# Omega Graduate School

# Dissertation Research Prospectus (Pre-Proposal)

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# Problem Statement

The problem is that middle-class African Americans experience race-related stress due to the influence of political ideologies which inform their perceptions of injustice (Kivikangas et al., 2021; Leong et al., 2020). However, the sociological relationship between race-related stress and perceptions of injustice among middle-class African Americans in Chattanooga, TN is unknown. This problem is of particular concern in the American Southeast, where there is a dynamic of historical racism (Anderson, Span, 2016). Therefore, Chattanooga, TN was selected as the geographical delimitation for this study because Chattanooga, TN is in the heart of the Southeast United States, and Tennessee is the historical, foundational origin of the Ku Klux Klan (Chalmers, 1987).

# Purpose Statement

The purpose of the study is to examine the potential relationship between the perception of injustice and race-related stress among middle-class African Americans in Chattanooga, TN.

# Background of the Problem (1-2 pages)

The background of the problem is rooted in critical race theory. It is thought by many that critical race theory (CRT) is an American phenomenon. However, the ideas of critical race theory have been propagated outside the U.S. for many years. The concepts of critical race theory are often favored by U.S. racial historians (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). CRT underpins an entire social movement meant to enact social reform through a violent revolution for some individuals. CRT is discussed in social, political, educational, and religious arenas. CRT asserts that race is a social construct created to perpetuate white privilege through white supremacy (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020).

Racism is multi-faceted in its nature, presentation, effects, and constituent components (discrimination, power, dominance) rooted in its expression and its total influence on the lives of African Americans. Racism is a difficult concept to operationalize for many (Harrell, 2020). Utsey (1999) proposed using the concept of race-related stress to represent the physical, emotional, psychological, and mental toll exerted on African Americans due to chronic exposure to racism, racial prejudice, racial discrimination, and racial stereotypes. Harrell (2000) defined race-related stress as the race-related interactions between groups or individuals and their environments that spring from the dynamics of racism; race-related stress is perceived to strain or exceed collective and individual resources.

People perceive different actions as unjust and react differently to injustice experiences. This subjective perception of injustice could determine not only their actions but also their mental health - race-related stress (Fetchenhauer, Huang, 2004). For example, current research on people suffering from pain after traumatic accidents have shown that people who subjectively perceived their situation as less just felt pain longer and more strongly (Trost, Scott, Buelow, Nowlin, Turan, Boals, Monder, 2017; Sullivan, 2020; Carriere, Pimentel, Yakobov, Edwards, 2020). To better understand the impact of injustice experiences on mental health, it is necessary to validly assess experiences of injustice with appropriate instruments (Fetchenhauer, Huang, 2004).

Most evaluations of a sense of justice were conducted in Western cultures up to this point. Frequently, the focus is on concepts such as social injustice, fair distribution of goods, or justice sensitivity, or the questionnaire was developed to determine the belief in a just world, a concept that was developed based on Western ideas of justice (Dalbert, Montada, Schmitt, 1987; Schmitt, Baumert, Gollwitzer, Maes, 2010). Most studies in the field developed and used specific questionnaires which only referred to the target group or the conflict concerned (Pham, Weinstein, & Longman, 2004). In addition, research has shown that the perception of injustice will likely increase through situations characterized by basic human rights violations (Sullivan, 2020).

A deeper examination using CRT as the framework revealed additional considerations such as historical racism, the oppression of African Americans in the current socio-political context, unique knowledge and experiences of the African American population, multidisciplinary influences, and actions for social justice (Daftary, 2018; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017; Aymer, 2016). With CRT guiding the research conceptualizations of race-related stress and the perception of injustice, systemic racism was considered an important predictor variable (how much direct racism the researcher's population had experienced based on their responses to the instruments versus the professional and socio-economic station they had achieved). Race-related stress is the psychological distress experienced by African Americans due to sustained exposure to overt or vicarious effects of racism - discrimination, microaggressions, stereotypes, and prejudice (Harrell, 2000; Utsey, 1999). Studies indicate race-related stress to be associated with physical and psychological well-being, African American activism, and racial identity attitude (Hope et al., 2018; Leath & Chavous, 2017; Prosper, 2018; Szymanski, 2012; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; 2016; Miller, Keum, Thai, Lu, Truong, Huh, Ahn, 2018)

The result that individuals with the attitude that things are generally good and all right with the world will be more inclined to take up activism work for social change seems counterintuitive based on the body of literature (Leath & Chavous, 2017). Therefore, the two goals of the current study are to add to the literature on socio-political attitudes and better understand how the variables might be related concerning race-related stress and the perception of injustice in the study population.

# Significance

This study will contribute to the gap in research on race-related stress and the perception of injustice. The significance of this study will be to expand the knowledge and understanding of the possible relationship between race-related stress and the perception of injustice in the study population. A better understanding of any possible relationship between these two variables might aid the study population in affecting authentic racial reconciliation in a way that CRT possibly does not.

# Research Questions

RQ1: What relationship, if any, exists between self-assessed levels of race-related stress and self-assessed perceptions of injustice among middle-class African Americans in Chattanooga, TN?

# Research Methodology

This study will utilize a quantitative methodology because hypotheses derived from research questions will be tested using statistical analysis. This quantitative study will utilize a correlational design to examine the relationship between race-related stress and the perception of injustice among middle-class African Americans in Chattanooga, TN.

# Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study will be framed by Marxism with critical race theory as its actuator. It can be established that much contemporary social conflict can be attributed to Marxism by way of critical race theory (Ghous, 2020).

# Instrumentation

Validated survey instruments that measure attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, or behaviors will be used in this quantitative study. This study will utilize the **Index of Race Related Stress – Brief (IRRS-B)** (Utsey, 1999) instrument, which measures race-related stress using three subscales: racism based on Jones’s tripartite model of racism (Jones, 1971), Essed’s collective racism (Essed, 1990), and Lazarus and Folkman’s life stress theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Scoring of the IRRS-B will be based on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*This never happened to me*) to 4 (*This happened, and I was extremely upset*).

This study will utilize the **Perceived Injustice Questionnaire (PIQ)** instrument, which measures perception of injustice using five subscales: emotional and cognitive consequences, injustice perception, injustice experience, revenge, and forgiveness (Neumann, Berger, and Kizilhan, 2021). The scoring of the PIQ will be based on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly agree*), 2 (*agree*), 3 (*neither agree nor disagree*), 4 (*disagree*), and 5 (*strongly disagree*).

# Research Design

This quantitative study will utilize a correlational design to examine the relationship between race-related stress and perception of injustice among middle-class African Americans in Chattanooga, TN.

# Population and Sampling

The target population for this study will be middle-class African Americans in Chattanooga, TN from city government, university-level academia, and various private sector businesses. The total population represented in the study is 60 middle-class African Americans in Chattanooga, TN.

Snowball Sampling will be used to ensure representation of the sample population utilized to ensure eligible participants meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria until a minimum sample size of at least 46 participants is attained. Sample size will be calculated using G\*Power software. Permission to recruit participants will be secured from the Chief Human Resources Officer for the City of Chattanooga, the Vice Chancellor of Diversity and Engagement at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga, the Chief of Talent for Hamilton County Schools, and the Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Tennessee.

# Hypotheses

## Correlational

H0: No statistically significant relationship exists between levels of race-related stress and perceptions of injustice among middle-class African Americans in Chattanooga, TN.

Ha: A statistically significant relationship exists between levels of race-related stress and perceptions of injustice among middle-class African Americans in Chattanooga, TN.

# Data Analysis Plan

This study will test data for normality and relevant assumptions of appropriate statistical procedures. If data do not meet assumptions for parametric procedures (results apply to the population), nonparametric procedures (results apply only to the sample) will be utilized.

This study will utilize Pearson’s Product Moment of Correlation (parametric) to test the hypotheses for statistically significant relationships.

This study will include post-hoc statistical procedures such as power and effect size to aid the interpretation of the results.