W. E. B. Du Bois*

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Introduction

Researchers, scholars, and practitioners have long been interested in identifying individual-differences variables that are linked to psychological adjustment (e.g., Adler 1923; Allport 1937; Bandura 1977; Cattell 1965). One variable that is believed to represent a universally important and robust individual-differences variable that accounts for a range of positive and negative psychological outcomes is hope (Lopez 2013; Snyder 1994).

Snyder's Cognitive Theory of Hope: Agentic and Pathways Thinking

Although various models of hope have been presented in recent years (see Lopez et al. 2003, for a review), one of the most compelling and comprehensive models has been that provided by Snyder and his colleagues (Snyder 1994, 2002; Snyder et al. 1991). Based on Snyder's (1994) hope theory, all individuals are believed to be guided by efforts to reach and obtain goals. As a general disposition to engage in conscious efforts to obtain a goal, hope is expected to extend a range of psychological benefits (Lopez 2013; Snyder 1994; Snyder et al. 1991). In that regard, findings from numerous studies have provided general support for Snyder's (1994) contention that hope represents an adaptive personality construct in adult populations. For example, a reliable positive association has been identified between hope and measures of positive psychological adjustment (e.g., life satisfaction; Chang and Banks 2007; Danoff-Burg et al. 2004). Similarly, a reliable negative association has been identified between hope and measures of negative psychological adjustment (e.g., depressive symptoms; Chang et al. 2016; Hirsch et al. 2012; Kwon 2000; Snyder et al. 1991).

Importantly, Snyder et al. (1991; see also, Babyak et al. 1993; Gomez et al. 2015; Magaletta and Oliver 1999) have shown that *hope* reflects a cognitive set composed of two relatively distinct ways of thinking about a goal as measured by their Hope Scale. *Agentic thinking* involves thoughts related to one's successful determination or resolve about reaching goals (e.g., "I meet the goals that I set for myself"), whereas *pathways thinking* involves thoughts about one's effective ability to pursue different means to obtaining goals (e.g., "I can think of many ways to get out of a jam"). According to Snyder et al. (1991), "the[se] two components of hope are reciprocal, additive, and positively related, although they are not synonymous" (p. 571). Conceptually, the difference between hope agency and hope pathways is similar to Bandura's (1977) distinction between efficacy expectancies and outcome expectancies, respectively. However, in contrast to the notion that the former is a more important determinant of outcome than the latter (Bandura 1977), Snyder et al. (1991) have suggested that it is important to consider both types of cognitions as they relate to behavior and outcome. Hence, an important tenet of Snyder's (1994) hope theory is that the perception of goal attainment will be, in general, positively associated with greater levels of *both* agentic and pathways thinking, which in turn will result in *each* of the hope components being associated with psychological adjustment (e.g., greater life satisfaction, less depressive symptoms). Thus, Snyder et al. (2000) identified hope

as a common factor involved in what makes cognitive-behavioral interventions successful. Unfortunately, despite concerns raised more than a decade ago about the lack of diversity in hope research (Chang and Banks 2007), much of the research continues to be based on the study of European American adults. Consequentially, advances in our understanding of the usefulness of the components of hope in the lives of more diverse ethn racial groups remains largely unknown or limited at best. For such reasons, the American Psychological Association (2017) recently emphasized a need to increase our understanding of the importance of positive psychological variables and outcomes in the lives of diverse ethn racial groups (see also, Chang et al. 2016).

Racial Discrimination and Social Support in Accounting for Psychological Adjustment in African American Adults: Does Hope Still Matter?

By 2060, it is projected that ethn racial groups will make up more than 55% of the American population (U.S. Census 2015). Across these groups, African Americans currently make up the second largest ethn racial group (Henry Kaiser Family Foundation 2014). Noteworthy, although the 12-month prevalence rate for major depressive disorder has been estimated to be 6.7% in the general population (Kessler et al. 2005), it has been found to be 10.4% among African American adults (Williams et al. 2007). Accordingly, in the context of accounting for psychological adjustment, it has become important for researchers to identify variables associated with psychological adjustment of a growing number of ethn racial groups, including African Americans.

Noteworthy, studies of African American adults over the past several decades have pointed to a number of important and reliable variables that account for psychological adjustment. Among them, one theoretically salient, long-standing, and widely examined explanatory variable has been racial discrimination (Du Bois 1903; Klonoff and Landrine 1999). In general, *racial discrimination* refers to the perceived experience of being treated differently, typically negatively, by others due to one's phenotypic characteristics (e.g., being dark-skinned) and/or one's ethn racial affiliation (Clark et al. 1999). Indeed, results from a recent survey indicated that 71% of African Americans report race as the primary reason for experiencing day-to-day discrimination (American Psychological Association 2016). Not surprisingly, hundreds of studies have identified a reliable association between the experience of racial discrimination and psychological adjustment in African American adults. For example, findings from recent studies of African American adults have indicated a positive association between racial

discrimination and depressive symptoms (e.g., Banks et al. 2006; Chao et al. 2012; Prelow et al. 2006), and a negative association between racial discrimination and life satisfaction (e.g., Broman 1997; Prelow et al. 2006; Utsey et al. 2000; Yap et al. 2011).

In addition to racial discrimination, findings from numerous studies have also implicated the important but adaptive role of *social support*, the perception that one has others who cares for them and can provide them with needed assistance (Cohen and Wills 1985), in psychological adjustment models of African Americans (Neighbors 1997; Neighbors et al. 2012; Taylor et al. 1997). Consistent with this view, findings from studies of African American adults have identified a negative association between social support and depressive symptoms (e.g., Harris and Molock 2000; Pollock et al. 2015; Schulz et al. 2006), and a positive association between social support and life satisfaction (e.g., Fife et al. 2011; Nguyen et al. 2016; Prelow et al. 2006).

Although the pattern of these findings underscores the utility of psychological adjustment models of African Americans that include an examination of racial discrimination and social support (Adams et al. 2003; Neighbors et al. 2012), it remains unclear if an examination of hope might add further explanatory power to our balanced understanding of both negative and positive psychological adjustment in African American adults. As some researchers have previously argued, understanding what accounts for negative psychological adjustment does not necessarily implicate what accounts for positive psychological adjustment (Wong 2011). Indeed, apart from the fact that only a handful of studies exist that have examined for the role of hope in the adjustment of African American adults (e.g., Banks et al. 2008), we are not aware of any published study that has investigated the extent to which hope components might add incremental utility, beyond the inclusion of racial discrimination and social support, to the prediction of psychological adjustment in African American adults. For example, although a study by Banks et al. (2008) was able to show that hope components uniquely accounted for psychological adjustment in African Americans, independent of racial discrimination, this study did not include an examination of social support and was limited to accounting only for depressive symptoms. Accordingly, the present study was conducted to address this important limitation in the extant empirical literature.

Purpose of the Present Study

Given these concerns and limitations for understanding the role of hope in African American adults, we had two specific objectives in conducting the present study: (a) to determine the extent to which hope components (*viz.*, agency and pathways)

would add incremental validity to the prediction of negative psychological adjustment, beyond the inclusion of racial discrimination and social support; and (b) to determine the extent to which hope components would add incremental validity to the prediction of positive psychological adjustment, beyond the inclusion of racial discrimination and social support.

Consistent with past findings and with the notion that the effects of racial discrimination are psychologically harmful (Clark et al. 1999), we hypothesized that the experience of racial discrimination in African Americans would be involved in accounting for psychological adjustment. Specifically, we expected to find racial discrimination to operate as a positive predictor of negative psychological adjustment, and as a negative predictor of positive psychological adjustment. Moreover, given findings from studies pointing to the importance of social support systems in African American adults (Neighbors 1997), including those pointing to their explanatory power independent of racial discrimination (Pollock et al. 2015), we hypothesized that social support would further augment the prediction of psychological adjustment in African American adults, beyond what might be accounted for by racial discrimination. Specifically, we expected to find social support to uniquely operate as a negative predictor of negative psychological adjustment, and as a positive predictor of positive psychological adjustment. However, given that findings on social support systems in African Americans have sometimes pointed, beyond the role of family members, to the role of non-family members (e.g., friends; Neighbors et al. 2012), we explored for the comparative involvement of family and non-family sources of social support in adjustment. Finally, consistent with the notion that hope components represent inclusive, but distinct processes associated with psychological adjustment across all individuals (Snyder 1994, 2002; Snyder et al. 1991), we hypothesized that both hope agency and pathways would add further incremental validity, above and beyond racial discrimination and social support, to the prediction of both negative and positive psychological adjustment in African American adults. Thus, in providing a stringent theoretical test of the value of hope in the lives of African Americans, even after accounting for racial discrimination and social support, we expected to find both hope components to be uniquely and negatively involved in negative psychological adjustment, and to be uniquely and positively involved in positive psychological adjustment.

Method

Participants

A total of 249 self-identified African American college students (199 female and 50 male) were recruited from a large

Eastern public university in the United States. Ages ranged from 18 to 48 years, with a mean age of 21.58 ($SD = 5.44$).

Measures

Racial Discrimination

To assess for racial discrimination, we used the General Ethnic Discrimination Scale (GEDS; Landrine et al. 2006). The GEDS is a simplified and generalized version adapted from the Schedule of Racist Events (SRE; Klonoff and Landrine 1999), and assesses for experience of discrimination across 18 SRE events (e.g., “How often have you been treated unfairly by teachers and professors because of your race/ethnic group?”) over the past year and during one’s lifetime due to one’s ethnoracial membership, as well as appraisal of the stressfulness of the events. Noteworthy, scores assessing for recent discrimination, lifetime discrimination, and appraised discrimination have been found to load onto a single perceived ethnoracial discrimination factor in African American adults (Landrine et al. 2006). Accordingly, we used the total GEDS score as a measure of racial discrimination in the present study. Respondents were asked to indicate either the frequency of experiencing a discriminatory event over the past year or during their lifetime using a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*almost all of the time*), or the degree of stress experienced by the event using a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely stressful*). To obtain a total score, scores across all 18 SRE events for “past year” and “entire life” are added together with scores for “stressful” for the first 17 SRE events. In support for the criterion-related validity of the GEDS, Landrine et al. (2006) found that scores on the GEDS were positively associated with scores on a measure of psychiatric symptoms in an ethnoracially diverse sample of college students. Higher scores on the GEDS indicate greater general experience of racial discrimination. In the present sample, internal consistency of the GEDS as measured by Cronbach’s alpha was .97.

Social Support

To assess for social support, we used two questions asking about family and friend support from the social network list (SNL; Hirsch 1980). Noteworthy, the original SNL was designed to measure the number of individuals in one’s various social networks. However, given that findings from studies have typically found stronger evidence for the importance of quality, rather than quantity, of social support in adult psychological adjustment (e.g., Nguyen et al. 2016), we used adapted versions of these two questions (see Bass and Stein 1997; Jeglic et al. 2007) to assess for quality of social support from family members (“How satisfied are you

with the support that you receive from your family?”) and from friends (“How satisfied are you with the support that you receive from your friends?”). Respondents were asked to indicate their level of support satisfaction to each question using a 9-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*not at all satisfied*) to 8 (*very satisfied*). In support for the construct validity of these two adapted items, Jeglic et al. (2007) found that scores on these two items were positively associated with scores obtained from a measure of perceived social support in a sample of college students. Higher scores on these two questions indicate greater social support satisfaction.

Hope Agency and Pathways

To assess for hope agency and pathways, we used the Hope Scale (HS; Snyder et al. 1991). The HS is a 12-item measure of multidimensional hope consisting of a 4-item Hope Agency scale (HS-Agency; e.g., “I meet the goals that I set for myself”) and a 4-item Hope Pathways scale (HS-Pathways; e.g., “I can think of many ways to get out of a jam”). Four items are filler items. Respondents were asked to indicate how accurately each item described them using a 4-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*definitely false*) to 4 (*definitely true*). In support for the construct validity of the HS scales, Snyder et al. (1991) found that scores on agency and pathways were positively associated with other measures of positive future cognitions (e.g., optimism) and negatively associated with adjustment (e.g., depressive symptoms). Additionally, in support for the distinction between agency and pathways, Chang and Banks (2007) found that scores measuring for positive problem orientation (i.e., the perception that problems as solvable) were more strongly associated with HS-Pathways scores, than with HS-Agency scores in a sample of African American college students. Higher scores on the HS-Agency scale indicate greater thoughts about being able to successfully obtain a goal, whereas higher scores on the HS-Pathways scale indicate greater thoughts about finding ways to reach a goal. In the present sample, internal consistencies of the HS-Agency and HS-Pathways scales as measured by Cronbach’s alpha were .84 and .82, respectively.

Negative Psychological Adjustment

To assess for negative psychological adjustment, we used the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI; Beck et al. 1988) and the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck et al. 1961). The BAI is a 21-item self-report measure consisting of common symptoms of anxiety (e.g., “Fear of the worst happening”). Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they have experienced each symptom over the past week using a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 3 (*severely*). In support for the construct validity, Beck et al.

(1988) found that scores on the BAI were positively associated with scores on alternative measures of anxiety symptoms. Furthermore, Chang (2017b) found that scores on the BAI were positively associated with scores on other measures of negative affective conditions in a sample of African American college students. Higher scores on the BAI indicate greater anxious symptoms. In the present sample, internal consistency of the BAI as measured by Cronbach's alpha was .96.

The BDI is a commonly used 21-item self-report measure of depressive symptomatology. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they have experienced specific depressive symptoms in the past week, across a 4-point Likert-type scale (for example, "0 = I do not feel sad" to "3 = I am so sad or unhappy that I can't stand it"). In support for construct validity, Beck et al. (1961) found that scores on the BDI were positively associated with scores on other measures of depressive symptoms and with clinical ratings of depression. Furthermore, Chang (2017b) found that scores on the BDI were positively associated with scores on other measures of negative affective conditions in a sample of African American college students. Higher scores on the BDI indicate greater depressive symptoms. In the present sample, internal consistency of the BDI as measured by Cronbach's alpha was .91.

Positive Psychological Adjustment

To assess for positive psychological adjustment, we used the Subjective Vitality Scale (SVS; Ryan and Frederick 1997) and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al. 1985). The SVS is a 7-item self-report measure assessing for feelings of energy and vitality (e.g., "I feel alive and vital"). Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which each statement is true of them using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not true at all*) to 7 (*very true*). In support for the construct validity, Ryan and Frederick (1997) found that scores on the SVS were positively associated with scores on other measures of positive psychological adjustment (e.g., self-actualization, self-esteem). Higher scores on the SVS indicate greater vitality. In the present sample, internal consistency of the SVS as measured by Cronbach's alpha was .87.

The SWLS is a 5-item measure of global life satisfaction (e.g., "I am satisfied with my life"), or a person's satisfaction with life as a whole, rather than any specific domain. Respondents were asked to rate the extent of their agreement to these items across a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). In support for the construct validity of the SWLS, Diener et al. (1985) found that scores on the SWLS were positively associated with scores across a wide range of well-being measures (e.g., happiness, positive affect). Furthermore, Fife et al. (2011)

found that scores on the SWLS were positively associated with scores on measures of religious commitment and social support in a sample of African American college students. Higher scores on the SWLS indicate greater life satisfaction. In the present sample, internal consistency of the SWLS as measured by Cronbach's alpha was .87.

Procedure

Self-identified monoethnic African American (e.g., "Black, not of Hispanic origin") college students taking an Introduction to Psychology course were solicited to participate in a paper-and-pencil study looking at personality and adjustment using a Psychology Subject Pool website. A total of 249 African Americans signed up for the study online and then completed all study measures a few days later in a group setting. The study included a self-report battery involving the GEDS, HS, BAI, BDI, SVS, SWLS, items assessing for family and friend support, and several sociodemographic questions (e.g., age, sex, family income). Measures were randomized to control for ordering effects. The battery was administered in groups of 15 participants or greater. Participants were not made aware of the purpose of the study until after the study was completed. Upon completion, students were given research credit for their participation. All participants signed consent forms and were informed that all test data would be kept strictly confidential.

Results

As shown in Table 1, the majority of the African American participants were female (79.9%), aged ≤ 25 years (87.1%), freshman (38.2%), and over half (64.4%) reported annual household incomes \leq \$40,000.

Relations Between Racial Discrimination, Social Support, Hope, and Psychological Adjustment in African American Adults

Correlations between all measures are presented in Table 2. As this table shows, the patterns of correlations were generally consistent with expectations. For example, racial discrimination was positively correlated with anxious symptoms and depressive symptoms ($r_s = .34$ and $.20$, $p_s < .01$, respectively), and negatively correlated with vitality and life satisfaction ($r_s = -.15$ and $-.24$, $p_s < .05$, respectively). Similarly, family social support and friend social support were also found to be negatively correlated with anxious symptoms ($r_s = -.13$ to $-.20$, $p_s < .05$) and depressive symptoms ($r_s = -.30$ to $-.36$, $p_s < .001$), and positively correlated with vitality ($r_s = .33$ to $.41$, $p_s < .001$) and life satisfaction ($r_s = .36$ to $.46$, $p_s < .001$). Finally, hope agency

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for the present African American sample

	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	50	20.1
Female	199	79.9
Age		
25 years of age or younger	217	87.1
Older than 25 years of age	32	12.9
Class breakdown		
Freshman	95	38.2
Sophomore	62	24.9
Junior	66	26.5
Senior	26	10.4
Annual family income		
< \$10,000	49	19.7
\$10,000–\$20,000	35	14.1
\$20,000–\$30,000	40	16.1
\$30,000–\$40,000	36	14.5
\$40,000–\$50,000	18	7.2
\$50,000–\$60,000	22	8.8
\$60,000–\$70,000	12	4.8
\$70,000–\$80,000	11	4.4
> \$80,000	26	10.4

N = 249

and pathways were found to be negatively correlated with anxious symptoms ($r_s = -.14$ to $-.23$, $p_s < .05$) and depressive symptoms ($r_s = -.26$ to $-.42$, $p_s < .001$), and positively correlated with vitality ($r_s = .39$ to $.47$, $p_s < .001$) and life satisfaction ($r_s = .36$ to $.53$, $p_s < .001$). Noteworthy, although hope agency and pathways were found to be significantly

intercorrelated ($r = .75$, $p < .001$), they were not so high as to indicate complete redundancy ($r^2 = .56$).

Examining the Unique Role of Hope in Accounting for Negative Psychological Adjustment in African American Adults

To examine the utility of hope in accounting for negative psychological adjustment, above and beyond racial discrimination and social support, we conducted a series of hierarchical regression analyses in predicting scores on the BAI and BDI. However, to control for variations in sociodemographic background, age, gender, and family income were entered as control variables in Step 1. GEDS scores were entered in Step 2, followed by scores on the two social support items in Step 3. Finally, HS-Agency and HS-Pathways scores were entered in Step 4. Results of these analyses for predicting variance in anxious symptoms and depressive symptoms are presented in Table 3. To determine if racial discrimination, social support, and hope accounted for a small, medium, or large amount of the variance in psychological adjustment, we used Cohen's (1977) convention for small ($f^2 = .02$), medium ($f^2 = .15$), and large effects ($f^2 = .35$).

As the table shows, in accounting for anxious symptoms, racial discrimination was found to be a significant predictor ($\beta = .37$, $p < .001$), and to account for a medium ($f^2 = .15$) 13% of additional variance in BAI scores, $F(1, 244) = 28.16$, $p < .001$, above and beyond sociodemographic factors. When the social support set was included in the next step, it was not found to account for any significant amount of additional unique variance in BAI scores, $F(2, 242) = 1.17$, *n.s.* Neither of the social support sources emerged as significant predictors within the set. The inclusion of the hope set in the final step was found to account for a small ($f^2 = .05$), but significant 5% of additional unique variance in BAI scores, $F(1,$

Table 2 Correlations, means, standard deviations, and internal reliability estimates for all study variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Racial discrimination	–								
Family support	–.14*	–							
Friend support	–.08	.54***	–						
Agency	–.05	.26***	.29***	–					
Pathways	.00	.17**	.14*	.75***	–				
Anxious symptoms	.34***	–.20***	–.13*	–.23***	–.14*	–			
Depressive symptoms	.20**	–.36***	–.30***	–.42***	–.26***	.43***	–		
Vitality	–.15*	.41***	.33***	.47***	.39***	–.35***	–.64***	–	
Life satisfaction	–.24**	.46***	.36***	.53***	.36***	–.27***	–.55***	.59***	–
<i>M</i>	96.80	5.87	5.79	12.51	12.54	30.10	11.05	33.20	22.16
<i>SD</i>	42.96	2.28	2.53	2.40	2.25	14.88	9.12	8.76	6.84

N = 249

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 3 Results of hierarchical regression analyses showing amount of variance in negative psychological adjustment accounted for by racial discrimination, social support, and hope in African Americans, controlling for sociodemographic factors

Negative outcome and predictors	β	R^2	ΔR^2	df	F
Anxious symptoms					
Step 1: sociodemographic factors		.01	–	245	.84
Age	–.11				
Gender	–.02				
Annual family income	–.03				
Step 2: racial discrimination	.37***	.14	.13	244	28.16***
Step 3: social support		.15	.01	242	1.17
Family	–.12				
Friends	.05				
Step 4: hope		.21	.05	240	6.33***
Agency	–.27***				
Pathways	.03				
Depressive symptoms					
Step 1: sociodemographic factors		.04	–	245	2.32*
Age	–.15*				
Gender	.11				
Annual family income	.07				
Step 2: racial discrimination	.20***	.10	.06	244	10.57***
Step 3: social support		.22	.12	242	12.66***
Family	–.28***				
Friends	–.12				
Step 4: hope		.34	.12	240	14.78***
Agency	–.39***				
Pathways	.02				

$N=249$

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

240) = 6.33, $p < .001$. Within the hope set, only hope agency emerged as a significant predictor ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .001$). The total prediction model, including sociodemographic factors, racial discrimination, social support, and hope, was found to account for a medium-large ($f^2 = .27$) 21% of significant variance in BAI scores, $F(8, 240) = 8.67$, $p < .001$.

In accounting for depressive symptoms, racial discrimination was found to be a significant predictor ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$), and to account for a small ($f^2 = .06$), but significant 6% of the variance in BDI scores, $F(1, 244) = 10.57$, $p < .001$, above and beyond sociodemographic factors. When the social support set was included in the next step, it was found to account for a medium ($f^2 = .14$) 12% of additional unique variance in BDI scores, $F(1, 242) = 12.66$, $p < .001$. Within the social support set, only family support emerged as a significant predictor ($\beta = -.28$, $p < .001$). The inclusion of the hope set in the final step was found to account for a

medium ($f^2 = .14$) 12% of additional unique variance in BDI scores, $F(1, 240) = 14.78$, $p < .001$. Within the hope set, only hope agency emerged as a significant predictor ($\beta = -.39$, $p < .001$). The total prediction model, including sociodemographic factors, racial discrimination, social support, and hope, was found to account for a large ($f^2 = .51$) 34% of significant variance in BDI scores, $F(8, 240) = 13.85$, $p < .001$. Overall, these results indicate that hope is an important variable in accounting for negative psychological adjustment in African Americans.

Examining the Unique Role of Hope in Accounting for Positive Psychological Adjustment in African American Adults

Similar to the analyses conducted in accounting for negative psychological adjustment, hierarchical regression analyses were again conducted to examine the utility of hope in accounting for positive psychological adjustment, namely, scores on the SVS and SWLS, above and beyond racial discrimination and social support. Results of these analyses are presented in Table 4. As the table shows, in accounting for vitality, racial discrimination was found to be a significant predictor ($\beta = -.20$, $p < .01$), and to account for a small ($f^2 = .04$), but significant 4% of additional variance in SVS scores, $F(1, 244) = 6.69$, $p < .01$, above and beyond sociodemographic factors. When the social support set was included in the next step, it was found to account for a medium ($f^2 = .18$) 15% of additional unique variance in SVS scores, $F(1, 242) = 15.78$, $p < .001$. Within the social support set, both family and friend support emerged as significant predictors ($\beta s = .27$ and $.17$, respectively, $ps < .01$). The inclusion of the hope set in the final step was found to account for a medium ($f^2 = .20$) 17% of additional unique variance in SVS scores, $F(1, 240) = 23.83$, $p < .001$. Within the hope set, both hope agency and pathways emerged as significant predictors ($\beta s = .27$ and $.20$, respectively, $ps < .01$). The total prediction model, including sociodemographic factors, racial discrimination, social support, and hope, was found to account for a large ($f^2 = .75$) 43% of significant variance in SVS scores, $F(8, 240) = 21.58$, $p < .001$.

In accounting for life satisfaction, racial discrimination was found to be a significant predictor ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .001$), and to account for a small ($f^2 = .08$), but significant 7% of the variance in SWLS scores, $F(1, 244) = 11.57$, $p < .001$, above and beyond sociodemographic factors. When the social support set was included in the next step, it was found to account for a medium ($f^2 = .22$) 18% of additional unique variance in SWLS scores, $F(1, 242) = 19.94$, $p < .001$. Within the social support set, both family and friend support emerged as significant predictors ($\beta s = .30$ and $.19$, respectively, $ps < .01$). The inclusion of the hope set in the final step was found to account for a medium ($f^2 = .22$) 18% of additional unique

Table 4 Results of hierarchical regression analyses showing amount of variance in positive psychological adjustment accounted for by racial discrimination, social support, and hope in African Americans, controlling for sociodemographic factors

Positive outcomes and predictors	β	R^2	ΔR^2	df	F
Vitality					
Step 1: sociodemographic factors		.07	–	245	4.23**
Age	.15*				
Gender	–.21**				
Annual family income	–.01				
Step 2: racial discrimination	–.20**	.11	.04	244	6.69**
Step 3: social support		.25	.15	242	15.78***
Family	.27***				
Friends	.17**				
Step 4: hope		.43	.17	240	23.83***
Agency	.27***				
Pathways	.20**				
Life satisfaction					
Step 1: sociodemographic factors		.02	–	245	1.11
Age	.05				
Gender	–.11				
Annual family income	.06				
Step 2: racial discrimination	–.27***	.09	.07	244	11.57***
Step 3: social support		.27	.18	242	19.94***
Family	.30***				
Friends	.19**				
Step 4: hope		.45	.18	240	25.17***
Agency	.45***				
Pathways	.00				

$N = 249$

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p \leq .001$

variance in SWLS scores, $F(1, 240) = 25.17$, $p < .001$. Within the hope set, only hope agency emerged as a significant predictor ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$). The total prediction model, including sociodemographic factors, racial discrimination, social support, and hope, was found to account for a large ($f^2 = .82$) 45% of significant variance in SWLS scores, $F(8, 240) = 19.97$, $p < .001$. Overall, these results indicate that hope is also an important predictor of positive psychological adjustment in African Americans.

Discussion

More than two decades ago, Snyder (1994; Snyder et al. 1991) conceptualized hope to represent a universally positive and robust psychological construct associated with

individual differences in adjustment. Yet, the study of hope and adjustment in diverse ethn racial groups has remained very limited (Adams et al. 2003; Chang and Banks 2007). Accordingly, a major goal of the present study was to examine the importance of hope in accounting for both positive and negative psychological adjustment in one important ethn racial group, namely, African Americans. Given some evidence from past research findings pointing to the explanatory value of incorporating racial discrimination and social support in prediction models of psychological adjustment in African American adults (Clark et al. 1999; Neighbors 1997), we were particularly interested in providing a stringent test of hope theory. Specifically, we sought to determine the extent to which hope components were important variables in accounting for psychological adjustment above and beyond a consideration of racial discrimination and social support in African Americans. We focused on a balanced examination of adjustment by investigating the prediction of both positive and negative indices of psychological adjustment (Wong 2011).

The Role of Racial Discrimination, Social Support, and Hope in Accounting for Positive and Negative Psychological Adjustment in African American Adults

In accounting for both positive and negative psychological adjustment in the present study of African American adults, some notable patterns emerged. First, consistent with research identifying a reliable association between racial discrimination and psychological adjustment in African American adults, we found that racial discrimination was a consistent predictor of the present indices of both positive and negative psychological adjustment. Specifically, African Americans experiencing racial discrimination reported higher levels of anxious and depressive symptoms, and lower levels of vitality and life satisfaction. This pattern was found independent of age, gender, and family income. Accordingly, these findings indicate that being the target of racial discrimination might be detrimental to African American adults in two ways. For African Americans, experiences of racial discrimination might elicit or generate strong negative emotional experiences (Henson et al. 2013), that in turn result in the development of anxiety and depression (Watson and Clark 1984). Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, consistent with Fredrickson's (2001) theory of positive emotions, it might stifle the growth of positive emotional experiences, including feelings of being alive and satisfied with one's life, that are involved in helping to broaden and build personal strengths (e.g., Chang 2017a). At the very least, our findings underscore the continued importance of studying for the pernicious and widespread impact of racial discrimination in society on levels of both positive and negative

psychological adjustment in African Americans, as well as in other targeted ethnoracial groups (e.g., Latinos, Asian Americans, multiethnorracials; Jackson et al. 2012).

Second, consistent with the importance of having multiple sources of social support (Neighbors 1997), our findings for social support indicated that family and friend support were consistent and unique predictors of positive psychological adjustment in African American adults. Specifically, African Americans who were satisfied by the support they received from their family and friends reported greater vitality and life satisfaction, independent of sociodemographic factors and experiences of racial discrimination. Noteworthy, results from these findings indicated that satisfaction with family support was consistently a stronger unique predictor than was satisfaction with friend support in predicting both vitality (β s = .27 vs. .17, respectively) and life satisfaction (β s = .30 vs. .19, respectively). Thus, our findings provide greater specificity for the importance of different sources of social support involved in positive psychological adjustment. For example, expanding on Prelow et al.'s (2006) earlier finding of a unique positive association, controlling for experiences of racial discrimination, between general social support and life satisfaction in African American adults, we were able to identify the greater involvement of family support, compared to friend support, in this relationship. However, given that the present findings were based on a predominantly young adult sample, it would be important to determine if family support, compared to friend support, continues to remain a stronger predictor of positive psychological adjustment in African Americans across the adult lifespan (e.g., Nguyen et al. 2016).

Interestingly, our findings based on examining the role of social support in accounting for negative psychological adjustment in African American adults were mixed. We found no evidence for the unique role of social support in accounting for anxious symptoms, independent of sociodemographic factors and experiences of racial discrimination. In contrast, consistent with previous findings linking low social support and depressive symptoms in African American adults (e.g., Harris and Molock 2000; Pollock et al. 2015), we found some evidence implicating the role of social support in accounting for depressive symptoms. Specifically, African Americans who were dissatisfied by the support they received from their family, but not from their friends, reported greater depressive symptoms. Again, our finding is not only consistent with Prelow et al.'s (2006) finding showing that independent of experiences of racial discrimination, lower levels of general social support is a unique predictor of depressive symptoms in African American adults, but it goes further to clarify the greater involvement of family support, compared to friend support. Although some caution should be taken in considering these findings given that they are based on the use of single-item measures

of family and friend support, they at least suggest that the unique social capital afforded by family and friends might be more robustly associated with positive, rather than negative psychological adjustment among African American adults. Thus, applying strength-based strategies to leverage family support to positively affect psychological adjustment in African American adults might garner greater benefits when focused on fostering or promoting positive adjustment (e.g., Bell-Tolliver et al. 2009), rather than on abating or reducing negative adjustment. Importantly, for African Americans, this might need to involve a more inclusive understanding of “family” that involves a wider network of kins (i.e., extended family; Neighbors 1997). As noted earlier, however, whether the relations between social support and psychological adjustment in African Americans change in later adulthood remains to be determined.

Evidence for Hope Agency, But Not Pathways, as an Important Positive Psychological Variable in Accounting for Both Positive and Negative Psychological Adjustment in African American Adults

Beyond the important findings obtained for racial discrimination and social support, we found clear and consistent evidence for the distinct and central role of hope agency in accounting for both positive and negative psychological adjustment, independent of differences in sociodemographic factors, experiences of racial discrimination, and social support. Specifically, African Americans who believed that they had the ability to achieve their goals reported lower levels of anxious and depressive symptoms, and higher levels of vitality and life satisfaction. Interestingly, in contrast to Snyder et al.'s (1991) contention that both hope agency and pathways uniquely contribute to psychological adjustment, we failed to find compelling evidence for the unique role of hope pathways in accounting for psychological adjustment in African Americans. However, one exception was found. In accounting for vitality, we found that feeling alive was predicated on African Americans' belief in *both* their ability to achieve personal goals and their ability to pursue effective means to reach those goals. Although some researchers have argued that the primary component driving the positive effects of hope is agentic thinking (Tong et al. 2010), rather than a combination of agentic and pathways thinking, it is important to appreciate that there has not been enough studies conducted on hope in African Americans to draw any strong conclusions at this time (Chang and Banks 2007). For example, in contrast to the present findings, Davidson et al. (2010) found that hope pathways, but not agency, accounted for suicidal ideation in African American college students attending a leadership conference. Thus, there is a need for more studies that examine the role of hope components

across a wider spectrum of positive and negative psychological adjustment outcomes in African Americans.

Nonetheless, the present findings do offer some opportunity to consider the usefulness of bolstering hope agency among African American adults with low hope. According to Adams et al. (2003), teaching African Americans to cope effectively with life challenges and threats (e.g., racial discrimination) represents one approach to facilitating hope. Relatedly, applying problem-solving therapy (D’Zurilla and Nezu 2006) techniques that help African Americans to reframe or reimagine their problems as solvable or manageable (i.e., increase positive problem orientation and decrease negative problem orientation) and to engage in greater approach behaviors (i.e., reduce avoidance behaviors) toward resolving their problems, may prove useful in building agentic thinking. Alternatively, or additionally, there might also be value in directly targeting hope in African American adults. For example, in a pilot study of hope therapy in a community sample of adults, Cheavens et al. (2006) showed that an eight-session intervention targeting core elements of hope theory (e.g., setting personal goals, developing pathways to work toward goals, and cultivating personal sources of motivation) was effective in producing significantly greater agentic thinking, between pre- and post-treatment. Moreover, it would be useful to determine if the building of hope in African Americans (as well as in other ethnoracial groups) might also serve to buttress existing strategies to treat or reduce psychological problems (e.g., depression, anxiety; Chang et al. 2018). Within this context, however, we join Lopez et al. (2000) in arguing that the cultivation of hope should be based on a foundation in which efforts have been first made to “level” social disparities and differences across individuals of all ethnoracial backgrounds. That is, what value is there in bolstering hope in individuals if efforts are also not made to acknowledge and change the social conditions that might have led their loss of hope in the first place (Prilleltensky 1989)?

Some Limitations of the Present Study

Although the present findings provide promising empirical support for the importance of hope, especially hope agency, in accounting for a range of positive and negative psychological adjustment outcomes in African American adults, independent of differences associated with sociodemographic factors, experiences of racial discrimination, and social support, some limitations to the present study should also be noted. First, the focus of our study was on African American adults. However, African American children and adolescents are equally, if not more, at risk as adults are to experiencing racial discrimination and receiving poor or limited social support from others (Sanders-Phillips 2009).

Because hope is believed to also represent an important individual-differences variable in children (Snyder et al. 1997), it would be useful to determine the generalizability of the present adult findings in younger populations. Second, and relatedly, it would be important to also examine the validity of the present findings in a more heterogeneous sample of African American adults, beyond a convenience sample of relatively healthy African American college students. For example, it would be interesting to determine if differences in mental and physical health, coping skills, marital status, and work history, to name just a few, might play a role in understanding the relationship between hope components and psychological adjustment in African American adults. Third, given that discrimination and social support have often been found to account for psychological adjustment in marginalized groups, and Snyder’s (1994) contention that hope represents a universally important individual-differences variable, it would be important to determine if the present model can also be used to study other ethnoracial groups. For example, in a recent study of multiethnoracial adults, those who identify with more than one ethnoracial identity, Chang et al. (in press) found that both hope agency and pathways were uniquely involved in accounting for life satisfaction. Lastly, given the cross-sectional design of the present study, cause and effect cannot be determined. In that regard, it would be important in future studies to determine if and how hope components might account for changes in positive and negative psychological adjustment across time among African American adults.

Some Concluding Thoughts

In summary, we examined the utility of a prediction model of positive and negative psychological adjustment in African American adults involving racial discrimination, social support, and hope. Consistent with past research findings, we found general support for racial discrimination and social support, especially family support, in accounting for both positive and negative psychological adjustment, independent of sociodemographic factors. Importantly, we were able to show that hope, especially hope agency, was a consistent predictor of both positive and negative psychological adjustment in African American adults, even after accounting for the variance in adjustment associated with racial discrimination and social support. Thus, our findings provide some compelling evidence for the importance of hope, especially agentic thinking, in the mental health and well-being of African American adults. Future studies should continue to examine the extent to which agentic thinking, compared to pathways thinking, represents a distinct and central motivational process for African Americans.

Acknowledgements The first author would like to thank Chang Suk-Choon and Tae Myung-Sook for their encouragement and support throughout this project, and to acknowledge the late C. R. Snyder for sharing his passion for the study of hope in the lives of all people.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest Edward C. Chang, Olivia D. Chang, David Rollock, P. Priscilla Lui, Angela Farris Watkins, Jameson K. Hirsch, and Elizabeth L. Jeglic declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent All procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the Institutional Review Board at the university where the study was conducted. Informed consent was obtained from all individuals participating in the present study.

Animal Rights No animal studies were carried out by the authors for this article.

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