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## **Perceived Racism, Emotional Responses, Behavioral Responses, and Internalized Racism among Ethiopian Adolescent Girls in Israel: A Facet Theory Approach**

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**Abstract.** The present study examined perceived racism in a sample of 93 girls aged 15-21 from the Ethiopian Jewish community in Israel, its correlation with emotional and behavioral coping styles, and its psychological effects (internalized racism), employing Facet Theory tools (multidimensional scaling analyses; FSSA; Mapping definition).

The few studies that have been conducted on this subject in Israel found that young Ethiopian people experience racism based on skin color.

It was found that the intensity of perceived racism correlates with internalized racism. A multidimensional scaling map provides a general picture of the girls' emotional responses (anger, empowerment, internalized emotions) and behavioral responses (adapt, fight, and flight) to the experience of perceived racism.

In the discussion it is suggested that racism is experienced as a danger situation in which three coping style archetypes are chosen as a line of defense, and that each of these styles is effective in a different way.

The present study seeks to contribute to the corpus of knowledge on the effects of racism on the individual suffering from it by means of Facet Theory principles, and the following article presents a mapping definition for the research question regarding the effects of racism on individuals suffering from it.

### **1. Theoretical Background**

In the broad body of academic knowledge on issues of racism, one of the key questions pertains to the psychological effects of living in a racist environment. In recent decades a large number of studies have been conducted that shed light on how people from minority groups perceive racist incidents they experience, the emotions and behaviors responds to these incidents, and their psychological implications for the individual.

Although all the variables described above (racist incidents, emotions, behavior, internalized racism) are studied extensively, it is difficult to find studies that attempt to combine the different variables into a comprehensive model. Thus for example, of thirty-nine studies reviewed by Carter (2007), twenty-four examine the correlation between racist incidents and various mental health measures, e.g., depression, anxiety, psychological functioning (Dohrenwend, 2000), six examine the correlation between racist incidents and different dimensions of physical health, e.g., blood pressure, infant weight (Collins et al., 2004), two examine the correlation between

racist incidents and displays of self-destructiveness, e.g., cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption (Guthrie et al., 2002), and some of the studies engage in an in-depth examination of the emotions aroused in respondents as a result of a racist experience, or their coping styles (Plummer & Slane, 1996).

The present study presents an approach to measuring and analyzing perceived racism and its effects on the individual suffering from it by employing Facet Theory principles, especially multidimensional scaling analyses and the mapping definition technique (Borg & Shye, 1995; Levy, 2003; Shye & Elizur 1994). The article presents a conceptual and empirical system that enables the broad conceptualization and measuring of the individual's perception of the racist incident, the emotions aroused in him or her in the wake of the incident (emotional response), his or her behavioral response to the racist incident, and the internal implications of coping with racism (internalize racism). We will endeavor to contend with this challenge by means of a sample of adolescent girls of Ethiopian origin living in Israel.

### **1.1. Perceived Racism**

Studies have demonstrated that in many cases, race-based experiences are perceived as stressful events, which may threaten the sense of self-worth, self-confidence, and well-being (Carter, 2007). Moreover, the central aspect of racist experiences is the perception of these events and the subjective interpretation of the individual: If one does not perceive an event as negative, it will not produce harm (Carter, 2007).

Racism is an everyday experience and is not necessarily manifested in extreme cases, such as hate crimes (Swim et al., 2003). Often, racism is present, just not expressed openly (unseen or hidden), and in many other cases it is overt. The racist experiences documented in various studies may be manifested as acts perpetrated by various public institutions (Pettigrew, 2007; Sue et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2008; Utsey, 1999), bad service in public institutions (Swim et al., 2003), verbal racist expressions (Swim et al., 2003; Sue et al., 2008), and non-verbal racist expressions (Pettigrew, 2007; Sue et al., 2008; Swim et al., 2003). Despite the great variance, Carter (2007) suggests classifying racist incidents into three types: racial discrimination (avoidance), racial harassment (hostile), and discriminatory harassment (combination of harassment and discrimination). Researchers explain that ambiguous racism, as opposed to direct racism, can be experienced as a more chronic source of stress (prolonged emotional response), and can lead to prolonged cognitive processing and emotional stimulation that can result in negative responses in the person experiencing it, especially if he has had prior racist experiences (Bennett et al., 2004).

### **1.2. Emotional and Behavioral Responses and Implications**

Studies conducted in the United States show that for the person experiencing it, racism triggers psychological, emotional, social, and behavioral responses (Brown, 2003; Fanon, 1982; Swim et al., 2003). A review of the research literature examining the emotions that surface in an encounter with racism shows the emergence of intense negative emotions, including anger and anxiety (Swim et al., 2003; Bennett et al. 2004), powerlessness, non-visibility, obedience, submissiveness, forced compliance, and stress deriving from a sense of having to represent an entire group (Sue et al., 2008; Bennett et al., 2004).

On the other hand, very few studies have focused on coping styles and behavioral responses toward racism (Sue et al., 2008). This may be due to the latent nature and elusive character of contemporary racism (Utsey et al., 2000). Although there is only a small number of studies in the field of behavioral response to racism, a literature

review shows that the majority do respond in one way or another (behavioral or emotional responses) to a racist incident in which they are the target (Swim et al., 2003).

### **1.3. Internalized Racism**

Racism tends to be internalized by its targets, and is manifested in anti-self issues, suppressed anger expression, and nihilistic tendencies (which are defined as self-destructive) (Brown, 2003). *Anti-self issues* occur when a person feels alienated from his racial identity and seeks to escape from it, and subsequently from any connection with other members of his racial community (Brown, 2003). Members of minority groups encounter innumerable opportunities to be angry, but these expressions of anger are attended by sanctions. When the denial of anger and aggression becomes normative, the expressions of suppressed anger, which is defined as *suppressed anger expression*, result in artificial friendliness, passivity, and ultimately withdrawal or self-destructiveness (Brown, 2003).

*Nihilistic tendencies* in this context are a strong tendency toward self-destructiveness and harm due to fatalism associated with racial categorization. Self-destructive disorder is defined as self-defeating attempts to survive in a society that systematically frustrates normative efforts toward natural human development. It is manifested by the individual himself; he is his own worst enemy, and acts with the intention of destroying himself (Brown, 2003). According to Brown (2003), internalize racism is divided to three subcategories: Anti-self issues, suppressed anger expression and Nihilistic tendencies. These describe the manner in which internalize racism affects the individual's mental health.

### **1.4. Ethiopian Youth in Israel**

The Ethiopian community is a Jewish black minority in Israeli society. The first Ethiopian immigrants arrived in Israel in the 1980s (Shabtay, 1999), today they account for 1.86 per cent of the total population in Israel (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009), and constitute a minority group based on skin color. Studies conducted in Israel that focused on the adjustment processes of Ethiopian immigrants indicated that their efforts to integrate into Israeli society were attended by feelings of rejection by society. The findings indicate that many perceive difference in skin color as one of the main reasons for their difficulty in integrating into Israeli society, despite being Jewish, which is a generalizing mechanism directed toward integration in Israel (Shabtay, 1999). As we demonstrate before, studies conducted in the United States focus on emotional and behavioral coping styles and internalized implications (Brown, 2003; Swim et al., 2003; Utsey et al., 2000). Several studies which examined Ethiopian immigrants' experience of being black in Israel, found racial manifestations equivalent to those mentioned above (Ben-David & Tirosh Ben-Ari, 1997; Ben-Eliezer, 2008; Shabtay, 2001).

Studies shows (Ben-David & Tirosh Ben-Ari, 1997; Ben-Eliezer, 2008; Shabtay, 2001) that racism in the Israeli society, on its different aspects, creates considerable distress amongst those youth.

Other studies conducted among youths indeed indicate self-destructive elements; an approximate 33 per cent dropout rate from the education system, experience with drugs (25 per cent, i.e., twice the rate among all Israeli youths), alcohol consumption, and suicidal behavior (at twice the rate of all Israeli youths) (Edelstein, 2004). There is an over-representation of Ethiopian youths in the criminal statistics pertaining to Israeli youths (Edelstein, 2004).

Ethiopian girls, in comparison with boys, constitute a distinctive risk group due to their age, being women, children of immigrants, their low socioeconomic status, and

due to society's perceptions and racist attitudes toward their skin color. Evidence of the distinctiveness of Ethiopian girls and how this is manifested in risk behaviors can also be found in studies conducted in Israel (Zaslavsky, Apter, & Idan, 2002). A few studies that focused on Ethiopian girls found that the level of their integration into their peer group is lower compared to Israeli youths in general. It was also found that about a third of these girls are involved in one of the following risk behaviors: drug use, alcohol consumption, indiscriminate sexual relations, and delinquency (Zaslavsky et al., 2002).

To summarize, in order to gain an understanding of the complex reality with which these girls have to cope, it is important to understand their perception of racism, a perception comprising a complex correlation between several variables: perceived racism, emotional responses to these incidents, their behavioral response to racist incidents, and how and to what extent they internalize this racism.

These complex correlations will be examined using Facet Theory tools and principles.

### **1.5. Research Goals**

The study engages in an exploration of the inner structure and correlation between the variables: perceived racism, emotional responses (anger, frustration, sadness, helpless, shame, empowerment), behavioral responses (try to change behavior, try to behave better, disregard, try to avoid contact, pray, try to forget, become violent, respond and tell the racist he is wrong), and internalized racism (nihilistic tendencies, anti-self issues, suppressed anger expression), in order to identify the dynamics of coping with racism from the subjective perception of the individual.

Based on the complex correlations between the variables, a general model (mapping definition) will be constructed that endeavors to describe the range of choices facing an Ethiopian adolescent girl coping with racism, from the subjective perception of the reality in which she lives and with which she is coping. The mapping sentence will help to define the general research question regarding the individual's responses to the racist incidents she encounters.

## **2. Research Method**

**2.1. Participants:** 93 adolescent girls, aged 15-21, from the Ethiopian community participated in the study. The girls were enlisted by approaching institutions attended by a concentration of Ethiopian youths. 125 adolescents were approached, and 93 returned the completed questionnaires (74 per cent).

**2.2. Measures:** As described above, the present study attempts to measure the concepts: perceive racism, emotional responses to racism, behavioral responses to racism, and internalized racism.

The questionnaires were developed by combining two bases: theoretical and empirical ideas from the literature, and a series of focus groups conducted with Ethiopian girls.

**2.2.1. Demographic Background Questionnaire:** Data was collected regarding participants' age, grades at school, and affiliation to religion, as well as the year their parents emigrated, their jobs, who they live with at home, number of bedrooms, and their financial situation compared with their friends.

**2.2.2. Perceived Racism Questionnaire:** This questionnaire was constructed on the basis of the focus groups described above and on current available literature (Carter, 2007). It comprises seven items representing perceived racism. This type of racism is defined as the subjective perception of an event experienced by an adolescent girl and defined by her as a racial event (i.e. disrespectful attitude toward

me because I'm Ethiopian). The respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which each of the situations applies to them on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1="to a very low degree", and 7="to the highest possible degree". The questionnaire was found to have high reliability ( $\alpha=0.88$ ).

**2.2.3. Emotional Responses Questionnaire:** This questionnaire is based on a questionnaire developed by Barnett (2008) for a study that examined the perceptions of a sample of Arab pharmacists in Israel concerning racist responses they encounter from customers, and for focus groups held with girls at a center for girls at risk, from which a number of dominant emotions emerged.

The final version of the questionnaire included six emotional responses: anger, frustration, sadness, helplessness, shame, and empowerment. These are the emotions that can manifest when experiencing perceived racism. The respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which each of the situations applies to them on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1="to a very low degree", and 7="to the highest possible degree". Since the reliability of the questionnaire was found to be moderate ( $\alpha=0.67$ ), a multidimensional scaling analysis was carried out, according to which the six emotions were classified into three categories: anger, empowerment, and internalized emotions. The analysis is presented in the Findings section.

**2.2.4. Behavioral Responses Questionnaire:** This questionnaire is based on a questionnaire developed by Barnett (2008) for a study that examined the perceptions of a sample of Arab pharmacists in Israel concerning racist responses they encounter from customers, and for focus groups held with girls at a center for girls at risk. The questionnaire includes eight behavioral responses that might be adopted as a reaction to perceived racism (efforts to behave better). The respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which each of these responses applies to them on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1="to a very low degree", and 7="to the highest possible degree".

Since the overall reliability of the questionnaire was found to be moderate ( $\alpha=0.57$ ), a multidimensional scaling analysis was carried out, according to which the behavioral responses were classified into three categories: fight ( $\alpha=0.64$ ), flight ( $\alpha=0.66$ ), and adapt ( $\alpha=0.58$ ). The analysis is presented in the Findings section.

**2.2.5. Internalized racism Questionnaire:** This 15-item questionnaire, which is comprised of 3 subcategories, was developed and formulated by Barnett (2008). This questionnaire measures internalize racism by three (out of five) hypothetical mental health problems that could exist because of racial stratification the following dimensions in accordance with the conceptualization developed by Brown (2003): self-destructive behaviors (fighting, practicing unsafe sex, alcohol and drug use, and life-threatening behaviors), anti-self issues (I wish I had lighter skin color), and suppressed anger expression (angry about things associated with the issue of race but having to control myself, anger and inner fury, angry with myself for not expressing anger over a racist incident, lying when a veteran Israeli asks if I'm angry at not being treated as an equal, and I pretend to like veteran Israelis).

Respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which each of these responses applies to them on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1="to a very low degree", and 7="to the highest possible degree". The questionnaire was found to have high to moderate reliability (suppressed anger expression –  $\alpha=0.67$ ; nihilistic tendencies –  $\alpha=0.80$ ; anti-self issues –  $\alpha=0.73$ ). The multidimensional scaling analysis of this questionnaire is presented in the Findings section.

## **2.3. Procedure**

Various institutions attended by adolescent girls from the Ethiopian community were approached through professionals. After receiving approval, most of the questionnaires were administered to the girls by the researcher, and the remainder were handed over to the responsible persons at the institutions with a detailed explanation on how to present the study and administer the questionnaire. The questionnaires were completed anonymously, sealed in an envelope, and mailed to the researcher.

### 3. Research Results

To identify the separate spheres of *emotional responses*, we carried out multidimensional scaling analysis on the averages of the six items. The two statistical dimensions of the figure, Stress=0.036 and RSQ=0.995, obtained relatively high scores. Figure 1 shows that the map is divided into three regions of emotional responses. The four emotional responses: frustrated, sad, ashamed, and helpless, which were named *internalized emotional responses*, appear in the first region, and one response appears in each of the two other regions: *empowerment* and *anger*, which expresses an externalized emotional response.

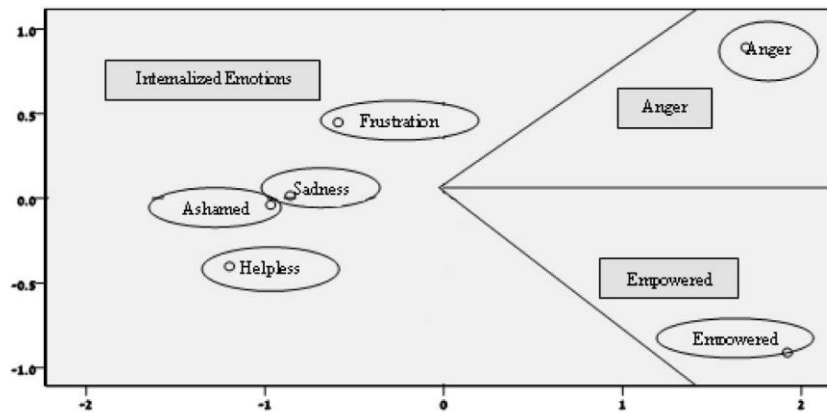


Figure 1: Map of Emotional Responses

To identify the separate spheres of *behavioral responses*, we carried out multidimensional scaling analysis on the eight variables. The two statistical dimensions of the figure, Stress=0.018 and RSQ=0.997, obtained relatively high scores. Figure 2 shows that the behavioral responses occupy various locations on the map and create a circular flow, which is possible to begin describing the circle at the point of the behavioral “praying” response and ends with the “become violent” response. we divided the map into three regions: *adaptation*, which includes the behaviors: praying, changing behavior, trying to forget, taking no notice, and trying to behave better ( $\alpha=0.64$ ), *flight*, which includes avoiding contact with the racist ( $\alpha=0.66$ ), and *fight*, which includes: answering back, and violence ( $\alpha=0.58$ ).

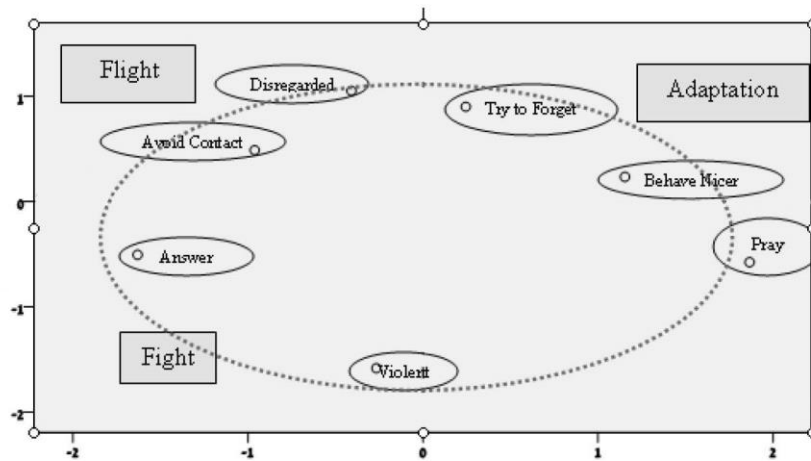


Figure 2: Map of Behavioral Responses

To identify whether there are separate spheres of *internalized racism*, we carried out multidimensional scaling analysis on the fifteen averages of the variables representing the implications for identity. The two statistical dimensions of the figure, Stress=0.099 and RSQ=0.957, obtained relatively high scores. Figure 3 shows that the different dimensions of internalized racism are spread throughout the map, and can be divided into three different content worlds in accordance with their location. Based on this division, the three following variables were constructed which match Brown's (2003) classification (see p 3).

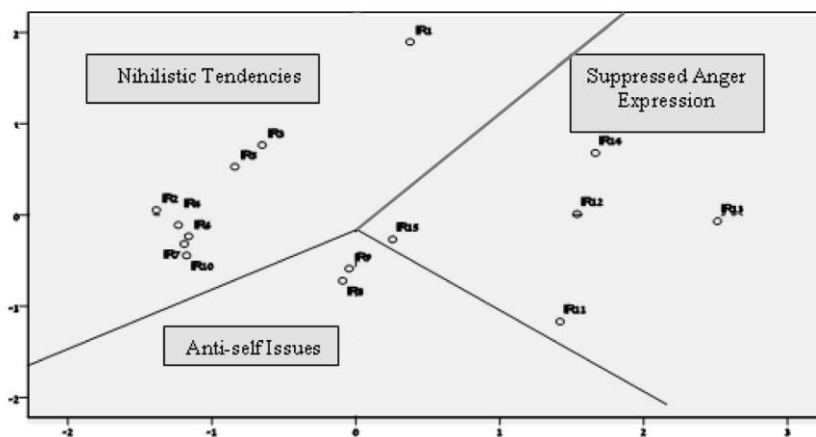


Figure 3: Map of Internalized Racism Dimensions

### 3.1. Perceived Racism and Emotional and Behavioral responses, and Internalized Racism

We conducted a Fssa that included all the studied variables in order to examine whether there is any regularity between the facets and the elements presented in Figure 1-3.

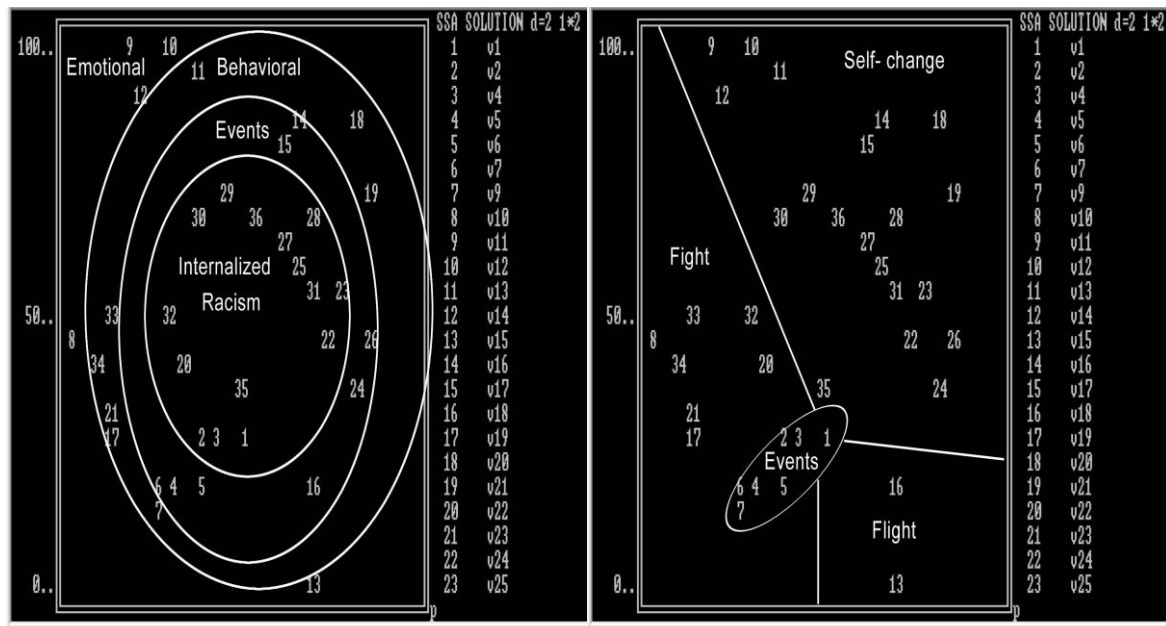


Figure 4: Map of all the variables: Perceived Racism, Emotional and Behavioral Responses, and Internalized Racism: Radial Partition and Angular Partition

Figure 4 shows regularity between the facets and the various elements in two respects. Two components of internalized racism variables (anti-self issues, and nihilistic tendencies) appear in the center of the map, The racist incidents appear next, the behavioral responses to racism (fight, flight, adaptation) appear in the third circle, and the emotional responses (internalized, anger, empowerment) appear in the outermost circle, In Facet Theory this kind of map distribution is called “radial distribution” (shye & Elizur, 1994).Seprn Index for this facet was 0.84

Figure 4 also shows that the map can be divided into three sections, at the center of which is the perceived racism variable. The first region includes the responses: anger (emotional response), and fight (behavioral response); along with suppressed anger expression, the second region: empowerment (emotional response), and flight (behavioral response); and in the third region: internalized emotional response (emotional response), and adaptation (behavioral response), as well as the internalized racism variables (anti-self issues, and nihilistic tendencies). This division indicates a connection between the different variables and perceived racism as a mediating variable, a connection between behavioral and emotional responses, and a connection between some of them and internalized racism. In Facet Theory this kind of map distribution is called “angular distribution” (Guttman & Greenbaum, 1998; Shye et al., 1994).Seprn Index for this facet was 1.00

In Facet Theory, the combination of radial and angular distribution is known as “**radex**” (Guttman & Greenbaum, 1998; Shye & Elizur, 1994). The implications of the radex structure for the mapping sentence are detailed in the Discussion section.

#### 4. Discussion

The present study examined Ethiopian girls’ experiences and perceptions of racism. It did not examine actual expressions of racism, on the premise that the individual’s experience and the implications of the subjective experience are the most meaningful. The “objective truth” of the incident is irrelevant to the effects and implications of the experience (Carter, 2007).



Combined with Facet Theory tools, the study's findings show correlations between the girls' different coping styles: emotional and behavioral responses, and internalized racism. Analysis of the Map of all Variables: Perceived Racism, Emotional and Behavioral Responses, and Internalized Racism (Figure 4) indicates three archetypes for coping with racism, each with a typical emotional responses, a typical behavioral responses, and internalize racism. The first coping style, "*fight*", is when in response to racism the girl is angry, fights, and is then angry again – at herself for not fighting hard enough (suppressed anger expression). The second, "*flight*", is when the girl feels empowered by racist experiences and consequently avoids contact with the racist. The "empowered" response combined with flight and avoidance possibly stems from the girl thinking "I'm not going to stoop to your level", and consequently she withdraws out of inner pride. The sense of empowerment is one of "I know my worth", but this experience results in the girls avoiding contact with the racist, and consequently reducing their personal space in society.

The last coping style, "*self change*", is emotional – internalized emotional responses: frustration, sadness, shame, and helplessness, which lead to adaptation behavioral responses: trying to forget or ignore the incident, praying, changing behavior, and trying to behave better. These coping styles lead to the most powerful form of internalized racism: anti-self issues, and nihilistic tendencies. The more the girls internalize their emotional responses and try to adapt themselves in terms of behavior, thus they will suffer more from psychological damage.

At times the stress resulting from encountering a racist experience mandates the costly response of avoidance (Feagin et al., 2001).

Girls who choose "flight" (avoidance) and "empowered" coping styles are least affected by internalized racism, but at the same time they also have the lowest chances of integrating into society. The conclusion, therefore, is that a girl who avoids Israeli society has fewer chances of being damaged by it, but will pay the price of social and economic non-integration.

It is difficult to ignore the similarity between the three archetypes described above and Gordon's (2002) classic description of the choices facing people contending with a racist reality: "*Every black person faces history – his or her story – every day as a situation, as a choice, of how to stand in relation to oppression, of whether to live as a being subsumed by oppression or to live as active resistance toward liberation or to live as mere indifference. This conception of history is rooted in daily life*" (Gordon, 2002, p. 250).

The findings of the present study, and especially Figure 4, corroborate Gordon's (2002) observation and complement it. As we have shown, the findings specify the emotional and behavioral significance of each choice and show which of the choices are more strongly linked to the internalized damage caused by racism.

Based on this view, A mapping definition can be formulated. The division into three coping style archetypes described above forming the first facet. The second facet defines the aspects in which the three archetype manifest themselves: the (a) recognition of racist events, the (b) emotional and (c) behavioral coping as well as the (d) internalized implications of coping with racism.

Consequently, the following mapping definition is proposed for the effects of racism on the individual suffering from it:

An item belongs to the content world of the effects of racism on the individual only if it asks about the extent to which A member (x) of a minority ("disadvantaged") social group

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{recognizes racial attitude of} \\ \text{responds behaviorally to racial attitude by} \\ \text{responds emotionally to racial attitude by} \\ \text{makes internal adjustments to racial attitudes by} \end{array} \right\}^a$$

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{fight} \\ \text{flight} \\ \text{self change} \end{array} \right\} \text{ behavior} \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{very often} \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \\ \text{never} \end{array} \right\}$$

#### 4.1. Suggestions for Further Research

The mapping sentence directs us to a number of challenges:

1. To attempt to conceptualize and understand the elements of internalized implications of coping with racism especially referring to the flight coping style: the findings highlight that the internalized cost indicated by Brown (2003), i.e., anti-self issues, and nihilistic tendencies, particularly specify the heavy price entailed in an adaptation coping style. While suppressed anger expression relates to the "Fight" coping style. We need to understand the price and corresponding effects of adopting a coping style of flight. Qualitative studies, as well as analysis of literary works, can advance us in this respect.
2. To test the validity of the mapping sentence for different ethnic groups, gender groups and age groups in order to examine the generalizability of the findings. For example, it is important to also examine the experiences of people from minority groups who have succeeded in order to examine perceived racism of the discriminatory harassment type, which we were unable to address in the present study.

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