# Racialization Without Racism in Scholarship on Old Age

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*Abstract:* Population aging and international migration have propelled the aging of ethno-cultural minorities to the forefront of social scientific inquiries. Examining how scholarship on old age makes sense of ethnicity and race has become relevant. Based on a scoping review of peer-reviewed articles published between 1998 and 2017 (n = 336), the present article asks whether the notions of racialization and racism inform this scholarship and argues that a racism-sensitive research agenda is needed.

*Keywords:* Racism, racialization, old age, aging, ethno-cultural minorities

## Rassisierung ohne Rassismus in der Altersforschung

*Zusammenfassung:* Demographische Alterung und internationale Migration haben das Altern von ethno-kulturellen Minderheiten in den Vordergrund sozialwissenschaftlicher Fragestellungen gerückt. Damit wird auch relevant zu untersuchen, wie Konzepte von Ethnizität und Rasse in der Altersforschung nutzbar gemacht werden. Basierend auf einem Scoping Review von peer-reviewed-Publikationen, die zwischen 1998 und 2017 publiziert wurden (n = 336), fragt dieser Beitrag danach, inwiefern die Begriffe Rassisierung und Rassismus sich in diesen Wissenskorpus einlagern, und argumentiert, dass eine rassismussensitive Forschungsagenda notwendig ist.

*Schlüsselwörter:* Rassismus, Rassisierung, Alter, Altern, ethno-kulturelle Minderheiten

## Racialisation sans racisme dans la recherche sur la vieillesse

*Résumé :* Le vieillissement de la population et la migration international ont propulsé le vieillissement des minorités ethnoculturelles au premier plan de la recherche en sciences sociales. Il est donc devenu pertinent d'étudier comment les concepts d'ethnicité et de race sont mobilisés dans la recherche sur le vieillissement. Sur la base d'une revue des publications évaluées par des pairs publiées entre 1998 et 2017 (n = 336), cet article se demande dans quelle mesure les notions de racialisation et de racisme sont intégrées à ce corpus de connaissances, et défend le besoin de développer un agenda scientifique sensible au racisme.

*Mots-clés :* racisme, racialisation, vieillesse, vieillissement, minorités ethnoculturelles

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## 1    Introduction

At a time when ethnic tensions around the world are intensifying due to, among other things, the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments and nationalist political parties, it would seem particularly relevant to try to understand whether or not racialization and racism inform the ways in which research on aging ethnic and racial minorities has been and is being conducted. It is not difficult to imagine that racial discrimination is a phenomenon some of these minorities have had to deal with throughout their life course, especially considering the colonial pasts of many of the societies they now call home (Kunow 2016). The present article therefore asks whether racialization and racism have informed the scholarship on ethnicity, race and old age. Part of the backdrop for the article is the fact that the growing number of people around the world who are aging in countries they were not born in seems to have rekindled social gerontologists' interest in ethnicity as a social position worth investigating (Phillipson 2015).

        In this respect, it is relevant to note that critical gerontologists have questioned social gerontology's capacity to face the numerous challenges that international migration poses (Rajan-Rankin 2018; Torres 2015a, 2019; Warnes et al. 2004). It is also necessary to acknowledge that I have argued elsewhere that the ways in which the social gerontological imagination regarding ethnicity was originally piqued (Torres 2015b) has kept this rekindled interest in ethnicity from developing into a branch of scholarship that can shed light on the injustices that often affect the lives of older ethnic and racial minorities (Torres 2018). It would seem necessary, in this connection, to mention that social gerontologists' first attempts to study ethnicity originated from studies aiming to explain the deviations from cultural norms that anthropo-gerontologists had noted (Torres 2015b). As such, these studies have inadvertently regarded Western and White backgrounds as the norm in relation to which the aging of ethnic and racial minorities was made sense of, while regarding the ways in which minorities make sense of the aging experience as deviations from these norms that needed to be explained. Thus, these studies provide a prime example of how imposing frames of reference that people regard as foreign is one of the ways in which injustices can be accomplished, despite our best intentions (Fraser 1996, 1997).

        Moreover, I have recently argued that scholarship on ethnicity, race and old age is at a crossroads, because the ways in which this scholarship makes sense of the identification grounds that are ethnicity and race have stagnated (Torres 2015a). It is also worth noting that as more ethnicity and race scholars begin to regard old age as a part of the life course they want to explore, social gerontologists are losing ground concerning inquiries into aging and old age that focus on ethnicity and race (Torres 2019). It is important to note, in this respect, that the bulk of this scholarship comes from researchers working on aging-related issues, which is why

the present article has the title it does and why this introduction alludes to social gerontology. It is, in other words, primarily the scholarship that is under scrutiny here. Understanding why it is necessary to take stock of where we are regarding this scholarship's way of making sense of ethnicity and race is therefore what I turn my attention to now. There is more to wanting to do this than the simple fact that the number of older people with ethnic and racial minority backgrounds is increasing due to population aging and international migration. The present article is namely the result of a theorizing exercise conducted because the scholarship in question is at a crossroads, and branches of scholarship that find themselves in this predicament are often encouraged to engage in theorizing.

To this end it is important to acknowledge that the notion of theorizing is not new to the social sciences, but has experienced a revival over the past few years as a result of Swedberg's (2012a) article on theorizing in *Theory and Society*, which is based on Charles S. Pierce's 1903 lecture on 'How to Theorize' (Swedberg 2012b). According to Swedberg (2012a), shifting our attention from inquiries driven by justification (which involve hypothesis testing) to inquiries driven by a longing for new discoveries is one of the approaches we can use to advance the ways in which we make sense of the phenomena under study. This latter type of inquiry is, in other words, what expansion of a scholarship's imagination entails. Thus, since I wanted to expand the imagination of scholars working on ethnicity, race and old age, I embarked on a theorizing exercise of my own a few years ago.

The exercise in question – which resulted in a new book entitled *Ethnicity & Old Age: Expanding our Imagination* (2019), see also Torres (2020), – was informed by C. Wright Mills' (1959) ideas on intellectual craftsmanship. In the appendix of his book, Mills argued that if one wants to assess what the scholarly imagination of a field fathoms or disregards as plausible, one needs to examine what researchers in the field take for granted and/or fail to acknowledge as potentially fruitful angles of investigation. The work underpinning the present article was inspired by what Mills suggested we could do to expand our scholarly imaginations. His suggestions can be regarded as a recipe for how scholars can approach their fields if they wish to shift their work from justification (hypothesis testing) to discovery mode; a mode that is, as already mentioned, believed to facilitate the unleashing of our scholarly imaginations so that new research questions can be posed and new research agendas can be established (Castoriadis 1987, 1994; Gaonkar 2002).

Coincidently enough, the same year that Swedberg made his first contribution to the contemporary debate on theorizing, Emirbayer and Desmond wrote a piece urging scholars specializing on ethnicity and race to reflect on the taken-for-granted assumptions that were shackling their imagination. Their plead read as follows: "it is widely recognize that our understanding of the racial order will remain forever unsatisfactory so long as we fail to turn our analytic gaze back upon ourselves, the analysts of racial domination, and critically inquire into the hidden presuppositions

that shape our thought" (Emirbayer and Desmond 2012, 574). These three scholars ideas about why it is propitious to embark on theorizing exercises that can unleash our scholarly imagination have inspired me to turn my analytic gaze toward my own field, i.e., scholarship on ethnicity, race and old age. It is against these backdrops that I decided to conduct a scoping review of the peer-reviewed literature published in English during the past 20 years, my goal being to assess *how* scholarship on old age makes sense of the identification grounds that are ethnicity and race. The present article asks one of the questions this review raised – a question prompted by the realization that although racialization and racism are phenomena that have preoccupied the imagination of scholars of ethnicity and race, they do not seem to have informed inquiries focused on old age.

## 2    Ethnicity, race and old age as identification grounds

The identification grounds this article focuses on are assumed to matter because people regard them as meaningful. Thus, ethnicity, race and old age are identification grounds used both by those who make identity claims and by those who assign identities to individuals on the basis of assumptions they make about these individuals' age, phenotypical characteristics, national/ geographical/ language and religious backgrounds. The key issue here being the use of the word assumptions. Thus, these identification grounds capture the dialectic nature of assigned and ascribed identities, and the ways in which assumptions about these identities are used to categorize people into groups. The ways in which the importance of these identification grounds has been made sense of has, however, evolved over the past decades. Social scientists no longer assume, for example, that ethnicity, race and old age determine who people are – an assumption that was at the heart of the essentialist understanding (Cornell and Hartmann 1998). Nowadays most social scientists take for granted that these identification grounds only matter when we allow them to matter, which is what a social constructionist approach is all about (Jenkins 1997). The scholarship under scrutiny here, however, is still most often informed by essentialist understandings of ethnicity and race (Torres 2015, 2019).

A few words about ethnicity and race are therefore necessary, as these identification grounds are sometimes used interchangeably, particularly in the scholarship the present article focuses on. Thus, it would seem important to state that race is often regarded as a "socially and historically *crude* category of people based mainly on physical features such as skin color" (Elias and Feagin 2016, 94), while ethnicity is used to denote "socially constructed groups primarily distinguished by cultural or geographical characteristics such as religion or national origin" (Elias and Feagin 2016, 95). Race scholars have argued that the fact that dominant White groups have been able to establish a racial hierarchy – based on the highly exploitative relationships

they have established with non-Whites throughout history and around the world – is part of the reason why we need to distinguish between these identification grounds.

In addition, because the logic these identification grounds rely on is different, it is important to ensure we do not conflate ethnicity and race with one another. Doing so could cause us to lose sight of what racism, as an ideology, and racialization, as a process, may mean for social relations (Miles 1989; Bairot and Bird 2001) as well as to disregard the fact that Whiteness is often used as the default category with regard to which the experiences of ethnic and racial minorities are made sense of. Power differentials are, in other words, often at play when we inquire into the experiences of these minorities (Bonilla-Silva 2012). It is against this backdrop that the present article asks if the literature engages with the notions of racialization and racism – and if so how? – as well as arguing that racialization and racism cannot be relegated to the periphery of the imagination of scholarship on ethnicity, race and old age.

## 3    Racialization, racism and racial discrimination

The phenomena the present article draw attention to are at the very core of the ways in which ethnicity and race scholars have made sense of how systems of oppression and inequality operate (Essed 1991; Nazroo 1998, 2003). This is one of the many reasons why I think we ought to examine whether or not these notions have informed the scholarship on ethnicity, race and old age. Note that, as I have argued elsewhere, although scholars in this field are obsessed with inequalities, they do not seem to be concerned with the injustices which underlie them (Torres 2018). A few words about how ethnicity and race scholars have made sense of these notions are warranted. In this article I propose that part of the reason why this is the case may be that the scholarship in question seldom looks at how the systems of oppression –racialization and racism – operate. These systems are briefly discussed below.

Racialization – a notion that originally emerged some forty or so years ago to allude directly or indirectly to "biological unity" (Bairot and Bird 2001, who present the genealogy of this notion) – is the term ethnicity and race scholars use "to refer to any process or situation wherein the idea of "race" is introduced to define and give meaning to some particular population, its characteristics and actions" (Miles 1989, 2004). Grosfoguel (2004), however, define racialization in a much broader way as "the process through which groups (frequently the dominant ones) use cultural and/or biological features/criteria to construct a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority among collective social actors" (Grosfoguel 2004, 326–327). This is why recognizing not only that racialization happens, but also how it happens, allows us to interrogate "the investments that social actors have in racialization and help us to understand why racializing discourse [and I would add practices] has proven so flexible, so insidious, and so durable" (Dick and Wirtz 2011, E9).

The notion of racism has been defined in various ways throughout history and is therefore most difficult to define. This notion is used to allude to both the theory and the belief that distinctive human characteristics and abilities are determined by race (Banton 2004, 2016). In the period following World War II, it was common to use the term racism to refer to the ideology, attitudes and actions that resulted in discriminatory behavior. During this period, "the primary use of the word "racism" lay in explaining particular attitudes and behavior as the outcome of an acceptance of certain obsolete doctrines of racial inequality" (Banton 2016, 1730). During the late 1960s and 70s, social scientists began noting that allusions to ethno-cultural differences sometime serve the same purpose as the original ideas of racial difference did; this being because no reference to biological notions of race needs to be made for this to happen – we can have racism without races (Massey et al. 1975,). Thus, although racism is still a highly contested notion, and "most of the sociological problems within the study of race and ethnic relations can be investigated without use of any concept of racism" (Banton 2016, 1735), the effects of racism are widely acknowledged. This is why one of the most cited articles on why racism still matters uses the phrase "race as biology is fiction, racism as a social problem is real" (Smedley and Smedley 2005) in its title, and why it is not uncommon for ethnicity and race scholars to adamantly argue that scholars must distinguish between "racism in effect" and "racism by intent" (Hendricks 2016).

Some of the latest papers on how racism operates (or why racial discrimination happens, as some scholars often refer to the behavioral expression of racism) are the work of Bonilla-Silva (1997, 2012, 2014). He argued that there are racialized social systems of domination that are global in scope, date back at least five hundred years, and take Whiteness as the default category in relation to which ethnic and racial minorities are constantly judged (see also the work of Feagin 2014 and Elias and Feagin 2016 who have argued that systemic racism characterizes American society). It is because of this that most social scientists specializing in ethnicity and race take for granted that, although the "overt, formal, and humiliating ideas and practices commonly affiliated with Jim Crow have been displaced, to some extent," there are "new ideas and practices that are institutional, covert and seemingly nonracial in character (… which) are perhaps all the more effective as instruments of racial domination" (Hendricks 2016, 1746). This is one of the many reasons why the present article asks whether the scholarship on ethnicity, race and old age under scrutiny here engages with the notions of racialization and racism, and if so, how.

## 4    Methods

The theorizing exercise underlying the present analysis relied on a scoping review. The sections that follow described how this review was conducted.

## 4.1 Sampling databases, journals and articles

Date parameters were set for the period between 1998 and 2017. Because the scoping review in question focused on how scholarship on old age makes sense of ethnicity and race, the databases used to search for peer-reviewed journals in English were those that had the largest number of journals in both of the fields deemed relevant to this inquiry (i. e., aging/old age and ethnicity/race): ASSIA (Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts) database and the Web of Science: Core Collection. These databases index a total of 61 journals. In addition, the table of contents of the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* was manually searched, as the journal is also a relevant dissemination outlet for this type of research.

The keywords used were ethnicity, race, aging, old age, elderly and all possible combinations of these terms. Only articles published in journals specializing in either aging/old age or ethnicity/race were chosen, and only those who mention the above terms in either their titles, abstracts (though not only in the methods section of the abstract) and/or keywords sections met the inclusion criteria. Articles that focused on specific ethnic groups but did not mention ethnicity and/or race, and/or aging, old age, elderly, senior, nursing home resident and/or older people in their abstracts, keywords or titles were not included. A critical inspection of these articles' content showed that they concerned ethnic groups, as opposed to contributing to the debate on the intersection of ethnicity, race and old age. The same applies to articles that focused on older migrants but did not mention ethnicity, race, ageing, old age, elderly and/or older people in the sections mentioned. Thus, articles on older migrants were only included in the review if they claimed to make a contribution to the intersection in question.

The sample comprises a total of 336 articles, which address the following topics: health inequalities (n = 117); health and social care (n = 55); social relations and caregiving (n = 52); attitudes (n = 15); methods-related issues (recruitment, retention and sampling) (n = 14); quality of life, life satisfaction, successful ageing, well-being (n = 14); financial issues (jobs, insurance, economic status) (n = 11); religiosity and spirituality (n = 9); experiences (n = 9); housing (n = 7); identity (n = 6); loneliness (n = 3); coping (n = 3); work-related issues (n = 3); volunteering (n = 3); life expectancy (n = 2); victimization (n = 1); nursing theft (n = 1); language proficiency (n = 1); personal control (n = 1); emotional expression (n = 1); storytelling (n = 1); black gerontologists (n = 1); social workers (n = 1); elder abuse (n = 1); gaming (non-digital) (n = 1); social participation (n = 1); preferred activities (n = 1), and life-space constriction (n = 1).

## 4.2 Analyzing the literature as data

Articles that met the criteria were saved as pdfs to facilitate the analysis. The data corpus was coded along 36 different themes using Excel tables. This was done to map out how the scholarship in question makes sense of the social positions of ethnicity

and race. Worth noting is that racism and racialization were not among the themes used to code the data corpus during work with the book project mentioned earlier. Two of the original codes, however, entailed allusions to discrimination and measures of discrimination, and it is these codes that were used to identify the articles in focus in the present article. Thus, the article relies on what could be described as a secondary analysis of the scoping review mentioned earlier and focuses on the 35 articles that refer to or measure discrimination. At the core of the analysis was the question: Does the literature engage with the notion of racialization and racism, and if so, how?

## 5    Findings

### 5.1    Racialization without racism and/or racial discrimination

As already stated, few articles referred to racism and/or racial discrimination (only 35 – or 10.4% – of the 336 articles included in the scoping review refereed to these issues). In spite of this, the authors took for granted that there were races, a notion that ethnicity and race scholars have contested for decades and that most regard as 'man's most dangerous myth' (Montagu 1997). Scholars working on ethnicity, race and old age are also constantly mixing up ethnicity with race and do not seem to be aware that, by doing so, they are engaging in the kind of racialization process that allows racism as an ideology to persist and the use of 'Whiteness' as the default category to go unquestioned (Bonilla-Silva 2012). A look at the 336 articles analyzed in the scoping review as a whole shows that 44% (149 articles) use, for example, the word race, racial, Blacks and/or Whites in their titles. This is one of the many reasons why I have argued elsewhere that constant use of what Bonilla-Silva (2012) refers to as the 'White frame' is one of the ways in which the scholarship in question ends up inadvertently placing ethnic and racial groups along various implicit continua of similarity and difference (Torres 2019). As already mentioned, reliance on Whites as the default category, in relation to which ethnic and racial minorities' outcomes are made sense of, is one of the reasons why injustices go unnoticed (Fraser 1996, 1997, 2009). Thus, my argument is that scholars who work on ethnicity, race and old age generally seem unaware that this is a problem. Their work suggests that they do not seem to grasp that their own use of the notion of race and their reliance on the 'White frame' work is contrary to the goal of emancipating older oppressed ethnic and racial minorities.

### 5.2    The use of euphemisms for racism/racial discrimination

Something else worth noting about the articles that refer to racism and racial discrimination is that racism seems to be an experience that scholars in this field tiptoe around. There is a collection of euphemisms these scholars use when alluding to the

Table 1      Articles that acknowledge racism in the literature on the intersection of ethnicity, race and old age

| Article theme and total number of articles on that theme out of the 336 articles that have been reviewed | Allude to racism/ racial discrimination in passing | Suggest that racism/ racial discrimination may play a role | Leave no doubt that racism/ racial discrimination is at stake | Sum per theme |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Health inequalities (n = 117) | 5 | 8 | 1 | 14 |
| Health and social care (n = 55) | | 2 | | 2 |
| Social relations and caregiving (n = 52) | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Attitudes (n = 15) | | | 1 | 1 |
| Methods-related (n = 14) | 1 | | | 1 |
| QoL, life satisfaction, successful ageing & well-being (n = 14) | 1 | | 1 | 2 |
| Financial issues (n = 11) | | 3 | | 3 |
| Religiosity and spirituality (n = 9) | 1 | | | 1 |
| Experiences (n = 9) | | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Identity (n = 6) | | | 1 | 1 |
| Loneliness (n = 3) | 1 | | | 1 |
| Coping (n = 3) | 1 | | 1 | 2 |
| Volunteering (n = 3) | | 1 | | 1 |
| Sum per allusion type (N=36) | 10 | 16 | 9 | 35 |

types of discriminatory and derogatory practices associated with racism and/or racial discrimination. Among them are: "life course discrimination" (White-Means 2000), "unjust, inequitable, and inhuman treatment" (Mills and Edwards 2002), "oppression, exploitation and inequality" (Williams 2005), "discriminatory and derogatory treatment" (Sherkat et al. 2007), "Othering" – which was alluded to as a "form of inadvertent discrimination" (Koehn 2009), "historical episodes of discrimination" (Lambe et al. 2010), "disproportionate experiences of social injustice" or "lifelong discrimination" (Barnes et al. 2011), "ethnic-micro-aggression" (Park 2015), and "racial discrimination" or "racial-ethnic discrimination" (Dillaway 2016). Thus, as a coherent whole, scholars of ethnicity, race and old age seem to be uncomfortable with using racism and/or racial discrimination as angles of investigation in their

inquiries, even though they sometimes acknowledge that these experiences are bound to be relevant to older ethnic and racial minorities. Table 1 shows the themes in focus in the 35 articles that do refer to racism and racial discrimination, as well as the ways in which these articles engage with these notions.

### 5.3    Alluding to racism/racial discrimination in passing

The analysis revealed two distinct ways of alluding to racism and/or racial discrimination in passing: doing so at the beginning of the article and doing so at the end. The article by Tait and colleagues (2011), which explores whether African Americans and Hispanics pray for their health more often than Whites do, finding that they do, is one of the texts that refers to racism and racial discrimination in passing in the introduction. Reviewing the literature on African Americans, they write, for example that they "have used prayer to respond to slavery, and to later continued racism and discrimination" (Tait et al. 2011, 341), an issue they then drop in that no other mention of these phenomena is made. Victor and colleagues (2012), who study whether or not loneliness is experienced by ethnic minorities in the UK, also allude to previous research showing that racism and discrimination are part of the reason why migrant groups may be particularly prone to experiencing loneliness. Also referring to these phenomena in passing are Hughes and colleagues (2014), who explore how older ethnic minorities with arthritis, heart disease and/or diabetes are affected by these diseases and who write that "ethnicity and race are factors in how the social roles of older adults are affected by chronic illness" (Hughes et al. 2014, 661). Last but not least, among the articles mentioning racism in passing in the introduction section, we have one by Braun and colleagues (2014), who suggest the need to move away from solely positivistic approaches to research on the intersection in focus, here in favor for 'decolonizing methodologies.' Thus, the interesting thing about articles that allude to these notions in passing, and only in the sections of the article that come prior to the methods section, is that they – by never mentioning these notions again – leave readers inadvertently thinking that these angles of investigation are not worthy of attention.

In contrast, articles that refer to these notions in passing but toward the end of the text inadvertently imply that future research ought to grapple with these notions, though not always in explicit terms. One such article is that of Consedine and colleagues (2004), who focus on styles of socioemotional functioning and claim that ethnic background predisposes people to adopting some patterns of adaptation over others. While explaining why African and Caribbean Americans seem to be more resilient than European Americans, these researchers write: "the first possibility is that the legacy of slavery and its long-term social and economic consequences have created conditions that strengthen the ability of people of the African Diaspora to cope with adversity – to "make do" under conditions of racism, unemployment, illness and fragmented families" (Condesine et al. 2004, 121). Once again we have

an article that acknowledges that the phenomena in question ought to receive attention. Grewal and colleagues (2004) explore what factors affect how older ethnic minorities in England think about quality of life and allude to racism and/or racial discrimination in passing, toward the end of the text (Liang et al. 2009; Dulin et al. 2011; Latham 2014; Zadhone et al. 2015). All of these articles fail to allude to the effects of racism and/or racial discrimination when reviewing the current state of the research they are focusing on, but end up suggesting future research has to deal with these phenomena.

### 5.4 Suggesting that racism/racial discrimination play a role

Suggesting that racism plays a role may sound like alluding to the issue in passing, but the difference is that the articles in this category do not just allude to racism and/or racial discrimination and leave it at that, they suggest (more explicitly) that these notions must have played a role in their findings, even if they did not measure the impact of these phenomena per se. As such, these articles give the impression that they were authored by scholars who are convinced that this phenomenon ought to be explored.

Miner and Tolnay (1998) focus on race and cohort differences in memberships in voluntary organizations and attribute the fact that older Blacks participate less in such activities to the historical discrimination they have experienced; this is an example of texts that explicitly suggest that racism plays a role. The article by White-Means (2000), who explore the racial patterns that can be discerned from studying disabled older people's use of medical services, but neither measure racial discrimination explicitly nor tap into this phenomenon, is filled with allusions to racial discrimination from start to finish. Mills and Edwards (2002) argue that the history of slavery in the US cannot be disregarded and that racial discrimination is therefore a given when it comes to disparities in mental health. Jackson (2005) makes the same claim with regard to health inequalities, even if her argument is a bit subtler, as does Williams (2005), who reviews American data on an array of health-related issues and suggests that "the multiple ways in which racism can affect the health of socially disadvantaged populations" (Williams 2005, 59) remain unexplored. Sherkat and colleagues (2007) focus on health inequalities at the intersection of ethnicity, race and old age and explore the effect health service use has on racial differences in mortality in the US; this is yet another example of an article that explicitly suggests racism may be an important factor. At the beginning of their article they state, for example, that we cannot disregard the fact that "even when services are available and affordable, Black Americans' treatment in primary health care settings may be tinged with subtle racism" (Sherkat et al. 2007, 208). The final sentences of their article read as follow: "research should also explore how discriminatory and derogatory treatment in health care settings affects Blacks' health service use. The cumulative effect of poor treatment in health settings may be disengagement and underuse of

the most important preventive and ameliorative services (…) The current study suggests a new potential avenue for exploration, linking racism to health service choices that affect health outcomes" (Sherkat et al. 2007, 221).

The article by Wray (2007), who explores how ethnic minority women in the UK make sense of the part of the life course known as midlife, is also an example of texts suggesting that racism ought to be taken into account (Barnes et al. 2011; Koehn 2009; Koehn et al. 2013; Prokos and Keene 2012). Last but not least, Ferrer and colleagues (2017) offer us one of the most recent examples of an article indicating that racism and racial discrimination ought to be taken into account when studying older ethnic and racial minorities. These authors argue that both intersectionality and the life course approach should be used when studying the experiences of racialized older people, while suggesting that racism, racial discrimination and "systems of domination" are a given in these older people's lives. Thus, what the articles suggesting that racism and/or racial discrimination should be taken into account when studying these groups have in common is that they, contrary to the texts only suggesting this in passing, mention these notions far more often and/or explicitly argue that they merit the attention of future research.

## 5.5    Leaving no doubt that racism/racial discrimination plays a role

Table 1 shows quite clearly that the previous two ways of addressing the phenomena in question are far more common than is leaving no doubt that racism and/or racial discrimination are important factors. There are, however, a few articles that take for granted the importance of these phenomena when studying the topics in focus. Some of the articles that leave no doubt as to whether these phenomena play a role and design empirical studies to measure just that are based on studies that measure the impact of racism explicitly, while others include questions about these phenomena in their design, even if the impact of these phenomena is not the primary focus.

McAuley (1998) takes for granted, for example, that the history of racial relations and discrimination that characterizes American society is bound to affect rural all-Black towns in Oklahoma, and studies whether this in turn affects the sense of place attachment experienced by older people living there. In addition, Moriarty and Butt's (2004) article about the implications of racism for, among other things, the inequalities in quality of life experienced by older people from different ethnic minority groups is an example of studies that unequivocally position racial discrimination at the very center of their inquiry. The article by Sheminari and O'Connor (2006), who shed light on how racism (as well as ageism) affects older Iranian women's perceptions of what it is like to grow old in Canada, is also an example of articles that leave no doubt that racism is a relevant phenomenon in these women's lives. The same applies to David and Knight (2008), who report on a project investigating how gay men from different cohorts cope with experiences of ageism, racism and homonegativity. The article by Lambe and colleagues (2010), who ask

whether racial discrimination in medical settings plays a role, among other things, in how older African Americans enrolled in an Alzheimer's research program think about brain donation, is also an example of articles that explicitly take racism into account. Another example can be found in Tsunokai and McGrath's (2011) article, in which baby boomers are asked whether they would cross racial boundaries to find a romantic partner, the assumption being that past experience of racism is part of the reason why so few participants in their study would consider dating outside their ethnic group.

One of the few studies whose sole purpose is to shed light on the relationship between lifetime discrimination, everyday discrimination and a health-related outcome is the study by Ayalon and Gum (2011), which focuses on mental health. Their study primarily refers to discrimination in general terms, showing that "Black older adults experience the greatest number of discriminative events, but weaker associated mental health outcomes" (Ayalon and Gum 2011, 587), while the older White people who participated – who attributed the discrimination they had experienced to increased age – experienced "more depressive symptoms and less life satisfaction" that their Black counterparts. These findings are explained by referring to the fact that the sample of older Black people in their study may have consisted of individuals who had become accustomed to experiencing such events, and/or who have social resources that ameliorate the impact of discrimination. Their findings are, however, particularly interesting, as they suggest that experiencing racism need not always have negative effects.

## 6    Discussion

The present analysis clearly shows – especially considering that only 10.4% of the scholarship on ethnicity, race and old age over the past two decades refers to racism and/or racial discrimination – that the notion of racism rarely informs scholarship on ethnicity, race and old age. Racialization, however, is highly characteristic of what this scholarship constantly does, in that it often uses race as a categorization device. Thus, the fact that the scholarship in question relies on Whiteness as the default category in relation to which the results of studies focusing on older ethnic and racial minorities are compared comes as no surprise (44% of the 336 articles use the words race, racial, Blacks and/or Whites in their titles). These are the reasons why the present article includes the phrase "racialization without racism" in its title.

Table 1 shows that studying racism and/ or racial discrimination explicitly is more uncommon than one might expect. In other words, in scholarship on ethnicity, race and old age it is more common to suggest that racism ought to be taken into account than to design studies that actually take this phenomena into account. It must be mentioned, however, that almost twice the number of articles comprising

the data corpus come from the second decade analyzed here (2008–2017). This suggests that scholars of ethnicity, race and old age are becoming increasingly aware that racism and/ or racial discrimination ought to inform their research. Comparing the themes presented in Table 1, we can also see not only that some themes do not acknowledge that the lives of older ethnic and racial minorities could be affected by racism and racial discrimination, but also that most of the articles alluding to these phenomena do not in fact study these phenomena as such. Thus, in the words of Hendricks (2016), the scholarship in question sometimes acknowledges that there is "racism in effect" but seems uninterested in studying "racism by intent."

A closer look at the topics the data corpus focuses on reveals that the scholarship in question seems relatively oblivious to the fact that research on heath inequalities has demonstrated the value of investigating how perceived racism impacts people's health (Nazroo 1998; Karlsen and Nazroo 2002a, 2002b). Namely, research has shown that "despite substantial differences in the experience of racial discrimination, the detrimental impact on health (can be) the same across socio-demographic groups" (Bécares et al. 2009, 504), which is why fear of racism – and not only the actual experience of racism – may be detrimental to our health (Bécares et al. 2009, 504). Against this backdrop, we can understand why Wiliams (2005) – whose work belongs to the data corpus analyzed here – has stressed the urgent need for research on health inequalities in old age to focus on the multiple ways in which racism can affect the health of socially disadvantaged populations.

In this respect, it would seem important to draw attention to Jackson (2005). She uses the MacArthur Scale on Subjective Social Status when trying to disentangle the relationship between objective and subjective socioeconomic status, and the role these measurements play in explaining health inequalities. Her main argument is that objective measures of socioeconomic status only offer us a small part of the bigger picture explaining the relationship between socioeconomic status and health inequalities. In her article, she refers to the fact that this scale uses a pictorial format when asking people to place an X on the rung on which they feel that they stand in relation to others; she claims the following:

> *Preliminary data suggest that individual's perceptions of their place in the hierarchy as assessed by the ladders are associated with health. The socioeconomic status-health relationship may be mediated by the subjective feeling of being lower or higher on the ranking (…) Insofar as social standing has beneficial effects on biological processes related to health, standing on the community ladder may be as important as standing on the SES [socioeconomic status] ladder.* (Jackson 2005, 64)

This very claim is developed in one of the most recent contributions to the scholarship on health inequalities, made by McGovern and Nazroo (2015), who aim to disentangle the patterns and causes of later life inequalities using a Bourdieusian

approach to health inequalities that measures not only occupational and secondary characteristics of objective social class, but also subjective social class. Their analyses show that subjective social status can mediate the effects of objective social class on health. This is why they argue that "if the health status of older people is partly the result of structural factors that operate in cultural and civic domains then the provision of public resources to encourage cultural and social participation more widely will have positive health effects" (McGovern and Nazroo 2015, 155). Although claims such as this one need to be tested empirically, it is results such as these that have led me to inquire into how the notions of racialization and racism are deployed in scholarship on ethnicity, race and old age.

Thus, by way of conclusion, it would seem important to state that one of the ways in which we could unleash the imagination of scholarship on ethnicity, race and old age would entail seriously grappling with the idea that racialization and racism could play a role in some older ethnic and racial minorities' life courses, and that designing studies that empirically address this very fact ought to be part of our research agenda. In globalized times such as ours, when tensions between ethnic and racial groups are on the rise, it would seem to be unimaginative to assume that these phenomena can be relegated to the periphery of our scholarly imagination. If we want to grasp what is actually unique about what makes ethnic and racial groups matter in our world, we ought to study the very angles of investigation that construct these groups' experiences as different from those of White dominant groups. Failing to do so means not only that we fail to investigate how racism as an ideology matters in old age, but also that we fail to expose the injustices that some older ethnic and racial minorities do face.

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