An Examination of the Relation between Everyday Discrimination and Psychological Distress among Latina/o Subgroups: Considering the Role of Gender

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Abstract

The relation between everyday discrimination and psychological distress was examined among 2,554 Latinos from the National Latino and Asian American Study (NLAAS). Gender was tested as a moderator in the discrimination-distress relationship among the total sample and separately for the four Latino subgroups. Analyses showed that for the aggregated Latino sample, discrimination was associated with psychological distress, and this relationship was moderated by gender. However, different patterns were found across sub-ethnic Latino groups. For Cubans, no main effect for discrimination on psychological distress was found, but an interaction effect was present for this group, with gender moderating the discrimination-distress relationship. That is, being a woman was related to higher levels of psychological distress when faced with discrimination for Cubans. By contrast, only a main effect of discrimination on psychological distress, but no moderating effect of gender on the relationship between discrimination and psychological distress was found among the Puerto Rican, Mexican, or Other Latino samples. We discuss the relevance of an intersectionality framework to study subgroup variations and the effects of gender in the relationship between discrimination and distress among Latina/os.

KEYWORDS: Discrimination, Psychological Distress, Latina/os, Gender, Intersectionality
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Perceived everyday discrimination (unfair treatment), conceptualized as subtle discrimination that occurs within daily routine practices that are seen as “normal” by the dominant group (Essed, 1991; Harrell, 2000), is commonly understood to be a social stressor that directly affects mental and physical health (Alegria, Shrout, Woo, Guarannacia, Sribney, Vila et al., 2007; Amaro, Russo, & Johnson, 1987; Fernando, 1984; Gee, Ryan, Laflamme, & Holt, 2006; Jackson, Williams, & Torres, 1998; Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999; Krieger, 1990; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003), much in like the same way that other kinds of social stressors (e.g., financial hardship, homelessness, isolation) affect one’s health and well-being. Several studies report that this form of discrimination is a common experience in the lives of ethnic minority populations (Gee et al., 2006; Kessler et al., 1999; Perez, Fortuna, & Alegria, 2008; Turner & Avison, 2003; Paradies, 2006; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Stuber, Galea, Ahern, Blaney, & Fuller, 2003), and that it adversely affects the mental health of ethnic minorities (Essed, 1991; Williams et al., 2003). That is, the stress that results from being treated rudely, ignored, or thought of as less smart, for example, is thought to accumulate over time, thereby adversely affecting the psychological well-being of those who are discriminated. These forms of everyday discrimination are not randomly distributed and are strongly related to race and ethnicity (Essed, 1991; Harrell, 2000; Jackson et al., 1998). As such, given the detrimental effects that everyday discrimination has on the mental health of already disenfranchised groups, the last decade has seen a rise in studies trying to more systematically understand the discrimination-mental health relation among populations of color.
However, this burgeoning of research examining the effects of discrimination on mental health outcomes among populations of color has mostly focused on African Americans. Despite this notable and important increase of attention paid to the discrimination-mental health relation, only a few studies have actually examined this relation among Latina/o populations (Moradi & Risco, 2006). Further, those studies that have examined discrimination experiences and its impact among Latina/os have mostly either focused on one ethnic group, particularly Mexican Americans, or Latina/os as a singular group. An even more scant area of inquiry in the discrimination literature on Latina/os is the role of various intersecting identities, such as sub-ethnic identity, social class and gender among Latina/os. Thus, little is known about the experiences of everyday discrimination and its impact among other Latina/o sub-ethnic groups and across genders.

Given that Latina/os are now the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority group in the United States, and the label “Latina/o” encompasses 20 different sub-ethnic identities (US Census, 2004), it is critical to examine the variation of discrimination experiences and its impact by gender and among sub-ethnic Latino groups (Guarnaccia, Pincay, Alegria, Shrout, Lewis-Fernandez, & Canino, 2007; Molina & Mahalingam, 2009). However, a more critical understanding of gender and ethnicity as analytic tools (Stewart & McDermott, 2004) and as social categories dependent on one another for meaning (Cole, 2009), as opposed to treating them merely as covariates or as independent variables, must be accounted for in order to better and more systematically understand this relationship. Mahalingam (2006) highlighted also the need to look at the role of social location in the experience of social marginality. As such, research on the discrimination-mental health relation among Latina/os necessitates a critical
understanding of the differing historical, economic, racial, and gendered contexts in which the different groups in this category are located.

Thus, the present study addresses these gaps in the literature by examining the relations of everyday discrimination and psychological distress by gender and sub-ethnic Latina/o groups (Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Other Latinos). Additionally, we examine the moderating role of gender on the discrimination-distress relation across the total sample and by sub-ethnic groups in order to better understand how gender and ethnicity shape the relationship between perceived discrimination and mental health. In the following sections of this paper we begin by considering the literature conducted on the relation between perceived discrimination and mental health among Latina/os. We then focus on the literature on discrimination and gender. Lastly, we consider the use of intersectionality as a theoretical framework in order to better understand the discrimination-mental health relation among Latina/os in the United States. Thus, we aim to understand the experience of everyday discrimination and its effects on psychological distress among Latina/os from an intersectional perspective in order to identify the unique gendered, culturally, and context-specific effects of the experience of discrimination on mental health.

*Perceived Discrimination and Mental Health among Latina/os*

National prevalence rates of discrimination among Latina/os in the United States have ranged anywhere between 30 to 83 percent (National Survey on Latinos, 2002; Perez et al., 2008). These reports of discrimination, however, vary by national origin group, nativity, education levels and gender, among other socio-cultural demographic factors. For example, in a recent study of the prevalence and correlates of discrimination among a nationally representative sample of Latina/os in the U.S., it was found that Cubans, in comparison to other Latinos
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(Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Other Latinos), as well as Latinos with high ethnic identity, in comparison to less ethnically-identified Latinos, were likely to be low on self-reported perceived discrimination. American-born Latinos and Latinos arriving in the United States at younger ages were more likely to perceive discrimination (Perez et al., 2008).

Not surprisingly, reporting perceived discrimination has been shown to relate to increased levels of psychological distress, depression, and anxiety among Latina/os of various ages and nationalities residing in different contexts within the United States (Alegria et al., 2007; Amaro et al., 1987; Finch, Kolody, & Vega, 2000; Gee et al., 2006; Gil & Vega, 1996; Landrine et al., 2006; Molina & Mahalingam, 2008b; Moradi & Risco, 2006; Romero & Roberts, 1998; Ryff, Keyes, & Hughes, 2003; Salgado de Snyder, 1987; Stuber, Galea, Ahern, Blaney, & Fuller, 2003; Vega & Rumbaut, 1991). Gee and colleagues (2006) in a study examining self-reported discrimination (measured as three domain-specific types of discrimination: goals, discomfort/anger, and health care discrimination), and their relation to mental health status among African descendants, foreign-born Mexican Americans, and Other Latinos in New Hampshire found that all three self-reported discrimination measures were associated with lower psychological well-being. Importantly, they found that this association was stronger for immigrants residing in the U.S. for a longer period of time.

Moreover, Codina and Montalvo (1994) in their study of the relation between phenotype and depression (measured with the CES-D) among US-born Mexican adults, found that darker-skinned Mexican American males, in comparison to lighter-skinned Mexican-born males and females had higher levels of depression. Although these researchers did not explicitly measure perceived discrimination, it is arguable that phenotype, particularly darker skin, is associated with higher reports of discrimination (Landrine, Klonoff, Corral, Fernandez, & Roesch, 2006),
which can lead to higher levels of depression. Generally speaking, these studies provide evidence that greater exposure to the U.S., being born in the U.S., and the intersections of phenotype gender (e.g., dark-skinned men) are associated with greater reports of discrimination (Perez et al., 2008), thereby leading to lower psychological well-being.

Krieger, Smith, Naishadham, Hartman, and Barbeau (2005) validated a racial discrimination scale and found that for working-class Latinos and African Americans residing in the Greater Boston area, perceived discrimination was significantly associated with greater psychological distress, and with more cigarette smoking. Similarly, Stuber et al. (2003) in their study of low-income African American and Latino (an aggregate of Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Mexican Americans, and Other Latinos) adults residing in New York City, found that (a) racial and non-racial discrimination were associated with poor assessed mental health and (b) respondents reporting experiencing multiple domains of discrimination had a greater probability of reporting poor mental health than those respondents who reported no experiences of discrimination. Unfortunately, this study did not examine these relations by Latino subgroups. Moreover, in a study investigating the impact of social discrimination (conceptualized as experiences of racism, homophobia, and poverty) on the mental health (assessed by a scale made up of multiple items assessing frequency of depression, anxiety, and suicidality) of gay and bisexual Latino men in Miami, Los Angeles, and New York, most of who were immigrants (i.e., 72%, see Diaz, Ayala, Bein, Henne, & Marin, 2001), the researchers found that social discrimination and psychological distress were associated. More specifically, higher levels of social discrimination were related to increased psychological distress. Although limited in generalizability, collectively these studies provide greater insight about the role that
discrimination can have on the mental health of Latina/os, especially at the intersection of different social locations (e.g., working class/low-income Latina/os).

Similar findings have also been noted among Latina/o college students. Contrada, Ashmore, Gary, Coups, Egeth, Sewell et al. (2001) for example, investigated the role of ethnic-related psychological factors on a number of outcomes among a racially and ethnically diverse sample of college students (including Latina/os). They found that perceived ethnic discrimination was positively related to past week psychological distress (depressive symptomatology), even after entering a number of possible covariates of psychological distress. A limitation of the study was that although their sample included Latina/os, no subgroup analyses were conducted given the relatively smaller sample size of Latina/os from the total sample. Though their findings are consistent with past studies on the discrimination-distress relation, we cannot conclude whether the same relation would hold for Latina/o college students.

However, there have been researchers who have been able to recruit large enough samples of Latina/o college students, allowing them to test the discrimination-distress relation among this population. For example, Hwang and Goto (2008) examined the impact of perceived racial discrimination on the mental health of Asian American and Latino college students using an etic (i.e., phenomena are universal/occur across cultures) and emic (i.e., culturally/group-specific manifestations of phenomena, see Berry, 1969; Triandis, 1996; Triandis, 2007) framework in order to understand universal as well as group-specific experiences of discrimination and their relation to mental health. Results revealed that both Asian American and Latino students reported experiencing similar exposure and reactions to different forms of discrimination. Moreover, irrespective of ethnicity, perceived racial discrimination was associated with higher levels of psychological distress, suicidal ideation, state anxiety, trait
anxiety, and depression. However, in line with the emic approach to understanding the experiences of discrimination and their relation to mental health outcomes, the researchers found that Latino students were more likely to have been accused of doing something wrong (e.g., cheating, not doing share of work, and breaking the law) and more likely to appraise these experiences as stressful than did Asian Americans. Although preliminary in nature, the authors noted finding a stronger relation between discrimination and depression and suicidal ideation for Latinos. In contrast, Asian Americans evidenced higher risk for trait anxiety. Although this was a college sample, and both groups were considered as aggregate samples, one of the strengths of this study is that the researchers took both an etic and emic approach to understanding discrimination, as previous studies have shown that different racial and ethnic groups differ on the reports of discrimination because some of these experiences are group-specific.

Moreover, Moradi and Risco’s (2006) study examined the relation between ethnic discrimination and psychological distress (measured with the Brief Symptom Inventory; Derogatis, 1993) among a diverse group of Latina/os, of which the half of the sample were undergraduates. Quite concerning, 91% of respondents reported experiencing some ethnic discrimination; and consistent with other findings, more frequent experiences of ethnic discrimination were associated with higher levels of psychological distress. Interestingly, ethnic discrimination was still a strong predictor of poor mental health independently of acculturation, which has previously been found to relate to greater psychological distress among Latina/os.

In sum, we see that when looking at the context of immigration among Latina/os, level of ethnic identity, age arrival to the United States and nativity, phenotype, as well as other cultural and socio-contextual factors will influence perceptions of discrimination and its impact on mental health. Thus, contextualizing the discrimination experience of Latina/os of various sub-
ethnicities becomes critical to understanding each group in its own terms and in the context of their particular immigrant experience.

Although the aforementioned studies provide much needed information about the relationship between discrimination and various mental health outcomes among Latina/os, only a few studies have examined this relation among nationally representative samples of Latina/os living in the United States. An exception is Alegría and colleagues’ (2007) study that employed a national sample (National Latino and Asian American Study) of Latinos to examine past year psychiatric disorders. This study found that frequency of perceived discrimination was associated with higher odds of past-year anxiety disorder. Interestingly however, no significant associations with either substance or past-year depressive disorders were found. Although past studies have found that greater reports of discrimination are related to increased levels of anxiety, a more consistent and robust finding has been the relation between discrimination and depression. Most of these studies have mainly focused on African Americans using geographically restricted samples. Perhaps the relationship between discrimination and mental health may differ for different ethnic and racial groups because of their social location, intersecting identities and the sociohistorical nature of the contact between an ethnic group and the dominant group at different geographic contexts.

Although the negative relationship between discrimination and mental health among Latina/os and other ethnic and racial groups is well documented, whether the effects differ by gender seems to be less conclusive. That is, little is understood about discrimination at the intersection of gender and ethnicity and its relation to mental health outcomes. Considering the role of gender as a context that may shape the experiences as well as the relation of discrimination experiences and mental health will serve to provide a greater and more complex
understanding of one of today’s leading public health concerns for Latina/o populations in the U.S.

**Discrimination and Gender**

Only a limited number of studies have quantitatively examined the heterogeneity in the discriminatory experience across Latino subgroups at various intersections, specifically, that between gender and ethnicity. In fact, although studies show that in general, Latino males report more discrimination than Latina females (Perez et al., 2008), the direction of these differences change depending on the type of discrimination being examined and setting in which the discrimination occurs (e.g., work, legal system, seeking medical care, or service provision setting). Conversely, other studies that do not specifically focus on Latina/os, have found no differences in self-reported discrimination by gender (Bird, Bogart, & Delhanty, 2004; Sanders-Thompson, 1996; Yen, Ragland, Greiner, & Fisher, 1999).

Molina and Mahalingam (2008a) for example, found that among a diverse group of Latina/o adolescents, female adolescents reported more discrimination from teachers than did Latino males. In contrast, Latino males reported significantly more discrimination in general and from counselors than did Latina adolescents. In examining inter-group discrimination among Cuban and Nicaraguan adolescents living in Miami, Florida, Molina and Mahalingam (2009) found that when examining gender differences in reported source-specific inter-group discrimination (i.e., from Blacks, Whites, or Latinos), a significant difference appeared only on perceptions of discrimination from Whites, with adolescent boys reporting more discrimination from Whites than adolescent girls.

Moreover, Kessler et al. (1999), in a national sample examining the prevalence rate of discrimination among Whites, Blacks, and Other groups, though not specifically referring to
Latina/os, found that gender did not significantly relate to major lifetime perceived discrimination, whereas gender related to day-to-day discrimination, with men perceiving significantly more day-to-day discrimination than women. Therefore, differentiating among the different types of discrimination that men and women experience is critical to understand the gendered nature of this experience. Such gender differences in the domain wherein discrimination occurs exist (Hwang & Goto, 2008), and the relationship between perceived discrimination and mental health may differ by gender. For example, in a more recent large study of adults between the ages of 25-74 years living in the United States, Ryff et al. (2003) found a negative relation between perceived discrimination and general well-being. Such effects however, were gender-specific. That is, for both white women and women of color, high levels of discrimination in their daily lives were associated with a lowered sense of growth, mastery, autonomy, and self-acceptance.

Other intersecting identities, such as gender and social class and the context of discrimination may also shape the nature of perceived discrimination. In a national study of professional Hispanic American women (as an aggregate group), Amaro et al. (1987) found that a majority of these women reported experiencing employment discrimination (82%). The researchers also found that experiencing discrimination was related to lowered levels of personal life satisfaction, and increased levels of psychological distress and stress in balancing family and professional roles among these women. In a smaller study of 140 Mexican American immigrant women living in Southern California, Salgado de Snyder (1987) found that 52% of the sample reported that they had experienced ethnically motivated discrimination in the previous 3 months. More importantly however, ethnically motivated discrimination (1 out of 12 measures of social stress used in the study) was found to be the strongest predictor of increased
levels of depressive symptomatology, measured by the Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D).

In a study examining a model that included collective and personal self-esteem as mediators in the association between perceived sexist discrimination and psychological distress, among women, Fisher & Holtz (2007) found that there were direct effects of perceived discrimination on depression and anxiety, with group and personal self-esteem only partially mediating the relationship between discrimination and distress. However, a limitation to this study as it relates to the present study is that the majority of participants were white. These associations may differ for women of color, who may be more likely to experience attributional ambiguity when it comes to perceiving unfair treatment solely on the basis of one social identity category (Fisher & Holtz, 2007). For example, it may be that for a Latina who is treated unfairly in a predominantly white setting, her perceptions of unfair treatment are perceived as being ethnically motivated, whereas at work, she may attribute unfair treatment to both gender and ethnicity.

For example, Levin, Sinclair, Veniegas, & Taylor (2002) examined the joint effects of gender and ethnicity on expectations of general discrimination (to oneself and against other members of one’s group) among Whites, Latinos, and African Americans. More specifically, the researchers tested two competing hypotheses: (1) the *ethnic-prominence hypothesis*, which predicted that women of color would not differ from men of color in their expectations of general discrimination because such expectations would be influenced more so by the common experience of ethnic discrimination shared with men of color, than by perceptions of gender discrimination; and the (2) *double-jeopardy hypothesis*, which posited that women of color would experience more general discrimination than men of color, White women, and White men
because they belong to two low-status groups. Results indicated that Latina and African American women did not differ from their male counterparts in expectations of general discrimination (personal and group) because these expectations were informed more by women’s perceptions of ethnic discrimination. By contrast, instead of ethnic discrimination, perceived gender discrimination contributed to expectations of general discrimination among White women. That is, the results were consistent with the ethnic-prominence hypothesis rather than the double-jeopardy hypothesis. However, a limitation of this study is that the sample was made up of college students, and thus, these findings might be context-dependent (e.g., Blacks and Latinos being in a predominantly white institution).

Similarly, perceptions of gender and racial discrimination may have unique covariates that are not typically accounted for in research studies assessing general forms of discrimination. For example, in a recent study examining the social status correlates of reporting gender discrimination and racial discrimination among racially diverse women (Latinas, African Americans, Asian, and Caucasian), Ro and Choi (2009) found that these two forms of discrimination have some similar but also different covariates. In particular, reports of racial discrimination were significantly correlated with race, financial difficulty and marital status. In contrast, higher reports of gender discrimination were significantly correlated with race, education, financial difficulty, and nativity. Interestingly however, although race was a significant correlate of both types of discrimination, the directions and patterns differed on the type of discrimination. That is, all three groups of women of color reported significantly more racial discrimination than Caucasian women, whereas only Latina and Asian women reported significantly lower levels of gender discrimination than Caucasian women (Ro & Choi, 2009). Thus, the differences and similarities in covariates of various kinds of discrimination by ethnic
and racial groups suggest that careful attention has to be paid not only to the type of discrimination being reported but also to the particular ethnic and racial group reporting discrimination. As well, taking into account other socio-cultural factors that might be related to reports of particular forms of discrimination, and how they affect the relation between discrimination and distress are equally important to study.

One of the major challenges is how to separate the unique contributions of gender and ethnicity in experiencing discrimination. One could argue that gender and racial discrimination may not be necessarily that easily separated from each other. For example, Essed (1991), in referring to Black women, coined the term “gendered racism” to describe how sexism and racism “narrowly intertwine and combine under certain conditions into one, hybrid phenomenon” (p. 31). She used gendered racism to describe the unique kind of oppression faced by Black women. In contrast to other studies that have examined the experiences of racism and sexism as separate from each other among women, Thomas, Witherspoon, and Speight (2008) examined the cumulative effect of gendered racism on psychological distress among African American women. In order to measure gendered racism, the researchers revised the Schedule of Sexist Events (Klonoff & Landrine, 1995) to include forms of discrimination previously reported by African American women in qualitative studies (Essed, 1991). As well, the scale was revised to read “Black woman” instead of “woman” in the items. Findings revealed that the majority (91%) of the sample reported experiences of discrimination with service professionals, including waiters and sales clerks. Moreover, many of the women (85%) experienced hearing jokes made about African American women, and 85% also said that they felt disrespected as Black women. More concerning, as well as consistent with the discrimination-distress literature, there was a positive significant relation between gendered racism and psychological distress. In
sum, these studies call for the need to use an intersectionality framework to study the intertwining effects of gender, ethnicity and social class in the experience of discrimination.

**Intersectionality**

Intersectionality theory refers to the way in which identity categories such as race, class, ethnicity, and gender simultaneously interact with one another (Crenshaw, 1993). Such an approach takes into account the multiple ways in which these identities come to structure a qualitatively different experience for groups of people occupying different social locations within a particular group. Stewart & McDermott (2004) provide the three tenets of the intersectionality perspective: (a) no social group is homogenous; (b) people must be located in terms of social structures that capture the power relations implied by these structures; and (c) there are unique, non-additive effects of identifying with more than one social group (see also Cole, 2009; Hurtado, 1989; Mahalingam, Balan, & Haritatos, 2008). In effect, these social identities have real and complex meanings in people’s daily lives.

Intersectional theorists have proposed various ways to study the simultaneous effects of intersecting social identities and social contexts. Crenshaw (1995) distinguished between *political* and *structural intersectionality*. Political intersectionality describes the ways in which women of color in particular, given their multiple subordinate identities, have found themselves caught between the two seemingly conflicting political constituencies to which they belong. Structural intersectionality on the other hand, refers to the way in which the experience of one’s membership in a particular group (e.g., Latina/os) qualitatively differs as a function of other group memberships (e.g., gender, class). By contrast, some researchers have conceptualized intersectionality as an *additive* model where a person’s two or more subordinate identities are summed together (Almquist, 1975). Some researchers have viewed intersectionality as a
*multiplicative and interactive* model of intersecting social identities (Reid & Comas-Diaz; Smith & Stewart, 1983). Further, Mahalingam, Balan & Molina (2009) proposed *transnational intersectionality* as a framework for studying the heterogeneity of families, in particular motherhood, within a transnational context.

Some have argued for the need to look at the intersecting social contexts and identities without explicitly comparing two social groups. For example, Cole (2009) argued that intersectional analyses need not always include multiple group comparisons. Rather the focus is on the various dimensions of social location (e.g., transnational intersectionality, see Mahalingam et al., 2009) and their impact on the construction, internalization and experience of social identities (Mahalingam, 2007; Mahalingam et al., 2009). Although these researchers differ in their views about how to study intersectionality, their conceptualizations of intersectionality converge on two issues: (a) the need to critically examine many universalist assumptions of psychological experiences; (b) the need to examine the heterogeneity within a social group stratified by gender, class and sexuality.

Latina/os are usually portrayed as a singular monolithic group that shares the same oppressions, characteristics, histories, and life experiences. The universalism that is implied in these descriptions does not recognize the heterogeneity and relative disadvantages such as class status that exist even within the group “Latina/o/Hispanic.” Acknowledging the complexities that exist in the lives of Latina/os and the contexts in which they are located is central to an intersectional perspective. Thus, Latina/os’ experiences of discrimination and its impact on mental health need to be understood within the larger sociocultural context in which this social process occurs as a function of the immigrant experience (Mahalingam et al., 2008).
Furthermore, Thomas et al. (2008) noted that “because individuals are multidimensional, possessing various social identities, gendered racism provides the opportunity for a more complex understanding of experiences with oppression” and that “the notion of gendered racism applies to men and women of all racial/ethnic minority groups” (p. 307). That is, gendered racism takes into account the simultaneous intersections of race/ethnicity and gender in the experience of oppression (Reid & Comas-Diaz, 1990). Thus, the way in which discrimination affects men and women may differ depending on the gendered nature of discrimination as well as on the gendered ways in which they cope with the stressor, all at the simultaneous intersection of other social identities (e.g., ethnicity). For example, King (2005), in her study examining cognitive attributions of African American women’s discrimination experiences, found that those women who perceived discriminatory acts (ethnic-based discrimination as well as discrimination as a result of ethnicity and gender) as negative, and who attributed importance to the acts, actually experienced more stress.

Furthermore, past studies have shown that in the face of experiencing distress, women are more likely to engage in rumination than are men—that is, women more so than men, passively focus attention to their symptoms of distress and all the possible causes and consequences of distress (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991; Nolen-Hoeksema & Jackson, 2001). Taken together, these studies suggest that although in general men of color may report more discrimination than do women of color (Banks, Kohn-Wood, Spencer, 2006; Perez et al., 2008), women report more psychological distress than men (Kessler et al., 1999). Hence studies on the effects of discrimination on psychological distress among people of color need to take into account the unique role that gender plays in this relation. We argue that an intersectional approach would aim to understand the effects of discrimination on distress as not solely dependent on experiencing
discrimination as a product of one’s social identity alone. Rather, it will focus on how constructions of multiple systems of inequalities are related to mental health outcomes among Latina/os who *simultaneously* embody these multiple identities at different social locations.

Although other scholars have noted that examining how social locations interact and influence health outcomes among immigrants is an area ripe for quantitative study (Viruell-Fuentes, 2007), only a few studies have actually examined how intersections of social identities, particularly ethnicity, gender, social class and sexuality, shape mental health (Amaro et al., 1987; Banks, Kohn-Wood, & Spencer, 2002; Finch et al., 2000) in the context of the discrimination experience. Finch et al. (2000) in their study examining the discrimination-distress relation among an adult sample of Mexican Americans living in San Francisco found that perceived discrimination was associated with increased levels of psychological distress, and that gender moderated the relation between discrimination and depression, with the effects of discrimination being stronger for women than men. Similarly, Banks et al. (2006) found that among a sample of African Americans, perceived discrimination was positively related to anxiety and depressive symptomatology, and that gender also moderated the discrimination-mental health relation. However, gender moderated only the relation between discrimination and anxiety symptoms, and not the relationship between discrimination and depression. Interestingly, in a national sample of adults in the United States examining the prevalence, distribution, and mental health correlates of perceived discrimination, Kessler et al. (1999) found no evidence for the cumulative effects of discrimination on mental health. That is, the estimated emotional effects of perceived discrimination on being, for example, a Black woman, were not greater than the effects of the same type of perceived discrimination based only on being Black or on being a woman.
Moreover, the researchers also did not find any significant differences on the strength of the association of discrimination and mental health by gender.

Whereas the first two studies showed that gender moderated the relationship between discrimination and mental health, several important issues must be noted. First, Finch et al.’s study only examined this relation among Mexicans in California, thereby limiting generalizability to other sub-ethnic Latina/o groups in the United States. Second, Banks et al.’s study, though revealing important information about how gender may moderate the discrimination-mental health relation depending on the psychological outcome, did not use actual scales to measure anxiety and depressive symptomatology, but rather used single-items (2 for each construct) to tap into symptomatology, thereby limiting the potential variance that could be captured in symptomatology among their sample.

Lastly, Kessler et al.’s (1999) study differed from the other studies in that two of their mental health measures used diagnostic criteria to measure mental health, and therefore, the differences in results we see across the studies could be attributed to the various ways in which mental health was measured across studies with different groups of people (e.g., Mexican Americans vs. Other). As well, the finding that the cumulative effect of perceived discrimination for being both Black and woman, for example, on mental health was not greater than the effect of perceived discrimination either based on gender or ethnicity on mental health should be taken with caution. That is, the type of discrimination perceived by various ethnic and racial groups may be qualitatively different and may not necessarily “add up” or “interact” in a statistical, quantitative sense (Cole, 2009; Levin et al., 2002; Reid & Comas-Diaz, 1990; Settles, 2006; Smith & Stewart, 1983).
Overall however, these results suggest that the way in which discrimination affects women and men from different racial and ethnic groups may be a function of the gendered ways in which men and women experience discrimination and cope with this type of stress (Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson, & Grayson, 1999). Thus, intersectionality as a theoretical approach may provide new insight about the various pathways by which experiences of discrimination come to affect the psychological well-being of Latina/os from different social locations within the United States (Mahalingam, Balan, & Haritatos, 2008).

Present Study

The present study will advance the field of Latina/o mental health in several important ways. First, using an intersectional theoretical approach, this study examined whether everyday perceived discrimination was a risk factor for psychological distress among a nationally representative sample of Latina/o adults in the United States. Second, in order to examine the possible heterogeneity in this relation, the association between discrimination and psychological distress was examined by gender and across four Latina/o sub-ethnic groups (Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Other Latina/os). Lastly, in order to examine the interactive effects of ethnicity and gender on mental health, this study examined whether gender moderated the discrimination-distress relation across the four Latina/o sub-ethnic groups.

Methods

Sample

Data were from the National Latino and Asian American Study (NLAAS), a nationally stratified area probability sample of non-institutionalized persons, 18 years of age and older living in the coterminous United States. The study was conducted between 2002 and 2003. The sample design is only briefly described in this paper (see Heeringa et al., 2004 for more details).
In order to obtain a nationally representative sample of Latino sub-ethnic groups regardless of geographic residential patterns, the sampling design included three components: (1) core sampling of primary and secondary sampling units; (2) high-density supplemental samplings of census block groups in order to over sample geographic areas made up of more than 5% of the targeted ethnic group; and (3) secondary respondent sampling to recruit participants from households where a primary respondent had already been interviewed. Weighting accounts for the joint probability of selection from the three components of the sampling design, allowing the sample estimates to be nationally representative.

For purposes of this study, we used data only from the Latino sample. The total Latino sample consisted of \( N = 2,554 \). This sample was divided into four strata of interest: Cuban (\( n = 577 \)), Mexican (\( n = 868 \)), Puerto Rican (\( n = 495 \)), and all Other Latinos (\( n = 614 \)). Approximately 52% of the total Latino sample was male and 48% female. The final weighted response rate for the combined Latino NLAAS sample was 75.5%.

**Procedures**

The University of Michigan, the Cambridge Health Alliance, and the University of Washington’s Internal Review Board Committees approved all recruitment, consent, and interviewing procedures (see Pennell et al., 2004 for a detailed description of the data collection procedures). Trained interviewers administered face-to-face interviews using computer-assisted software. These interviews were conducted in the respondent’s choice of language: English or Spanish. Instruments were translated into Spanish using standard techniques (i.e., translation and back translation). Interviews averaged 2.6 hours in length. As a measure of quality control, a 10% random sample of participants with completed interviews was recontacted for validation. Participants were compensated for their participation.
Measures

Perceived Everyday Discrimination. Everyday discrimination was measured using a 9-item scale adopted from the Detroit Area Study (DAS; Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997), used to assess perceptions of routine unfair treatment (Essed, 1991). Sample items include: (1) You are treated with less courtesy than other people, (2) You are treated with less respect than other people, and (3) People act as if they are afraid of you. Respondents reported frequency of each item on a 6-point scale ranging from 1= never to 6= daily. The items were standardized and then averaged out so that all items carried equal weighting in the discrimination mean score. We then centered the discrimination variable for use in the interaction term to minimize problems of multicollinearity when estimating regression coefficients (Aiken & West, 1991). Similar to other studies, we found support for a 1-factor structure (eigenvalue = 5.21; factor loadings = .68 -.82); thus, we used this measure as a unidimensional scale of everyday discrimination. The Chronbach’s $\alpha$ for our sample was .91.

Psychological Distress. Distress was measured with the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10; Kessler et al., 2002). This is a 10-item inventory that assesses the prevalence of negative feelings over the past 30 days. Sample items include: During the last 30 days, how often did you feel depressed? Did you feel hopeless? and Did you feel worthless? Respondents reported frequency of each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 1=none of the time to 5=all of the time. The raw variables were recoded so that higher values reflected greater levels of psychological distress. Responses were summed (range = 3 to 50; $\alpha = .87$).

Demographic Variables. We included socio-cultural demographic variables that have been shown to relate either with discrimination or psychological distress as covariates in our analyses. Sex: Studies have found that men report more discrimination than women (Perez, et
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al., 2008), although women report greater levels of psychological distress (Vega & Rumbaut, 1991). Sex was coded as 0= male and 1= female. *Age*: Age was divided into 6 categories (18-24 yrs old, 25-34 yrs old, 35-44 yrs old, 45-54 yrs old, 55-64 yrs old, and 65 yrs old and older).

Studies have found that age is correlated with reports of discrimination for Latinos (Perez et al., 2008), with younger Latinos reporting more discrimination than older Latinos. *Region*: This variable consisted of four regions: Northeast, Midwest, West, and South. Studies have found that reports of perceived discrimination vary according to geographic location (Gee, 2002). *Nativity*: This was measured by a single item where the respondent indicated whether they were foreign born or U.S. born. *Education*: This was measured in years of education. Past studies have found those with higher levels of education to report more discrimination (Forman, Williams, & Jackson, 1997; Perez et al., 2008). *Socioeconomic Status*: Socioeconomic status was measured as ‘Household Income,’ derived from the sum of seven questions related to sources of income: respondent, spouse, social security, government, family, and other. Income was categorized as: less than $15,000, $15,000 to $34,999, $35,000 to $74,999, and more than $75,000. Past literature has shown socioeconomic status to be related to distress and discrimination (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999). *Age of Immigration*: Studies have found that length of time in the U.S. was related to reports of discrimination (Goto, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2002; Perez et al., 2008) and psychological distress (Cervantes, Padilla, & Salgado de Snyder, 1991), with more time spent in the U.S. being related to greater levels of psychological distress.

Cultural factors used as covariates included the following: *Ethnicity*: The four sub-Latino ethnicities were: Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Other Latinos. Studies have found that Latino subgroups in the United States differ on their reports of perceived discrimination (Perez et al., 2008) and psychological distress (Rivera, Guarnaccia, Mulvaney-Day, Lin, Torres, &
Alegria, 2008). **English Language Proficiency:** English language proficiency was measured by a single item asking the respondent: How well do you speak English? The participant responded to this question as either “Poor,” “Fair,” “Good,” or “Excellent.” Responses to this variable were then recoded into two categories: (1) Poor/Fair and (2) Good/Excellent. Past studies on Latinos have found Latinos who report being less proficient in the English language to report higher levels of discrimination (Pew Hispanic Center, 2002). **Ethnic Identity:** Ethnic identity has been found to both exacerbate and buffer against the negative effects of discrimination on distress (Yip, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008). To measure ethnic identity we took the average of four standardized items: (1) How closely do you identify with other people who are of the same racial and ethnic descent as yourself? (2) How close do you feel, in your ideas and feelings about things, to other people of the same racial and ethnic descent? (3) If you could choose, how much time would you like to spend with other people who are of your same racial and ethnic group? and (4) How important do you think it is for people who are from your same racial and ethnic group to marry other people who are also from this group? Cronbach’s $\alpha$ for the items comprising this measure was .61.

**Analyses**

First, we computed descriptive statistics for the entire sample, for the four sub-ethnic groups (Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Other Latino), as well as across genders. We conducted all analyses using Stata 10 (Stata Corp, College Station, Tex) to account for our sample design, and to allow estimation of standard errors in the presence of stratification and clustering.

We conducted weighted multivariate regression analysis to predict psychological distress from everyday discrimination, while controlling for socio-demographic variables. First, we
conducted analyses with the total sample, which allowed us to understand the relationships among study variables for Latinos nationwide. We then fitted separate models for Latino males and females to examine the effects of discrimination on psychological distress across genders. Lastly, in order to examine potential sub-ethnic differences in the discrimination-distress relationship, and to test whether the effect of discrimination on psychological distress was moderated by gender for each Latino sub-ethnic group, we fitted separate models for each subgroup.

Results

Descriptive Analyses

The weighted proportions and standard errors for all study variables are reported in Table 1. We see significant differences across sub-ethnic groups across nativity, region (residence), years of education, household income, age of immigration, English language proficiency, and ethnic identity. There were significant differences among socio-cultural demographic variable across gender. Specifically, we noted gender differences in age and household income. In terms of perceived discrimination, we found both sub-ethnic and gender differences, with men reporting significantly more discrimination than women, and Puerto Ricans reporting more discrimination in comparison to other sub-ethnic groups, whereas Cubans reported the least perceived discrimination. Lastly, we found significant differences in psychological distress across sub-ethnic groups, with Puerto Ricans reporting the highest levels of distress and Mexicans reporting the lowest levels. We also found that Latino males reported significantly more discrimination than Latinas.

Table 2 shows the percentages of reasons for discrimination for the total sample, as well as by gender and sub-ethnic Latino groups. There were no differences across Latina/o subgroups
on reasons given for discrimination. There was a significant difference between men and women on reasons given for discrimination.

**Multivariate Analyses**

Table 3 shows results of the weighted multivariate regression models for psychological distress with everyday discrimination and the discrimination by gender interaction as predictors, and socio-demographic variables as covariates.

First, the results for the separate models by gender revealed that discrimination was significantly related to psychological distress for women \( (B = 3.20; p < .001) \) and men \( (B = 1.77; p < .001) \). In order to examine whether the strength of the effect of discrimination on psychological distress differed among men and women, we then fitted separate models that included the interaction of discrimination by gender for the total sample and by sub-ethnic Latino groups.

The results for the total Latino sample revealed that perceived everyday discrimination was a significant predictor of psychological distress \( (B = 1.94; p < .001) \). There was also a main effect for gender \( (B = 2.99; p < .001) \) for the total sample. That is, greater frequency of discrimination and being a woman were related to increased distress among the entire Latino sample. There was also a significant interaction between discrimination and gender \( (B = .98; p < .05) \). Specifically, women had higher levels of psychological distress when faced with discrimination (see Figure 1).

In order to examine whether these relationships held among different sub-ethnic Latino groups, regression models were run separately for each subgroup (Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Other Latinos).
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*Cubans.* The results of the regression model for Cubans revealed that there was only a main effect of gender \((B = 5.69; p < .01)\), but not discrimination \((B = .47; p > .05)\) on psychological distress. However, there was a significant interaction effect of discrimination by gender \((B = 3.37; p < .05)\) on psychological distress, suggesting that in the face of discrimination, being a woman can exacerbate the effect of discrimination on psychological distress for Cubans (see Figure 2).

*Mexicans.* For Mexicans, both being a woman \((B = 3.07; p < .01)\) and perceiving discrimination \((B = 1.90; p < .001)\) were associated with higher levels of psychological distress. However, the interaction term for discrimination by gender on psychological distress was not statistically significant.

*Puerto Ricans.* Surprisingly, for the Puerto Rican sample, only perceived discrimination was significantly associated with psychological distress \((B = 1.64; p < .01)\). We did not find a main effect for gender or an interaction effect of discrimination by gender on psychological distress.

*Other Latinos.* Similar to the results for Mexicans, for the Other Latinos sample, being a woman \((B = 2.94; p < .001)\) and perceiving discrimination \((B = 2.22; p < .01)\) were both significantly related to higher levels of psychological distress. Similar to Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, the interaction term was not significantly related to psychological distress among this sub-ethnic group.

**Discussion**

Our findings reveal that perceived discrimination affects the psychological well-being of Latina/os. Our findings were consistent with those of other studies examining the effects of discrimination on mental health among the general population and people of color more
specifically (Amaro et al., 1987; Finch et al., 2000; Gee et al., 2006; Kessler et al., 1999), such that higher frequency of discrimination was related to increased psychological distress. Similar to past studies, then, it appears that the experience of everyday discrimination is detrimental to the mental health of Latina/os, even in the context of sub-group differences across a wide range of socio-demographic factors.

However, there is heterogeneity in the experience of discrimination among Latina/os. For example, we replicated Perez et al.’s (2008) findings that men reported significantly more discrimination than women and that Cubans reported the least amount of perceived discrimination than other Latina/o sub-groups. In fact, Puerto Ricans reported the highest levels of perceived discrimination, with “Other Latinos” following in second. Although we did not test whether the effects of discrimination on psychological distress significantly differed across sub-ethnic groups, we did find that the main effects of discrimination on distress seem to be more pronounced for “Other Latinos” than the other two groups, despite that Puerto Ricans report significantly more discrimination than the other groups. Due to the heterogeneity within the Other Latino category, we are unable to explore why this might be the case. However, it is plausible that geographic context plays a role in this relation. For example, the groups making up the Other Latino category are relatively smaller groups of the Latino population wherein larger number of other Latino populations reside (e.g., Nicaraguans in Miami, Dominicans and Colombians in the Northeast). Perhaps it is plausible that the discrimination experienced by these Latina/o “minority” groups may be from other Latinos, and thereby, having its greatest effects on this group since it is being directed within a Latino-to-Latino direction.

Various scholars have shown that this is the case for Nicaraguan youth who reside in Miami, where Cubans are the majority and are more likely to discriminate against other Latinos.
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(Fernandez-Kelly & Schauffler, 1994; Gil & Vega, 1996; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), as well as for Dominicans in the Northeast who perceive discrimination from Puerto Ricans (Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006). Moreover, Molina & Mahalingam (2009) found that for both Cuban and Nicaraguan adolescents in Miami, self-reported perceived discrimination from other Latina/os was associated with increased levels of depressive symptomatology, though the effect of this relation was stronger for Nicaraguan youth than for Cubans. Overall, these findings suggest that the context wherein Latina/os are geographically and socially located may play a significant role in how discrimination is perceived and internalized. As Araujo and Borrell (2006) noted, the assumption that those living in ethnic enclaves will experience less discrimination because they come in contact less frequently with whites, “overlooks the effect that experiencing discrimination within one’s own group can have on the individual” (p. 260). Given this, future studies examining discrimination among Latina/os should consider measuring discrimination from an intra-group perspective as well.

Gender also matters. One of the main aims of this study was to examine whether everyday discrimination was associated with psychological distress and whether gender moderated this relationship among nationally representative samples of sub-ethnic Latino groups in the United States. Interestingly, we found that gender moderated the discrimination-distress relationship only for the total and Cuban samples, but not for the other three Latina/o sub-groups. For both the total and Cuban samples, being a woman was related to higher levels of psychological distress when faced with discrimination. Although we expected to find a moderating effect of gender on the total sample, we did not expect this moderating effect of gender on the Cuban sample only, and not the other sub-ethnic groups. In fact, we expected that discrimination would have a less pronounced effect on psychological distress among Cubans,
irrespective of other socio-cultural demographic factors, given their unique privileged social location relative to that of other Latina/os (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Stepick, 1993).

These results might suggest a gendered mental health risk for Cuban women, even when Cubans in general are more economically and socially privileged relative to other Latina/o groups. Perhaps the intersectional experience of being a woman, Latino and Cuban, and the interactions of these particular social identities might produce a qualitatively different outcome for Cuban women than they do for men. For example, Rivera et al. (2008) found using the NLAAS, that only the Cuban sample reported a positive association between family cohesion and psychological distress. Reporting higher levels of family cohesion was associated with increased psychological distress. The researchers further noted that high levels of family cohesion could be potentially harmful to mental health due to high levels of family demand. Consistent with prior research with Hispanic women, discrimination in addition to family and work-related stressors are associated with negative mental health outcomes (Amaro et al., 1987). Although we did not assess the extent to which Latinas and Latinos in our sample experienced family-related conflict, our results underscore the importance and need for understanding the subjective gendered experience of discrimination within multiple domains (e.g., society, home, work).

Perhaps one other explanation for this seemingly paradoxical relationship for the Cuban sample could be that embodying a privileged social location also has negative consequences. Portes and Rumbaut (1996) noted that contrary to expectations, the more educated, proficient in English, and informed immigrants are, as well as being in the U.S. for a longer time, the more critical their views and perceptions are about the host society. They observed that “for the better educated, acculturation [may thus] impl[y] shedding idealized perceptions and confronting the
host society’s complex and harsh realities” (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996, p. 186). It could thus be that for Cubans in general, but for Cuban women more specifically, their threshold for discrimination may be lower than that of other Latina/os both because of their relatively privileged social location and a critical awareness of the social realities of their host situation. In fact, Jackson and Kubzansky (2006) suggested that the closer the sense of perceived unfairness is to one’s self, the more severe the degree of the psychological outcome. Thereby, if Cuban women, as part of the majority group in Miami believe that they deserve better treatment given their relatively privileged social position, they may have a lower threshold for unfair treatment. As a consequence, if they perceive being discriminated, it is plausible that they may be more adversely affected by the discrimination than women from other Latina/o sub-ethnic groups. Hence we have to carefully consider each social location of the Latina/o groups to fully understand the subjective realities of discriminatory experiences. Therefore, employing multiple methods in future research that are sensitive to social location and intersecting identities is critical in order to better understand the phenomenological experiences and responses to discrimination. Multiple methodological approaches can better help us unravel and tease out the nuances and complexities of the discrimination experience as a gendered and culturally-specific process.

Moreover, our finding that gender moderated the relationship between discrimination and distress among the total sample suggests that perceived discrimination contributes to distress for women more than for men. Given that previous studies have found that gender moderates this relationship (Banks et al., 2006; Finch et al., 2001), these results are not surprising. However, these studies assessed this relation either among African Americans or geographically-restricted samples of Mexican American adults. As such, it may be that we only found a moderating effect
of gender on the discrimination-distress relation for Cubans and the total sample and not for other groups of Latina/os because we used a national sample of Latina/os of various social locations as opposed to restricted samples. It is also plausible that for the Puerto Rican sample, being a woman does not increase the probability of psychological distress in the face of discrimination due to the advantage of being U.S. citizens, which may help diffuse the added source of stress they could potentially face if they were non-U.S. citizens (e.g., fear of deportation). In fact, our results showed that for Puerto Ricans, being female was not significantly related to greater psychological distress. Conversely, we found that gender was positively associated with psychological distress for Mexicans and Other Latinos, although the interaction between discrimination and gender was not significant. Our results thus suggest that gender plays an important role on mental health for Mexicans and Other Latinos independently of discrimination.

Implications

Immigrant researchers such as Portes & Stepick (1993) noted that Cubans are viewed as the most successful Latina/os in the United States. Since Cubans are viewed as the most successful group, they experience the negative consequences of the model minority syndrome similar to the one experienced by successful sub-ethnic groups of Asian Americans (e.g., Japanese, Chinese, Asian Indian and Korean Americans, see Mahalingam (2006) for a discussion). For example, in a large survey conducted with Cuban and Haitian entrants in Miami, Portes, Kyle, and Eaton (1992) found that economic advantage did not translate into superior psychological well-being for Cubans. Perhaps there are positive and negative consequences for being a model minority among Latina/os (Mahalingam, 2006). In fact, Cubans consistently had higher rates of mental disorders than did Haitians. We also think the model minority syndrome
could also be gendered (Mahalingam, 2006). Mahalingam and Haritatos (2006) argued that since women are viewed as the bearers of culture, there are unique pressures on ethnic minority women, especially when their ethnic group is viewed as the most successful group. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, future research should examine the contours of the discriminatory experiences of Cuban women using an intersectionality framework.

Importantly, considering the ways in which men and women differ in their experiences of distress, more measures of individual difference factors and contextual information need to be considered to examine the unique ways in which gender might moderate the discrimination-mental health relationship when numerous outcomes are considered. For example, women are more likely to report depression and anxiety as a consequence of experiencing psychological distress because they tend to internalize their distress, whereas men are more likely to outwardly express distress through externalizing (e.g., anger) or risky (e.g., alcohol consumption) behaviors. Thus, the outcome measures being measured may need to consider the gender-specific pathways to coping with discrimination.

We argued that an intersectionality perspective is critical to study the simultaneous effects of social identities on the experience of discrimination at various social locations. The finding that these groups are differentially affected by gender in the context of discrimination points to future research avenues to investigate further the gendered and culturally-specific process by which discrimination affects different Latina/o sub-groups. Moreover, these findings present the opportunity to attend to differences that sometimes go unnoticed, while still identifying similarities that exist across groups within the Latina/o category.

Limitations
The findings of our study must be interpreted in light of a number of limitations. In particular, due to limitations of secondary data analysis, one of the limitations of this study relates to the measurement of discrimination. Although previous research has found that everyday discrimination is a robust measure and has predictive validity across different ethnic and racial groups, the discrimination measure used for this study may not have adequately captured some of the more ethnic and gendered-specific discrimination experiences that Latina/os may face (e.g., language-based, issues of legality). Moreover, given that participants self-reported experiences of discrimination, it thus creates some response bias. However, as Gee and colleagues (2006) have suggested, “perceptions have importance in their own right as they represent how people see their position in society and may indicate the stressors present in their lives” (p. 1826). Yet despite these limitations, the measure used in this study found the similar pattern for the discrimination-distress relation as previous studies have found using the same discrimination measure.

The cross-sectional nature of the data is a third limitation to our study, in that inferences cannot be made in terms of temporal ordering. It may be that people experiencing psychological distress are more likely to perceive discrimination. Although such a hypothesis is plausible, prior longitudinal studies have suggested that the causal order is from discrimination to illness (Pavalko, Mossakowski, & Hamilton, 2003; Williams et al., 1997). However, more longitudinal studies are needed to further explicate the causal direction of this relationship.

Lastly, although our study is one of the few studies examining the discrimination-distress relation among nationally representative samples of Latina/o sub-ethnic groups, there are limitations as to how the findings for “Other Latinos” should be interpreted. The findings of Other Latinos in particular, must be taken with caution, as this category is an aggregate of
various Latina/o sub-ethnicities, including Nicaraguans, Dominicans, Colombians, among others—all of who have very distinct migratory histories and incorporation to the U.S., and are generally phenotypically different and reside in different geographic parts of the U.S. Thus, we cannot say that one or all of the sub-groups within this category have experienced everyday discrimination in the same way, are similarly affected by discrimination, or that the role of gender in the discrimination-distress relationship among these various groups functions in the same way.

Conclusions

Despite the aforementioned limitations, our study contributes to a greater understanding of the discrimination-distress relationship among a nationally representative sample of Latina/o adults using an intersectional framework to understand this relation at the intersection of multiple social identities and social locations. Our results suggest that in general, perceiving discrimination is related to increased levels of distress, with the effect of this relation being overall stronger for Latinas, and Cuban women in particular. Further, subgroup differences found across genders and ethnic groups suggest that the experience and effects of discrimination may be qualitatively different by Latina/o sub-ethnicity. The present study thus highlights the importance of attending to the unique link between perceived discrimination and psychological distress among Latina/os across various social locations. More research is needed on the heterogeneity that exists within the U.S. Latino population in terms of discrimination experiences and its impact.

In effect, examining discrimination at the intersection of various social identities has implications for the way future studies should measure discrimination across Latina/o sub-ethnic groups and genders. Our study is one of the first to use an intersectionality perspective to study
how the social locations shape psychological responses to discrimination among nationally representative samples of Latina/os. Although this study is only a first step in exploring the factors that contribute to psychological distress among a diverse group of Latina/os, it underscores the importance of contextualizing these relations within a larger socio-cultural context that pays particular attention to the interactions of various social identities. Accordingly, attending to the complexity of the “Latina/o” experience in the U.S. and its relation to mental health thus remains an area ripe for study. Our study thus makes a modest attempt at drawing attention to the ways the social location of Latina/o adults shape the discrimination experience and responses to it. As such, the use of an intersectional approach for examining the discrimination experiences and impact on mental health among Latina/o populations in future studies is needed in order to be able to take into account the unique experiences and realities of sub-ethnic Latino immigrant groups across different social locations (Mahalingam et al., 2008; Molina & Mahalingam, 2009).

However, our findings also illustrate the commonality in the effect of discrimination on psychological distress across genders and Latina/o subgroups. That is, irrespective of gender and sub-ethnic group differences across a wide range of socio-cultural-demographic factors, the effects of discrimination are still detrimental to the mental health of all four Latina/o subgroups included in the study. Based on these findings, the next steps are to consider the gendered and ethnic-specific pathways by which discrimination affects various mental health outcomes, at the intersections of gender and ethnicity in order to identify the heterogeneity in coping with discrimination among Latinos.
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