Leveraging Minority Identities at Work: An Individual-Level Framework of the Identity Mobilization Process

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Abstract. Research on the business case for diversity suggests that organizations may gain important advantages by employing individuals from minority identity groups—those that are historically underrepresented and lower status—such as distinctive perspectives and greater access to minority customers and constituents. Organizations’ ability to capitalize on the promises of diversity ultimately depends on minority employees’ willingness and ability to draw on their distinctive strengths at work. However, little research has explored how employees perceive and act on potential advantages associated with their minority identity at work. Addressing this gap, we draw on in-depth interviews with 47 racial minority (31 Asian American and 16 African American) journalists to develop a conceptual framework of the process of identity mobilization—the steps through which individuals can deliberately draw on or leverage their minority cultural identity as a source of advantage at work and how this process is sustained or disrupted over time. The framework includes four different pathways through which individuals can leverage their minority identity to facilitate progress toward work-related goals and four identity mobilization tensions that can disrupt the identity mobilization process. Our research has significant implications for theory and practice related to diversity, identity, and positive organizational scholarship.

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Keywords: diversity • grounded theory • identity • identity management • journalism • positive identity • race

Introduction

The global workforce is experiencing a striking increase in demographic diversity (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2015, Cohn and Caumont 2016), making diversity a critical issue for 21st-century organizations. Scholars have proposed ways in which organizations can benefit from having demographically diverse employees, also known as the “business case for diversity” (Cox and Blake 1991, Robinson and Dechant 1997). For example, individuals from minority—historically underrepresented and lower status—identity groups in the workplace, such as racial minorities and women, are seen as providing distinctive perspectives (McLeod et al. 1996, Richard 2000, van Knippenberg et al. 2004) and greater access to minority customers and constituents (Ely and Thomas 2001, Avery et al. 2012).

We argue that an organization’s ability to capitalize on such benefits of diversity is ultimately in the hands of its minority employees. Even when the work environment encourages an employee to bring in the employee’s minority identity (Ely and Thomas 2001, Nishii 2013, Ramarajan and Reid 2013), at the final moment of decision, it is the employee’s choice to draw (or not to draw) on the employee’s identity-based strengths. However, research on the business case has focused on managerial actions, such as adopting diversity initiatives, while implicitly framing minority employees as targets to be managed rather than as agentic actors (Dye and Golnaraghi 2017). As a result, little is known about how, when, and why individuals draw on or “mobilize” their minority identity as a resource to further work-related goals, a perspective that we develop in this paper drawing on our qualitative research. Our investigation of how employees perceive and act on potential advantages associated with their minority identity deepens understanding of the business case for diversity by showing how it is enacted or “made real” through the actions of minority employees.

This perspective also complements existing individual-level research on the minority experience at work, which has primarily emphasized the challenges and liabilities associated with being a minority, such as unfavorable stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination (Davidson et al. 2016) in areas ranging from...
colleagues’ support and cooperation to selection, evaluation, and promotion (Maume 1999, James 2000, Milton and Westphal 2005, Stauffer and Buckley 2005, Carli and Eagly 2007, Dean et al. 2008, Heilman and Eagly 2008, Rosette et al. 2008, Yzerbyt and Demoulin 2010, Koenig et al. 2011, Heilman and Caleo 2015). Scholars have recently begun to examine how minority individuals cope with such challenges. To reduce the threat of being misjudged or mistreated because of their membership in a minority identity group, individuals may fend off negative stereotypes by avoiding verbal mentions of the identity, working harder to counter negative stereotypes about competence, conveying achievements or universal qualities associated with the group to colleagues, or attempting to affiliate with a more highly regarded group (Creed and Scully 2000, Clair et al. 2005, Roberts 2005, Ragins et al. 2007, Ely and Roberts 2008, Block et al. 2011, Madera et al. 2012, Shih et al. 2013, Roberts et al. 2014). Individuals may also cognitively reframe their minority identity by evaluating the minority group using criteria that establish positive distinctiveness or by categorizing themselves at a level that encompasses multiple identity groups, for example, as an organization member (Roberts and Creary 2013).

To develop a more complete understanding of organizational diversity, more research is needed on the “asset” side of how individuals may experience and act on their minority identity at work, thus complementing past research on the “liability” side. In particular, empirical research using a “close up” methodology, such as in-depth interviews, which capture individuals’ emic or insider perspective on a phenomenon (Marshall and Rossman 1995), is required. Addressing this need, we conducted a qualitative study of 47 racial minority (31 Asian American and 16 African American) journalists. Journalism, in which racial minorities are underrepresented (American Society of News Editors 2016, Papper 2016), was an appropriate context for this research given its strong business case for diversity in terms of news coverage and readership (Gold 2013, White 2015).

We drew on our interviews with the journalists to develop a conceptual framework of the process of identity mobilization—the steps through which individuals can deliberately draw on or leverage their minority cultural identity as a source of advantage at work and how this process is sustained or disrupted over time. The framework includes four different pathways through which individuals can leverage their minority identity to facilitate progress toward work-related goals and four identity mobilization tensions that can disrupt the identity mobilization process. This framework surfaces the individual-level perceptions and actions and unpacks the complexity involved in the business case for diversity. It also extends research on the minority experience at work by illuminating more proactive and positive ways in which individuals can manage their minority identity, emphasizing leveraging over coping. Further, it addresses the call for more research on how synergies can be achieved between an individual’s multiple (e.g., cultural and work) identities (Ramarajan 2014).

**Identity Resources**

Our framework focuses on how individuals utilize their minority identity as a resource that they already possess (Feldman 2004), rather than acquiring externally located resources, to facilitate their progress toward work-related goals. This conception of resource utilization is consistent with the conservation of resources (COR) theory, which establishes that individuals are motivated to acquire and use resources, defined as “those entities that either are centrally valued in their own right (e.g., self-esteem, close attachments, health, and inner peace) or act as a means to obtain centrally valued ends (e.g., money, social support, and credit)” (Hobfoll 2002, p. 307; see also Hobfoll 1989).

Most of the research from COR theory on personal resources has looked at how individuals can draw on their personality traits, such as self-esteem, optimism, and sense of control, as resources that can help them attain valued ends (Cozzarelli 1993). More recently, positive organizational scholars have broadened the set of personal characteristics that can serve as workplace resources to include professional identities (Dutton et al. 2010). For example, research by Caza reveals how professional identity complexity can be a resource that increases one’s affective commitment and creative responding, increasing resilience in the face of workplace stress (Caza 2007, Caza and Wilson 2009). Relatedly, although they do not explicitly draw from a resource framework, Ramarajan et al. (2017) demonstrate that drawing on multiple work-role identities enables perspective taking, motivation, and performance.

This study expands the set of personal characteristics that can serve as resources to include cultural identities. A cultural identity is an aspect of self-conception that “stems from membership in groups that are socioculturally distinct [and] … are often associated with particular physical (e.g., skin color), biological (e.g., genitalia), or stylistic (e.g., dress) features” (Ely and Thomas 2001, p. 230; see also Cox 1993). Members of a cultural identity group based on race, ethnicity, sex, social class, religion, nationality, and sexual identity often share norms, values, goal priorities, and sociocultural heritage. They also tend to experience similar power dynamics based on the prestige and status accorded to their group (Alderfer...
and Smith 1982, Nkomo 1992, Ely and Thomas 2001). However, individuals can vary in terms of the significance or regard that they associate with their group membership as well as their behavioral expressions of the identity (Cox 1993, Thomas 1993, Roberts et al. 2008). Our focus on mobilizing a minority cultural identity as a resource reveals unique pathways and tensions that have not been previously addressed in the literature on using personality traits and work identities as resources.

Our framework also contributes to research on resourcing theory (e.g., Feldman 2004), which argues that assets, which represent “potential resources,” remain dormant and do not create value until they are converted into “resources in use.” Existing research on resources in organizations has focused primarily on the acquisition or protection of assets rather than utilization—the process through which assets are converted into resources in use that create value (Feldman and Worline 2012, Halbesleben et al. 2014).

As a result, scholars have called for more research on the micro, incremental actions that are “involved in getting from ‘what do I have?’ to ‘what actions can I take to create outcomes I care about?’” (Feldman and Worline 2012, p. 640). In a parallel fashion, research on the business case for diversity has tended to focus on the decompositional composition of organizations—the “acquisition” or hiring of minority individuals as a potential resource (Prasad and Mills 1997)—rather than investigating how, when, and why those individuals choose to leverage their minority identity as a resource to create desirable outcomes.

Method

Research Context: Racial Minorities in Journalism

Racial minorities have been historically, and continue to be, substantially underrepresented in journalism (Williams 2015). The work of a journalist is to gather, evaluate, and present verified news and information that citizens can use to make better decisions about their lives, communities, and societies (American Press Institute 2017a). With the American public rapidly diversifying, it has been argued that a strong business case for diversity exists in journalism—that racial minority journalists play a crucial role in enabling news organizations to provide accurate information about the society in which their readers live (Gold 2013, White 2015). Thus, journalism represents an appropriate setting for research on how employees perceive and act on potential advantages associated with being a minority in the workplace.

We conducted in-depth interviews with 47 racial minority journalists during two waves of data collection. In our first wave, we interviewed 31 Asian American journalists. In our second wave, we interviewed 16 African American journalists. Although Asian Americans, the fastest-growing racial group in the nation, comprise 6% of the population and African Americans comprise 13% (Riccardi 2016, United States Census Bureau 2016), both groups are substantially underrepresented among newsroom employees and leaders in print/online news organizations, television, and radio (American Society of News Editors 2016, Papper 2016).

Participants

Thirty-one Asian American participants were recruited through announcements to two chapters of the Asian American Journalists Association and snowball sampling. These journalists self-identified as Asian Americans in agreeing to participate in a study of the “career experiences of Asian American journalists.” Participants represented a broad range of Asian ethnicities, including Cambodian (1), Chinese (6), Filipino (4), Indian (9), Japanese (1), Korean (1), Sri Lankan (1), Vietnamese (1), and multiracial (7). Sixteen African American participants were recruited through members of the National Association of Black Journalists and snowball sampling. These journalists self-identified as African Americans in agreeing to participate in a study of the “career experiences of African American journalists.” Table 1 provides additional information on each participant’s pseudonym, organization, position, sex, age, and race.

Wave 1: Procedure and Data Analysis

Each Asian American journalist participated in a semistructured individual interview, approximately 45–90 minutes in duration, with one of the authors, who is also Asian American. We were initially interested in the impact of stereotypes on Asian Americans in journalism. We asked the journalists about their work history, their perception of any stereotypes faced by Asian Americans in journalism, their race-related experiences at work, how they manage being a racial minority at work, and their relationships with colleagues (see Online Appendix A).

We took an inductive, grounded theory approach to analyzing our data (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Eisenhardt 1989, Sutton 1991). Based on previous research on stereotyping, we expected participants to describe stereotypes (e.g., that Asian Americans are passive) as a liability that they strove to minimize through actions, such as downplaying their Asian American identity. Participants did express concern about stereotypes and described many instances of downplaying their racial identity. At the same time, we were intrigued that the journalists sometimes described taking advantage of being Asian American to facilitate their pursuit of work-related goals. This observation led us to a critical point in our theorizing, in which we began to systematically consider the ways
in which individuals can leverage a minority identity as an asset in the workplace.

We examined all the passages in which the journalists described leveraging their minority identity in more detail to see if meaningful subcategories of behavior emerged. This analysis revealed four different behaviors that we coded as crafting, challenging, confirming, and bridging. In these passages, the journalists’ descriptions implied deliberate action geared toward making progress toward work-related goals. We, therefore, included these four behaviors in an aggregate theoretical category that we labeled “identity mobilization tactics.” Although the term “mobilization” is traditionally used in the social sciences to refer to collective action (Morris 2000), a more basic definition is to marshal something as a resource for action (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2017). Thus, we use the term “identity mobilization” to signify the act of managing one’s minority identity in ways intended to facilitate goal progress.

We iterated between our data and existing literature on identity, diversity, and resources in organizations to identify themes that were salient, new, and compelling. These iterations led us to include three

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Number</th>
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more key elements in our theory: the specific work-related goals toward which the journalists’ behavior was directed, identity resources on which the tactics drew as their input, and sources of stress and strain (tensions) associated with identity mobilization. We then developed a conceptual framework describing the relationships among these variables.

Wave 2: Procedure and Data Analysis
To further validate our framework in accordance with the grounded theory process, we interviewed African American journalists based on discriminate sampling, in which researchers test how well their emerging theory holds up in a focused set of additional sampling units (Strauss and Corbin 1990). African American journalists were a valuable extension of our original sample in that, like their Asian American counterparts, they are underrepresented in a field with a strong business case for diversity. At the same time, stereotypes about Asian Americans include both positive and negative elements, whereas stereotypes about African Americans tend to be more negative, which enabled us to ascertain how well our theory held up for a broader set of minorities—to examine whether individuals engage in identity mobilization across different minority identity groups facing somewhat different stereotypes. We sought to identify any common experiences and challenges around leveraging one’s minority identity at work but also remained open to uncovering differences. As discussed in our findings, Asian American and African American journalists described largely similar experiences, but African American journalists may have experienced one of the identity mobilization tensions more intensely as a result of the more negative stereotypes they face.

Each African American journalist participated in a semistructured individual interview, approximately 60 minutes in duration, with one of the authors, who is also African American. We asked the journalists about their work history and perception of any stereotypes faced by African Americans in journalism. We also asked whether they had engaged in four approaches to being a racial minority in journalism (identity mobilization tactics) mentioned in earlier interviews. As wave interviews and, if so, to share examples as well as more details about their motivations, concerns, and experiences. Finally, we asked whether there were other ways in which they had taken advantage of being an African American in journalism. This semistructured interview protocol (Online Appendix B) enabled us to examine whether our African American participants engaged in similar identity mobilization tactics as our Asian American participants while remaining open to learning about additional tactics. Further, our follow-up questions about concerns and experiences surfaced any sources of stress and strain that participants perceived around their identity mobilization without us asking directly about identity mobilization tensions mentioned in earlier interviews.

As we moved back and forth between our data, emerging conceptual framework, and the literature, we refined our coding categories and conceptualization of relationships among the variables. After no new themes or codes arose and the framework seemed to be a clear and sufficient explanation of the data, we concluded that we had reached a point of theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Leveraging a Minority Identity at Work
We now present our conceptual framework (shown in Figure 1) of the identity mobilization process—the steps through which individuals can deliberately draw on or leverage their minority cultural identity as a source of advantage at work and how this process is sustained or disrupted over time. First, we describe the core process, which involves work-related goals, identity resources (potentially valuable features associated with a minority identity), and identity mobilization tactics (specific actions individuals can take in an attempt to leverage their minority identity at work). Using illustrative qualitative data, we explain how each tactic is motivated and triggered by a work-related goal and draws on an identity resource as its primary input. Second, we draw on our data to build theory on how the process of identity mobilization is sustained or disrupted over time, focusing on the role of identity mobilization tensions (sources of stress and strain associated with identity mobilization) and perceived goal progress. In all our examples, we use “As” or “Af” to indicate the participant’s race as Asian American or African American.

The Identity Mobilization Process
Work-Related Goals. The journalists described three work-related goals—producing quality work, building relationships, and constructing a positive image—as key factors that motivated and triggered their mobilization of their minority identity. In this section, we provide an overview of the work-related goals.

First, the journalists defined quality work as journalistic outputs (e.g., newspaper articles or news segments broadcast on television or radio) that contribute to society by informing and enlightening the public. Amy, a television reporter, stated that “if you do the story correctly, you are shedding some light on this issue and helping people have a better understanding and enlightening people about an issue that might be affecting them. So the challenge is getting a story and finding the best way to tell the story to the general public in an informative, enlightening, and hopefully inspiring way” (participant 2 (P2), As;
see Table 1). Similarly, Matthew, a visual journalist stated that the role of journalism is “to keep people informed. To empower people…. We’re charged with making society better by providing education. And telling it as clearly and as accurately as possible” (P37, Af). The journalists also noted the centrality of producing quality work to their careers. Managers (e.g., immediate and upper-level editors) based important decisions on the journalists’ work outputs, including hiring decisions, decisions about story placement (how prominently the story would be featured in a newspaper or newscast), future story assignments (including continuing assignments or “beats” that specialize in a particular issue or institution, such as the White House), promotion decisions, and nominations for journalism awards, such as the Pulitzer Prize.

Second, the journalists stated that interpersonal relationships with sources and colleagues were vital to their ability to do work and, thus, to their careers. Sources—knowledgeable individuals on whom journalists depend for complete and often sensitive information (Hall 2005)—are often strangers. Journalists had to relate in such a way that sources would be willing to share information with them. Sarah, a newspaper editor, explained that “your ability to do a really good job as a journalist hinges on your ability to build a rapport…. The essence of a really good story is when you humanize it” (P32, Af). The journalists also described colleagues as valuable sources of information and assistance. Robert, a newspaper editor, stated that “with journalism you definitely need the support of your immediate peers…. Reporters…. all work together to get information, and you can’t be isolated either or else you aren’t going to get the best stories…. Because we’re all deadline-oriented, we need each other more than [in] other careers, I would say, because you can’t just say, ‘Well, I can deal with it later’” (P15, As).

Third, the journalists described the necessity of communicating a positive (e.g., desirable) image for their careers. Anna, a newspaper reporter, stated that “trying to be successful and position yourself in a very successful light, it also means you really have to hide your flaws and… you really have to play up all your positive attributes…. A lot of people talk like they’re more successful than they are. And I think management or people who are up there buy that, they buy into that” (P1, As).

We note that these three goals are important in many jobs and reflect basic sources of human motivation. The desire to build relationships stems from the intrinsic need for belongingness (Maslow 1943, Baumeister and Leary 1995). It also fulfills instrumental functions; relationships in the workplace are the basis of social capital and networks that can facilitate career advancement (e.g., Ibarra 1992). The desire to produce quality work stems from the need for competence (White 1959) and is fundamental to career advancement, thus fulfilling both intrinsic and instrumental needs. The desire to construct a positive image stems from the intrinsic need to have positive self-regard, which derives in part from a positive image in the eyes of others (reflected self-appraisal) (Cooley 1902). Positive image construction also facilitates career advancement, an instrumental need (Baumeister 1989, Leary and Kowalski 1990).

As indicated in Figure 2, these three goals are often interrelated in the workplace. For example, constructing
a positive image may contribute to interpersonal attraction, which increases others’ willingness to build a relationship. Individuals with strong coworker relationships may experience less relational conflict, which facilitates coordination and the ability to produce quality work. Producing quality work can feed directly into an image of competence.

Although the three work-related goals are important for all journalists, we argue that they are especially challenging for racial minorities because of cultural stereotypes. For Asian American journalists, the goal of constructing a positive professional image is complicated by the stereotype that Asian Americans are passive (Stuelpnagel et al. 2004). Assertiveness is considered to be an essential quality in a journalist. However, the model minority stereotype portrays Asian Americans as quiet and submissive technical specialists rather than assertive leaders with strong written and oral communication skills (Yu 1985, Levine and Pazner 1988, Leong and Hayes 1990, Harvard Law Review Association 1993, Lee 1994, Wall Street Journal 1995, Hyun 2005, Taylor et al. 2005, Hastings 2007). This stereotype can make it harder for Asian Americans to obtain a job as a journalist and to procure desirable story assignments (e.g., covering front-page news), thus complicating the goal of producing quality work. As Natalie, a television news assistant, stated, “They assume you’re going to be on the quiet side, that you’re not going to be that aggressive…. Being quiet I don’t think helps you one bit in this industry. They’re going to say, ‘Oh, she’s never going to get the story!’” (P28, As).

The goal of building relationships is also complicated by stereotypes about Asian Americans (Stuelpnagel et al. 2004). Asian Americans are assumed to be cultural outsiders in the United States, a stereotype known as the “perpetual foreigner syndrome.” Even when Asian Americans display no obvious differences in linguistic ability or dress, they are commonly assumed to be foreigners or immigrants (Harvard Law Review Association 1993, Kibria 2000, Wu 2002, Cheryan and Monin 2005, Devos and Banaji 2005, Hyun 2005), who are seen as less trustworthy (Lee and Fiske 2006). Even Asian Americans who are known to have been born in the United States are viewed as less fully “American” than white Americans (Cheryan and Monin 2005). Such assumed cultural differences can elicit discomfort and make it difficult to build trust with sources. It can also undermine a journalist’s ability to build relationships with colleagues. John, a newspaper editor, said, “People [make] assumptions because of the way you look, that you were probably not born in this country and probably don’t know enough about something, and that it’s pointless to try and express to you what

Figure 2. (Color online) How Identity Mobilization Tactics Relate to Goals, Resources, and Tensions
[they] want to say ... about baseball [or] politics or something. So, I think that I tend to get a little upset ... I might just walk away and say, ‘It’s your loss’” (P7, As).

For African American journalists, all three work-related goals are complicated by the stereotype that African Americans are less competent or intelligent (Devine and Elliot 1995, Krueger 1996, Fiske et al. 2002, Bergsieker et al. 2010). This stereotype can compromise one’s image as a capable journalist. Rachel, a newspaper reporter, stated that, based on this stereotype, “almost every editor that I’ve worked with has had [lower] expectations with me ... in terms of grammar, in terms of the way that I write, just in terms of my ability... As a journalist, they just don’t think you’re as good” (P34, Af). Further, colleagues who assume that one is less competent may resist think you in terms of my ability... As a journalist, they just don’t think you’re as good” (P37, Af). Further, colleagues who assume that one is less competent may resist think you in terms of my ability... As a journalist, they just don’t think you’re as good” (P37, Af).

Identity Resources. Our participants’ descriptions of identity mobilization revealed that they drew on two identity resources: stereotypes and identity-related insights. In this section, we provide an overview of the identity resources.

Stereotypes are traits that are ascribed to a social identity group (Siy and Cheryan 2013). To illustrate, Martha, a television reporter, described how Asian Americans are stereotyped as serious and intelligent: “When they see an Asian person, their immediate thought is, ‘Oh, it must be a serious person’... They assume, and not necessarily always for the right reasons, that you must be very serious, you must be semi-intelligent” (P5, As). Noelle, a newspaper reporter, described how African Americans are stereotyped as “cool” (P40, Af). Stereotypes are socially constructed beliefs about or meanings associated with a social identity group that may or may not be accurate or endorsed by a given individual. Members of a society acquire these meanings through mechanisms such as socialization processes and portrayals of the group in the media. Such meanings can also be negotiated or adjusted in face-to-face interactions through processes such as self-verification and behavioral confirmation (Swann 1987). An individual may choose to engage those meanings by claiming them in ways that foster positive image construction or relationship building as we describe in our later discussion of the identity mobilization tactics of confirming and bridging, respectively. In sum, we argue that stereotypes can serve as interpersonal resources that are generated during interactions and that draw on shared meanings held by members of a society.

A second identity resource that emerged from our data was identity-related insights, which we define as knowledge and perspectives stemming from one’s experiences as a minority group member. What an individual has observed and experienced as a member of a minority identity group can create a repository of identity group–related information, skills, understanding, and points of view. Individuals can draw on this repository to inform and enrich their work. For example, Kali, a newspaper reporter, described how she drew on her understanding of Asian Americans to write novel and informative stories about topics such as investing: “You’re able to use your race to turn inside you and, like a jazz musician, riff with it, you know? And I think we need to do that more in our writing because that’s ... a way to explain ourselves to the mainstream. And I think a lot of the stuff I did ... resonated with people because it was told from within communities. This is where I’m very much using my race in the workplace. And I think you can use some of your own experiences for a lot of that” (P12, As). Vanessa, a news service editor, described drawing on her identity-related insights throughout her career in journalism: “I knew things were going on that never got reported... And if you would just go to those parts of town and ask questions, you’ll find out... That was always my motivation for getting in this industry. And throughout my career, I have imbued my career with that type of thing. I mean I covered race from practically day one. And everything else that I have covered outside of race, I brought race back to it” (P44, Af).

Identity Mobilization Tactics, Goals, and Resources. Our participants described engaging in four different identity mobilization tactics: crafting, challenging, confirming, and bridging. Figure 2 depicts how the tactics relate to work-related goals and identity resources. Specifically, each arrow emanating outward from the center of the circle depicts an identity mobilization tactic and indicates that the tactic (e.g., bridging) draws on an identity resource to facilitate a work-related goal (e.g., building relationships). Thus, Figure 2 highlights four different pathways, each
corresponding to an identity mobilization tactic, through which individuals can leverage their minority identity at work.

Below, we define each identity mobilization tactic, identify the work-related goal that motivates and triggers the use of the tactic, and identify the identity resource on which the tactic draws. We also provide representative examples. Within each quotation, we use underlining to highlight words that speak to the work-related goal and **boldface** to highlight words that speak to the identity resource.

First, the journalists sought to leverage their minority identity at work through **crafting**, in which they created or attempted to influence a deliverable related to minorities, such as by pitching the idea for a news story, writing an article, or providing feedback on a colleague’s draft. In their descriptions of crafting, the journalists indicated that they drew on the identity resource of identity-related insights. As depicted in Figure 2, they also indicated that their aim was to **produce quality work**—to contribute to the construction of high-caliber journalistic outputs. For instance, the journalists described drawing on their knowledge of and perspectives on their minority group and racial dynamics to generate novel story ideas, craft textured articles, and enhance the accuracy, sensitivity, and breadth of other journalists’ work by correcting errors, acting as an informant, and supporting race-related coverage.

Julia, an Asian American newspaper editor, described how, in her earlier work as a reporter, she and an African American colleague drew on their understanding of race as they sought to provide quality coverage of an election. The added texture of their articles—recognizing minority communities’ push for a larger voice through the election—was valued by their readers:

> There was a racially tinged election. . . . It just so happens that the two reporters who were covering the issue at the time were myself and an African American reporter. And I guess because of who we were, where we came from, and our backgrounds, we saw things differently than our white colleagues. I think we understood a little bit better the whole push for getting a larger voice. . . . That reporter and I did stories that hadn’t been done before, and I remember people in the community telling us, “Wow, it’s the first time our voices have ever been heard.” And I think that’s what we bring to the table; it’s not a bias. It’s just this ability to understand that we are different, and we do bring our differences to the table. (P13, As)

Julia described how she and her colleague used the identity resource of identity-related insights—the ways in which they saw the election “differently than our white colleagues” as a result of “who we were, where we came from, and our backgrounds”—to help them produce quality work (“stories that hadn’t been done before”).

James, an African American online reporter, described how he brought a somewhat different viewpoint, based on his race-related experiences, as he sought to write high-quality articles about racial differences in unemployment:

> I was among a relative handful of black journalists. You feel that pull, that call to, in a sense, explain your world. Or at least, looking at these issues that everyone’s looking at through your lens . . . which is a little different. . . . And those differences can be instructive . . . to all readers. I think it’s particularly pronounced in coverage of race or in coverage of black elected officials. . . . And [even] when I wrote about . . . the black/white unemployment rate. . . . We ended up on the front page. So, everybody liked it. [I] ended up actually doing a whole run of stories. (P46, Af)

James described how he used his identity-related insights—the ways in which he saw race-related issues through a “lens” that was “a little different” in ways that he felt “can be instructive . . . to all readers”—to help him produce quality work (“a whole run of stories,” including a front-page story that “everybody liked”).

Second, the journalists sought to leverage their minority identity at work through **challenging**, in which they conveyed the inaccuracy of assumptions about their minority group. In their descriptions of challenging, the journalists indicated that they drew on the identity resource of identity-related insights and, specifically, their awareness of erroneous generalizations about the group. As depicted in Figure 2, they indicated that their aim was to **construct a positive image**—to communicate a more desirable and/or accurate impression—of their minority group. The journalists who engaged in challenging were highly aware of common assumptions about the group and the ways in which those assumptions are inaccurate, and they drew on this knowledge as they attempted to correct other people’s mistaken assumptions.

In some cases, journalists engaged in challenging while speaking with colleagues or sources. In other cases, journalists engaged in challenging while creating a deliverable, such as by writing an article that debunked rather than reinforced stereotypes about their minority group. In the latter situation, journalists crafted a deliverable that was a conduit for challenging. Thus, it is possible for a person’s behavior to embody two identity mobilization tactics (e.g., crafting and challenging) simultaneously.

Sonali, a newspaper reporter, described how she drew on her awareness of stereotypes to increase the accuracy of her colleagues’ image of Indians:
Sonali described how she used the identity resource of identity-related insights—her awareness that some people hold erroneous stereotypes about Indian people. As depicted in Figure 2, she indicated that their aim was to construct a positive image of India. Similarly, Darren, a newspaper reporter, described how, in his earlier work as a reporter, he drew on his awareness of stereotypes to broaden his readers’ understanding of African Americans living in public housing:

When I [wrote about] housing, I strove to not include those stereotypes of [African Americans]… the mom with the kid on her hip and a cigarette hanging out of her mouth…. [Cheap, high-alcohol liquor] on the ground, and a bunch of guys rolling dice…. I worked really hard to try to find someone who actually needed a hand up as opposed to a handout, and just tried to write about their situation and how they ended up in public housing…. Looking for stories that were uplifting, stories that spoke to the problems within public housing, stories that looked at individual success stories, kids, and people who were looking to do better. (P43, Af)

Darren described how he used his identity-related insights—his awareness that people hold stereotypes of African Americans as drinking, gambling, and needing “a handout”—to try to construct a positive image in the sense of communicating a more accurate image of African Americans (as including people who “needed a hand up as opposed to a handout” and “who were looking to do better”).

Third, the journalists sought to leverage their minority identity at work through confirming, in which they deliberately behaved in ways that are consistent with stereotypes about their minority group. In their descriptions of confirming, the journalists indicated that they drew on the identity resource of stereotypes. As depicted in Figure 2, they indicated that their aim was to construct a positive image—to communicate a desirable and/or more accurate impression—of themselves. When one behaves in a way that confirms stereotypes of one’s identity group, this can result in one being seen as embodying those attributes.

Jessica, a magazine reporter, described confirming the stereotype of Asian Americans as hardworking: “The stereotype that you’re hardworking is not initially one that you want to break down, right? So you do it. You come in on the weekends and you come to work early and you leave later and you show that you’re committed in all those ways” (P9, As). Here Jessica described how she used the identity resource of stereotypes—the stereotype that Asian Americans are hardworking—to try to construct a positive image in the sense of communicating a desirable impression of herself as hardworking.

Mark, a newspaper editor, described how, in his earlier work as a reporter, he confirmed the stereotype of African Americans as unintelligent to be perceived as unintelligent himself, an image that helped him to obtain information from sources:

I used those stereotypes to my advantage…. One of my heroes… is Lieutenant Columbo from an old TV series…. And I used his persona as a reporter…. I was working in [a]… very affluent, very white community, and they assumed that I was an idiot. So I played that to the hilt. I kept asking questions and of course, I knew that their own white paternal [attitude would] take over and they would say, “Oh, let me explain that to you.” And that’s exactly what I wanted to hear…. And then the next day, [that information appears] on the front page of the paper…. And I used that all the time because you knew you were going to get it [be stereotyped] anyway. (P42, Af)

Mark described how he used the stereotype that African Americans are unintelligent, which he felt was beneficial in the context of interviewing white community members who held a “paternal” attitude toward African Americans, to try to construct a desirable image of himself as unintelligent. White community members who perceived Mark in this way took extra time to explain news events to him in detail, enabling Mark to write front-page stories that furthered his career.

Fourth, the journalists sought to leverage their minority identity at work through bridging, in which they made jokes or engaged in polite conversations with people from outside their minority group about perceived intergroup differences. In their descriptions of bridging, the journalists indicated that they drew on the identity resource of stereotypes and, specifically, the stereotype that their minority group is exotic or different in a way that is interesting, admirable, comfortable, or humorous (Dhingra 2007, Pittinsky 2012). As depicted in Figure 2, they indicated that their aim was to build relationships—to establish, strengthen, or preserve their connection with other people at work. Journalists used polite language and jokes to communicate the meaning of intergroup differences as positive (e.g., interesting or humorous) and as a safe topic of discussion—a bridge on which they could “meet” with colleagues to talk about race without triggering a high level of interpersonal
tension. This behavior can contribute to colleagues feeling connected despite—or even because of—racial differences, thus facilitating smoother interactions.

Jared, a newspaper reporter, described engaging with colleagues in humorous comments about the relative scarcity of Asian Americans in professional sports to “blend in” and make his colleagues feel comfortable despite their racial differences:

We always joke about Asians in sports. Whenever there’s an Asian [athlete] doing well in an event . . . my coworkers always say, “Hey, check this out. There’s an Asian guy doing well” . . . They just think it’s kind of funny that—I’ve talked about this with them, too—how there’s so few. It’s kind of like a running joke we have. . . . I think making it light-hearted . . . takes the seriousness out of it . . . and kind of makes the work go easier. . . . I think it shows that you’re secure with yourself and you’re secure with your background and that you’re comfortable laughing at yourself and knowing that . . . no one’s perfect, whether you’re black, white, Asian, Latino. . . . And I think this helps you blend in with everyone else. . . . It lets other people know that . . . they can be comfortable with you and they can joke about things like that with you and . . . not have to really watch everything they say. (P23, As)

Jared described how he used the identity resource of stereotypes—the stereotype that Asian Americans are unathletic, which his coworkers perceived as humorous—to help build relationships (by signaling that “they can be comfortable with you and they can joke about things like that with you and . . . not have to really watch everything they say.”)

Sydney, a television reporter, described how she preserved her positive connection with a colleague who made a joke about African Americans by calmly going along with the flow of their conversation:

I’d interviewed this guy [for television] . . . and afterwards I was in makeup telling my makeup artist a joke. And it wasn’t a racial joke. . . . It was a nice guy, and he said, well, let’s get together sometime. We’ll have a joke-telling dinner. . . . [At the dinner] I did a joke that had some reference to Italians. But no sooner had I told the Italian joke than he came back with a — joke. At that point, I didn’t take offense. I had opened that door. . . . It was like okay, we’re going there. That’s fine. . . . And . . . it wasn’t to get back at me. . . . It was a turning point in my consciousness about racial jokes. And so I just think that you can’t get upset. (P39, Af)

Sydney described how bridging—her response to her colleague’s stereotype or assumption that using the n-word in joking about African Americans is comfortable rather than offensive—helped her to build relationships in the sense of sustaining her connection with a colleague whom she viewed as “a nice guy.”

We provide additional examples of the identity mobilization tactics in Table 2.

The Identity Mobilization Process over Time
Having described and illustrated the relationships between work-related goals, identity resources, and identity mobilization tactics, we continue to build our conceptual framework (see Figure 1) by addressing the question of how the identity mobilization process is sustained or disrupted over time, emphasizing the role of two factors: identity mobilization tensions and perceived goal progress. First, we describe the tensions and present illustrative data. We build theory on the origins of the tensions and how and why the tensions can disrupt the identity mobilization process by reducing the likelihood of initial or subsequent identity mobilization. Second, we discuss how perceived goal progress following identity mobilization affects the likelihood of subsequent identity mobilization.

How Tensions Disrupt the Identity Mobilization Process. Importantly, our interviews revealed that the process of identity mobilization—rather than being straightforward and solely beneficial—is complex and can be fraught with tension. Specifically, the journalists described four different sources of stress and strain that they experienced when they considered using or used the identity mobilization tactics. We label these sources of stress and strain as “identity mobilization tensions,” drawing from Kreiner et al. (2006). The notion from Kreiner et al. (2006) of an identity tension also refers to identity-related stress and strain but arises from the interaction between personal and social identities, which differs from our focus. As shown in Figure 2, each identity mobilization tactic (depicted as an arrow) was associated with one or more tensions (depicted as the shaded area encompassing the arrow). For example, both the confirming and bridging tactics were associated with the perpetuation tension. Our interviews suggested that experiencing these tensions reduces the likelihood that a minority individual will engage in initial or subsequent identity mobilization, thus disrupting the identity mobilization process, as we describe below.

Identity Mobilization Tensions. First, the pigeonholing tension refers to concern or ambivalence (defined as a mixture of positive and negative thoughts or feelings; Ashforth et al. 2014) around the possibility that identity mobilization—and specifically crafting—will cause one to be viewed in an excessively narrow way: as being capable of doing only minority group-related work. Martha, a television reporter,
Table 2. Identity Mobilization Tactics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant, sex, race</th>
<th>Identity mobilization tactic</th>
<th>Illustrative example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P19, F, As</td>
<td>Crafting</td>
<td>Described pitching news stories drawing on her knowledge of developments in South Asia: “Tens of thousands of people were being displaced at the border. People...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P39, F, Af</td>
<td>Crafting</td>
<td>Described conducting interviews that drew on her experiences as an African American: “I interviewed...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P30, F, As</td>
<td>Crafting</td>
<td>Described sharing her knowledge related to Asian Americans with colleagues: “I was the only Asian in the newsroom. And I remember during Chinese New Year...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P41, M, Af</td>
<td>Crafting</td>
<td>Described writing articles that drew on his own experiences as an African American: “As black journalists specifically, there’s a responsibility and a role for us as ambassadors and missionaries, as people who can bring in ideas and context and perspective that otherwise might be missing from our mainstream media and to insist that those stories are told...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8, M, As</td>
<td>Crafting</td>
<td>Described pitching news stories drawing on his insights related to Asian Americans: “This is Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, and we wanted to do some programming on that...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P13, F, As</td>
<td>Challenging</td>
<td>Described challenging a community member who wrongly assumed that she was an immigrant based on her phenotypical appearance as a racial minority: “A lawyer...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P45, F, Af</td>
<td>Challenging</td>
<td>Described challenging the stereotype that black voters should support black politicians: “After...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4, F, As</td>
<td>Challenging</td>
<td>Described challenging the stereotype that Asian Americans are good at math and science: “I mean the stereotype of Asians was about how they’re always good in math and in the sciences, and I always tell them, 'No, no, no...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P46, M, Af</td>
<td>Challenging</td>
<td>Described challenging the stereotype that African Americans are less intelligent than whites: “I remember getting a bunch of email [from readers responding to an article I wrote]...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P21, F, As</td>
<td>Challenging</td>
<td>Described challenging the stereotype that Asian Americans know everything about Asia: “There were a few times...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7, M, As</td>
<td>Confirming</td>
<td>Described confirming the “model minority” stereotype of Asian Americans: “On the plus side, I think if you draw on some of the stereotypes you may be seen as loyal, hardworking, methodical...&quot;</td>
</tr>
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described how her concern that she would be pigeonholed reduced her willingness to engage in crafting:

[My managers] assumed if something happened down in Chinatown, or if there was an issue that involved our race, that I was the one who should go cover it. And probably more to my detriment than anyone else, I refused to because I didn’t want to get stereotyped into that. I was so hell-bent to cover politics. That’s what I wanted to do. (P5, As)

Similarly, Ella, a newspaper reporter, described how the pigeonholing tension reduced her willingness to engage in crafting:

I never had a beat where it was your job ... to write about people of color. But what would happen is that [if] there was a story involving something that was central to people of color they would give it to me. ... I remember ... having a conversation with this editor saying, “I feel like my skillset is being reduced to race and I don’t like how that feels”. ... I remember this particular editor saying, “But you can do it better than most.” And me saying, “I’m tired and I’m not doing this anymore.” (P47, Af)

Second, the activism tension refers to concern or ambivalence around the possibility that identity mobilization—and specifically challenging—will cause one to be perceived as disruptive or offensive. Wendy,
a newspaper reporter, described how her concern that colleagues would perceive her as a disruptive “activist” reduced her willingness to engage in challenging:

I am an Asian American journalist, but I don’t wear a big button everywhere I go. . . . [Race is] not something I feel like I have to put in their face and talk about every conversation. . . . I think if you do that, you marginalize yourself. . . . Journalists I work with who are much more active and vocal about [race] . . . get kind of branded . . . as this activist. (P10, As)

James, the online reporter from our earlier discussion of crafting, described how his concern around offending colleagues made him hesitant to engage in challenging them as individuals:

[Pointing out stereotypical coverage], that’s one of the hardest things to do . . . because it’s something like challenging someone’s work. . . . [If] you say . . . [That person’s] story just missed the mark on A or B, “they’re on the defensive, right?” Periodically over the year, a group of black journalists will go on a “date” with the top editor to talk more generally about coverage and stuff that we thought was stereotypical or not sophisticated enough. Most of those kind of conversations suffer from a lack of specificity. . . . And so, you end up having a general conversation. And it almost invariably goes nowhere. Like everyone agrees, “We don’t want bad stories. We don’t want shallow stories.” . . . So I find it difficult to make headway (P46, Af).

Third, the 

objectivity tension

refers to concern or ambivalence around the possibility that identity mobilization—and specifically crafting—will cause one to be perceived as positively biased toward other members of one’s minority group rather than as an objective professional. Sonali, the newspaper reporter from our earlier discussion of challenging, described how his concern around offending colleagues made him hesitant to engage in challenging them as individuals:

If I go into a room [and] there’s nothing but white people, I kind of will be like the cool black person, might throw a joke out there or say something funny that gets people laughing. . . . That’s playing into the stereotype, and I kind of hate it sometimes, but it makes [them] feel more relaxed when I do it . . . even though it’s kind of giving them what they want. (P40, Af)

Pamela, a television producer, described her ambivalence around confirming the stereotype that African Americans are cool and funny:

I do feel a little bit more aggressive about approaching the story because I feel like they listen to you a little bit more about your insights and stuff. . . . I accuse them of pigeonholing me, but sometimes perhaps it’s my own doing. . . . I feel like they automatically do pigeonhole me regardless of my actions, but then I feel like I sometimes advance it further. (P25, As)

We provide additional examples of the identity mobilization tensions in Table 3.

Origins of the Identity Mobilization Tensions. We theorize that all four identity mobilization tensions reflect an underlying uneasiness that identity mobilization will invoke or reinforce cultural stereotypes related to one’s minority group. Dominant group members are believed to hold stereotypes about lower-status groups that serve to justify and maintain the existing social hierarchy and power structure (Fiske et al. 2002). We argue that the pigeonholing, activism, and objectivity tensions reflect concern about invoking and being subjected to negative stereotypes (about narrow competence, disruptiveness, and a lack of objectivity) that may be faced by minority cultural identity groups in general. In contrast, the perpetuation tension reflects concern about reinforcing stereotypes that are specific to one’s minority identity group.

First, cultural minorities may generally be stereotyped as less competent than the dominant group. Racial minority groups, for example, are stereotyped as less competent than whites (Bergsieker et al. 2010).
Even Asian Americans, who are characterized as hardworking “model minorities,” are also stereotyped as lacking in qualities that are important for career advancement in many fields, including assertiveness, leadership qualities, and communication skills (Hyun 2005, Burris et al. 2013, Tran and Lee 2014). We propose that the pigeonholing tension originates from such negative stereotypes about the competence of minority groups. Stereotypes have a strong tendency to persist even in the face of disconfirming evidence (Lyons and Kashima 2003). For example, perceivers can engage in fenc ing or subtyping, in which individuals who defy the stereotype are coded as special exceptions to a rule that still holds (Kunda and Oleson 1995). As a result of such fencing, a minority journalist who crafts a compelling article about his or her minority group may be acknowledged as competent, but colleagues may perceive that competence as restricted to minority group–related work, thus maintaining the stereotype that minorities are less competent overall than dominant group members. The tendency to assume that minority employees are only narrowly competent to do work related to their own, marginalized communities has been documented in settings such as retail and banking (Ely and Thomas 2001, Bendick et al. 2010). This tendency is also related to typecasting, in which employers making hiring decisions rely heavily on a job candidate’s past experience in a specialized domain, which can reduce the risk of hiring an unqualified candidate but also underestimate the full range of what individuals are capable of doing in the future (Faulkner 1983, Mainiero 1990, Zuckerman et al. 2003).

Second, we propose that the activism tension may originate from a stereotype of cultural minorities as disruptors. Lower-status group members have a long history of resisting domination and seeking to change the existing power structure (Scott 1990, Satell and Popovic 2017). Such efforts by racial minorities (e.g., protests associated with the Civil Rights Movement, the Asian American Movement, and the Black Lives Matter movement) are well known. Thus, it is possible that a cultural image or stereotype exists of minorities as disruptors or “rabble-rousers” (Branscombe and Ellemers 1998, Block et al. 2011), which could undermine their pursuit of work-related goals.

Third, the objectivity tension may be highly visible in journalism, a professional context that emphasizes objectivity as a foundational tenet (American Press Institute 2017b). We argue that the objectivity tension may originate from the implications of the disruptor stereotype for social competition. When people compete for scarce resources, they tend to demonstrate especially high levels of in-group favoritism (Sherif 1966, Brief et al. 2005). Thus, cultural minorities, if they are stereotyped as disruptors who seek to bring about social change and threaten the existing distribution of resources, may be especially vulnerable to the perception that they are positively biased toward members of their own minority group and using their work platform to advance this agenda. As such, the objectivity and activism tensions may be related.

Finally, the perpetuation tension captures concern or ambivalence around the possibility that engaging in the identity mobilization tactics of confirming or bridging will reinforce stereotypes specific to one’s minority group. Although Asian Americans are associated with some positive stereotypes and African Americans are associated with mostly negative stereotypes, both Asian American and African American journalists described experiencing the perpetuation tension, revealing that both groups (not just African Americans) worry about reinforcing racial stereotypes. Further, both Asian American and African American journalists described engaging in confirming and bridging, revealing that both groups (not just Asian Americans) used tactics that draw on stereotypes as an identity resource.

These commonalities notwithstanding, we theorize that Asian Americans and African Americans may experience confirming, bridging and the perpetuation tension that these tactics can produce, in somewhat different ways. When we asked African American participants if they had ever engaged in confirming or bridging, the subset who answered “no” tended to be strikingly emphatic rather than ambivalent. For example, when Rachel, the newspaper reporter from our earlier discussion of the stereotype that African Americans are low in competence, was asked if she had ever confirmed racial stereotypes, she replied, “Never. Never. Never. Ever. . . . Asians can play into the stereotypes of being super nerdy and super smart or being super docile. . . . [But for] black people, all of the stereotypes are negative” (P34, Af). When James, the online reporter from our earlier discussions of crafting and the activism tension, was asked if he had ever engaged in race-related joking with colleagues (a form of bridging), he said, “I don’t go down that road. I don’t do the racial jokes thing. I think people sense that. So they don’t. Even if they would tell those jokes, they won’t go there with me” (P46, Af). Violet, a newspaper reporter, stated, “My face will tell [that I don’t engage in race-related joking] before I speak it. . . . That’s just not something that I could see myself going along with” (P35, Af).

We argue that these emphatic responses reflect the limited existence of positive stereotypes about African Americans and professionalism. Our Asian American participants described facing both negative (e.g., passivity) and positive (e.g., model minority)
### Table 3. Identity Mobilization Tensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant, sex, race</th>
<th>Identity mobilization tension</th>
<th>Illustrative example</th>
<th>Identity mobilization tactic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P31, F, As</td>
<td>Pigeonholing tension</td>
<td>Described how colleagues thought all her story ideas were about Asians: “I said . . . to my editors, ‘No, these stories were given to me.’ Because sometimes someone will pitch an idea and you just end up taking it, to put it together . . . I was pretty upset by it.”</td>
<td>Crafting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P46, M, Af</td>
<td>Pigeonholing tension</td>
<td>Described feelings of concern around pigeonholing: “Black journalists hated sometimes being pigeonholed . . . You didn’t necessarily want to write about race. Because you wanted to write about what everybody else writes about. And it gets back [to] the reward system . . . White colleagues [didn’t value] these stories as much.”</td>
<td>Crafting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P25, F, As</td>
<td>Pigeonholing tension</td>
<td>Described feeling ambivalent about contributing to stories related to Asia: “I think a lot of times it works for you because it’s nice to [be] someone that people turn to. A lot of times it works against you because it sort of pigeonholes you as, okay, she’s just the expert in this one field. So it’s sort of double-sided, I guess.”</td>
<td>Crafting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P42, M, Af</td>
<td>Pigeonholing tension</td>
<td>Described how his editors pigeonholed him as “the ghetto reporter”: “I was the only African American . . . in the entire newsroom. And I remember there was some crime happening . . . in the projects. And they wanted me to tag along with a white reporter for [the white reporter’s] safety.”</td>
<td>Crafting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P24, F, As</td>
<td>Pigeonholing tension</td>
<td>Described her ambivalence about writing stories related to Asian Americans: “I can best serve these interests in the long run by really not being so Asian American . . . I need to not be thought of as the ethnic . . . reporter . . . I really think that my credibility in the long run will be through doing . . . very non identity politics centered type stories.”</td>
<td>Crafting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P29, M, As</td>
<td>Activism tension</td>
<td>Described how managers reprimanded him for challenging colleagues’ assumptions about racial minorities, causing him tremendous stress: “I thought I was going to lose my job, because I was so angry about things, and a lot of it had to do with this racial thing.”</td>
<td>Challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P38, F, Af</td>
<td>Activism tension</td>
<td>Stated that she sometimes withholds critiques of her colleagues’ stereotypical comments to avoid upsetting them: “My mentor in the newsroom . . . would say, ‘I think we need to sit on this [critique] because you’re trying to get . . . a promotion or a move to a different section . . . You don’t want to piss anybody off.’”</td>
<td>Challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P34, F, Af</td>
<td>Activism tension</td>
<td>Described why she does not challenge her colleagues who hold stereotypes about African Americans: “I don’t have those conversations because . . . you get even more marginalized in the newsroom . . . when you address those things. I’ve always kept my head down and . . . it has allowed me to at least maintain in the newsroom. A lot of other people who actually stand up and act like entitled white people in the newsroom, they are blocked. They don’t get the promotions . . . and I would say it’s because they speak up too much.”</td>
<td>Challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant, sex, race</td>
<td>Identity mobilization tension</td>
<td>Illustrative example</td>
<td>Identity mobilization tactic</td>
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<tr>
<td>P8, M, As</td>
<td>Activism tension</td>
<td>Stated that he avoids being “in your face” in discussing race with colleagues at work, explaining that “it’s hard because it’s a work environment. It’s not necessarily a place to push your personal agenda.”</td>
<td>Challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P45, F, Af</td>
<td>Activism tension</td>
<td>Stated that “sometimes I pick my battles” in pointing out colleagues’ stereotypical assumptions, explaining that “there was only one time in my career I was really outspoken... I think it hurt me at that newspaper.”</td>
<td>Challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P18, F, As</td>
<td>Objectivity tension</td>
<td>Described how an editor questioned her objectivity around Asian Americans, asking, “Are you sure you can cover this fairly without being a cheerleader?... I said, ‘People in the community are actually afraid that I’ll have this job because [white reporters] will do the festival stories, all Asians are alike, there’s no tensions. I put in my stories the inside jokes that Asians have about other Asians, that immigrants have about other immigrants, and things like that.’ And she didn’t realize that... I wish that I had said to her, ‘Do you ask white reporters this when they cover politicians?’”</td>
<td>Crafting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P32, F, Af</td>
<td>Objectivity tension</td>
<td>Stated that many editors have told her, “You can’t be objective about this subject because you’re African American.” Her own view is that “one of the biggest misconceptions about black journalists is that we can’t be objective about our own community. And I think that is something that is really unfair because you can make that same argument about white journalists... I can have a point of view personally, and still be objective.”</td>
<td>Crafting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P31, F, As</td>
<td>Objectivity tension</td>
<td>Described how managers’ concerns about her objectivity lead her to withhold some of her story ideas: “Sometimes it’s very hard for me to pitch [Asian American] stories... I’m trying to [figure out] how do I pitch this so that they don’t think I’m just doing this because these are my friends?... I think what’s hardest, sometimes I censor myself. Which is not good. I’m trying to work on that.”</td>
<td>Crafting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P39, F, Af</td>
<td>Objectivity tension</td>
<td>Described how an editor questioned her objectivity during a job interview: “He asked me... if I got an assignment to go to Harlem to cover something that had to do with one of my friends and that it was negative... would you always be able to tell the truth about whatever you found?... That was a ridiculous question to ask if I could tell the truth, when I was as qualified as anybody to report on anything.”</td>
<td>Crafting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P41, M, Af</td>
<td>Objectivity tension</td>
<td>Described how some colleagues and readers question the objectivity of racial minority journalists who write about race: “Very often other people in the industry [attempted] to portray myself or other... reporters of color covering this as activists instead of reporters... attack me personally, rather than dealing with the work... Among some white readers there has become a callous or a hesitance to trust my reporting... I think it’s a false binary... One core tenet of both journalism and activism is that both are means in which the person participating seeks to tell the truth in public.”</td>
<td>Crafting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
stereotypes, whereas our African American participants primarily described facing negative stereotypes about professionalism, such as not being competent, hardworking, or punctual. As a result, African Americans may be less able or willing than Asian Americans to engage in confirming or bridging, which draw on stereotypes as a resource but may also reinforce the full set of stereotypes about one’s minority group. Some African Americans, such as Rachel, believe that no positive stereotypes exist about African Americans, whereas others may believe that the risk of reinforcing all the stereotypes about African Americans outweighs the potential benefits of leveraging positive stereotypes. In sum, although a few of our African American participants (e.g., Mark and Sydney) used the confirming and bridging tactics, most were wary of or disinclined toward these tactics, suggesting that the overall negativity of work-related stereotypes made the perpetuation tension more salient for African American versus Asian American journalists.

**Tensions as an Impediment to Identity Mobilization.** As described earlier, each identity mobilization tension captures concern that engaging in identity mobilization will result in an undesirable outcome, such as being perceived negatively at work. We theorize that the greater the journalist’s concern (i.e., the greater the journalist’s experience of the identity mobilization tensions), the less likely the journalist is to engage in initial identity mobilization, as shown in Figure 1. This relationship is consistent with research on expectancy theory, which finds that the decision to engage or not engage in a behavior is strongly influenced by the perceived desirability of expected outcomes (Vroom 1964, Porter and Lawler 1968, Donovan 2001).
Being perceived negatively at work is anathema for most individuals, who seek to be perceived positively by others, thus validating their self-worth (Crocker and Park 2004, Ely and Roberts 2008).

If a minority journalist has previously engaged in identity mobilization—such as by publishing an article about the journalist’s minority group (crafting) or pointing out stereotypical assumptions about the group (challenging)—this increases the visibility or salience to other people of the journalist’s minority identity. This greater identity salience, in turn, increases the likelihood that the journalist will feel at risk for being negatively stereotyped (Roberts et al. 2008) in accordance with the identity mobilization tensions (e.g., as only narrowly competent, disruptive or offensive, or lacking in objectivity). As such, we theorize that engaging in initial identity mobilization can actually increase identity mobilization tensions—reducing the likelihood of subsequent identity mobilization, as indicated in Figure 1—unless these risks are outweighed by anticipated gains in terms of goal progress, as we discuss below.

**How Perceived Goal Progress Sustains or Disrupts Identity Mobilization.** Once an individual has engaged in an identity mobilization tactic, perceived goal progress—the individual’s perception of the extent to which the tactic resulted in progress toward the intended work-related goal—is likely to play a critically important role in influencing the individual’s subsequent behavior. Specifically, we theorize that individuals who perceive that they made more (vs. less) goal progress are more likely to use the same tactic in the future (see Figure 1) based on the expectation of similar outcomes. Greater perceived goal progress is also likely to boost self-efficacy around enacting the tactic, which enhances motivation (Bandura 1997, Stajkovic and Luthans 1998, Amabile and Kramer 2011).

To illustrate, James, the online reporter from our discussion of crafting, described how his first article on racial differences in unemployment—after he overcame his editor’s initial hesitation around the value of the story—turned out to be a thought-provoking piece that “everybody liked” and that “ended up on the front page.” This progress toward James’ goal of producing quality work appeared to encourage him to engage in further crafting as he “ended up doing . . . a whole run of stories” on the same topic (P46, Af). Jared, the newspaper reporter from our discussion of bridging, described how his engagement in joking about Asian Americans in sports helped him to make his colleagues feel comfortable despite their racial differences and to strengthen his relationships with them. This progress toward his goal of building relationships appeared to encourage him to engage in further bridging as he and his colleagues continued to make humorous comments about Asian Americans in sports as “a running joke” (P23, As).

Conversely, some participants perceived less progress toward their intended goal following identity mobilization, reducing their later use of the tactic. Hannah, a newspaper editor, described how she once challenged a colleague who made stereotypical remarks. Her attempt at challenging did not appear to succeed in changing her colleague’s stereotypical image of African Americans. Instead, her colleague “threatened” her, and her supervisor “brushed off” her concern. Given this experience, Hannah stated that she now refrains at times from challenging: “Where I see [stereotypical comments], I feel like I probably should step in and say some things, but I just don’t . . . . I really do pick my battles. . . . My gut tells me it wouldn’t be taken too seriously” (P33, Af). Elaine, a newspaper reporter, described how the feedback that she and a fellow Asian American colleague provided on another journalist’s draft article—a type of crafting—was rejected, resulting in little or no progress in terms of contributing to the production of quality work. As a consequence, Elaine’s colleague became less willing to engage in subsequent crafting of this type:

> They put this [offensive racial term] in a story . . . and it wasn’t something that added relevance. They could have just cut that part of the quote out. And then I complained about it, and I got . . . [another Asian American] reporter to talk to the national desk about it. And she found out that the copy desk had actually flagged it and said, “We think this is problematic,” but the editors were like, “It’s fine.” And then nothing happened . . . . She’s kind of stopped complaining that much . . . and I can see now why because nothing ever happens of it. (P18, As)

**Discussion**

Our conceptual framework lays a foundation for future studies to test and develop further theory on identity mobilization—the steps through which individuals can deliberately draw on or leverage their minority cultural identity as a source of advantage at work and how this process is sustained or disrupted over time. Our findings provide insight into how minority individuals experience the business case for diversity, including the potential advantages that they perceive to be associated with their minority identity (identity resources), the actions through which they can draw on these identity resources in pursuit of work-related goals (identity mobilization tactics), and their experience of identity mobilization tensions that may reduce their willingness to leverage their minority identity at work. In doing so, our framework makes significant contributions to
research on identity and diversity in organizations as well as positive organizational scholarship.

**Theoretical Contributions**

Our framework contributes in two major ways to research on identity in work settings. First, our focus on identity mobilization and identity resources offers a different lens for understanding the motivations behind and nature of identity work in organizations. Research on identity negotiation (e.g., Swann 1987, Swann et al. 2000), identity work (e.g., Snow and Anderson 1987, Ashforth and Kreiner 1999, Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003), Kreiner et al. (2006), interpersonal sensemaking (e.g., Wrzesniewski et al. 2003), and identity management (e.g., Ibarra 1999, Roberts 2005, Roberts and Creary 2013) all emphasize the active role that individuals play in ensuring that their identities are known and understood in accordance with their desired selves. Despite this important work on identity construction, we have a limited understanding of how individuals can draw on identity as a resource—a human asset that can be used to facilitate work-related goals beyond identity formation. Our model connects identity mobilization tactics to specific identity resources and three work-related goals that notably include producing quality work. Because the goals are interrelated, each tactic can facilitate the production of quality work. Thus, rather than emphasizing how a minority individual’s identity management can detract from the individual’s work (Raghuram 2013), our framework reveals how identity management is integral to the doing of work—how it can be motivated by the desire to enhance work quality and can result in improved work outputs.

Second, we provide a novel approach for understanding how individuals manage their lower-status identities at work. Prior research has focused on identity work tactics that individuals employ to cope with the challenges of devaluation, such as managing a dirty or stigmatized occupational identity (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999); a cultural identity with negative connotations in a professional context, such as being female in science or African American in medicine (Roberts et al. 2008); and invisible stigmas (Clair et al. 2005). Our research complements the focus of past research on the liability side of being a minority at work (Davidson et al. 2016) by unveiling how individuals can use lower-status identities in positive ways, namely the pathways through which individuals can leverage the asset side of a minority identity.

Yet, taking this asset view does not negate the reality of the liability view. Minority individuals must still manage identity devaluation or stigma (Crocker et al. 1998). Identity mobilization could even be viewed as the management of stigma, with individuals transforming aspects of a devalued identity into a positive feature rather than downplaying or hiding the identity. Confirming and challenging, two of our identity mobilization tactics, relate to behavior noted in earlier work; confirming relates to Roberts’ (2005) theoretical discussion of capitalizing on social identity stereotypes, and challenging relates to Creed and Scully’s (2000) notion of educative encounters. Our findings underscore the importance of these behaviors to minority individuals. Then our framework significantly extends our understanding of these and additional identity-related behaviors by situating them in a process model that reveals how these behaviors can facilitate work-related goals but only when individuals possess the requisite identity resources and ability to navigate tensions.

Our analysis of positive identity dynamics contributes to the growing field of positive organizational scholarship (Cameron et al. 2003, Roberts 2006). Heretofore, discussions of diversity within positive organizational scholarship have been limited. Further, although scholars have called for more research on positive identities at work, including those that are complementary within an individual (Dutton et al. 2010), little is known about creating synergies between an individual’s multiple identities (Ramarajan 2014). Our framework shows how individuals can use their minority identity as a resource in attaining important work-related goals, thus linking their cultural and work identities. As such, it creates a conceptual bridge between diversity, identity, and positive organizational scholarship.

Our paper also advances research on the business case for diversity, a highly influential and enduring perspective that has been criticized for framing minority employees as targets to be managed rather than as agentic actors (Dye and Golnaraghi 2017). The business case treats employees as economic resources (Prasad and Mills 1997) and implicitly assumes that minority employees, upon being hired, will automatically contribute their distinctive strengths to their organizations without considering the agency of those employees. Our findings challenge this core assumption by illustrating the agency and varied choices of employees around leveraging their minority identity as a resource to further the production of quality work and other work-related goals. For example, a minority journalist with identity-related insights may or may not embrace an opportunity to engage in crafting an innovative newspaper article about a minority community that increases the organization’s legitimacy with minority customers. It is precisely this type of quality work that the business case describes as a major organizational benefit of workforce diversity. Our framework provides insight into such micro-decisions, which are the basis of organizations capitalizing (vs. losing out) on the benefits of diversity.
Put another way, our model helps bring to light how employee diversity is but a potential resource that must be acted on to become a resource in use—that the movement from a diverse workforce to the benefits of diversity must be enacted and fundamentally requires enactment by minority employees. As such, this paper provides a novel illustration of resourcing theory (Feldman 2004) and addresses the call for studies to identify the microactions needed to convert dormant resources into desired outcomes (Feldman and Worline 2012).

Finally, we extend research on stereotype content. Prior work (e.g., Cuddy et al. 2011, Fiske 2018) suggests that African Americans and Asian Americans contend with starkly different stereotypes in terms of broad dimensions of warmth and competence. This research is grounded in surveys asking respondents how society views a variety of groups, eliciting stereotypes that are general and decontextualized. By investigating the lived experiences of racial minorities in their work context, our study surfaces compelling work-related stereotypes (of narrow competence to do minority group–related work, disruptiveness, and a lack of professional objectivity). These professional stereotypes are more nuanced than overall warmth and competence and are faced by African Americans and Asian Americans alike.

**Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research**

In this section, we discuss several strengths and limitations of the current research as well as promising directions for future research on identity mobilization. One strength of our study was the inclusion of two racial minority groups who face somewhat different cultural stereotypes. Our confidence in our findings was strengthened by the fact that Asian American and African American participants described largely similar experiences around identity mobilization. Additional research should examine the extent to which our framework can be generalized to other minority cultural identity groups. Minority groups may differ in the identity mobilization tactics they use most often or in the identity mobilization tensions they experience most intensely as a function of the group-specific stereotypes they face. For example, women, who are stereotyped as low in competence and highly emotional (Plant et al. 2000) and who are expected to be highly communal (Carli and Eagly 2007), may experience especially high levels of both the pigeonholing and activism tensions. Muslims, who are stereotyped as violent and untrustworthy (Sides and Gross 2013), may experience especially high levels of the activism and objectivity tensions.

Studies may also examine the extent to which our framework generalizes to occupations other than journalism. Different identity mobilization tactics may be especially important to individuals, depending on the job they hold. Crafting, which is geared toward producing high-quality analytical outputs, may be especially beneficial for consultants, marketing analysts, and other knowledge workers whose analyses include minority customers or constituents. Bridging may facilitate relational work, such as customer service. Confirming and challenging may be especially helpful in fields in which image concerns prevail, such as politics and entertainment.

We note that our framework may not be exhaustive. Research using other samples may reveal additional resources, goals, tactics, or tensions involved in the identity mobilization process. For example, identity resources could include enhanced mindfulness in social interactions (Frable et al. 1990) or resilience (Sellers et al. 2006), which are associated with the experience of marginalization. Longitudinal research designs may be ideal for testing and building on our emergent framework. Although our interviews captured accounts of participants’ entire careers, these accounts were retrospective and collected at one point in time. It is possible that our data missed important dynamics around identity mobilization that occur over time but that were outside of our participants’ ability to observe and report.

Future research should also examine how managers and organizations can welcome identity mobilization in generative ways and alleviate identity mobilization tensions. Some of our participants’ managers appreciated the incorporation of race-related insights into journalistic work, whereas other managers questioned the journalists’ objectivity, contributing to the objectivity tension. Such actions taken by managers as well as contextual factors, such as organizational pressures to include nonwork identities, inclusive climates, and workgroup diversity perspectives (Ely and Thomas 2001, Nishii 2013, Ramarajan and Reid 2013), may have a powerful impact on the likelihood of successful identity mobilization.

Finally, our research did not systematically explore the implications of multiple identities for identity mobilization. When an individual possesses multiple, simultaneously salient minority cultural identities, this simultaneity (Holvino 2010) may offer additional opportunities to draw on identity resources (e.g., a broader range of meanings around identities or the intersection of identities). Although our study and participants’ descriptions focused primarily on the mobilization of racial identity, a few participants noted how the simultaneity of their race, gender, and age created unique opportunities for identity mobilization. Fiona, a newspaper reporter, perceived that she was stereotyped as adding a feeling of variety or spice to the workplace based on her simultaneous identities as young, “ethnic,” and female. She described
confirming this stereotype by placing a candy jar on her desk, which helped her to establish “a presence” and caused coworkers to “think fondly” of her (P24, As). In addition, each salient minority identity may be accompanied by identity mobilization tensions. Jessica, a magazine reporter, stated that she was interested in gender issues and had wanted to draw on her gender identity–related insights to craft stories. However, she chose not to write any articles related to gender because of the pigeonholing tension. Instead, Jessica wrote articles on topics such as job cuts and stated: “I don’t think those were my best stories at the end of the day or the things that I’m most proud of. . . . It probably turned out that way because those weren’t the things I was most passionate about to begin with” (P9, As). It would be valuable to explore the antecedents and outcomes of such decisions about which identity or identities to mobilize at work in the case of multiple minority identities.

Relatedly, we note that intersecting identities heightened identity mobilization tensions for several journalists. Mark, the newspaper editor who described confirming (with sources) the stereotype that African Americans are unintelligent, said that he avoids confirming the stereotype that African American men are threatening (Wilson et al. 2017): “I have a smile on my face all day. [My colleagues] can come up and talk to me. I’m not the angry black guy in the corner” (P42, Af). Similarly, Matthew, the visual journalist from our earlier discussion of the stereotype that African Americans are low in competence, described how being a large African American man with a shaved head increased his experience of the activism and perpetuation tensions and influenced his approach to challenging: “I don’t [call people out vehemently about racial stereotypes] because that’s what they expect me to do. . . . I try to carry myself with a certain level of class. I’ve been cursed at in the newsroom before and I just . . . walked away. . . . I don’t ever want to give anyone the satisfaction of being able to say he’s a [big] angry black man and I’m afraid to work with him” (P37, Af). Such comments draw attention to individuals’ mindfulness of their physical presence and attributes when they consider engaging in identity mobilization. Future research could examine how minority individuals’ experience of the physical form of their intersecting identities affects their choices around identity mobilization.

**Practical Implications and Conclusion**

Our framework highlights the proactive, agentic role that minority individuals can take in creating value from diversity in organizations. This “bottom-up” approach to managing diversity empowers individuals to leverage existing resources (i.e., draw on an identity that they already possess) rather than encouraging them to focus more narrowly on gaining other people’s support (e.g., through networking) to make progress toward their work-related goals. By using the identity mobilization tactics and identity resources in our framework, minority individuals may be able to maximize their own ability to achieve work-related goals and contribute to their organizations.

Yet we caution against the implication that the onus of managing diversity should rest on the shoulders of those who are marginalized and often less empowered rather than on the systems that require individuals to navigate disadvantage. Several participants who engaged in tactics such as crafting and challenging described the process of educating and convincing others as draining. One participant remarked that she had grown tired of giving colleagues feedback about stereotypical content in their work and wished that she didn’t feel the duty to take it on. Another participant encountered strong criticism and interpersonal conflict after challenging his colleagues’ assumptions about racial minorities. As a result, he experienced anger, stress, and burnout.

The identity mobilization process we describe is likely to benefit organizations through the production of innovative, high-quality work; the development of positive relationships that can increase firm-wide social capital; and the construction of positive images that can reflect favorably on the organization. Thus, our individual-level framework has important implications for organizations. Organizational leaders who understand the minority experience of the business case for diversity—from the wide range of distinctive contributions that minorities can make to the concerns that discourage them from making such contributions—may be able to create more supportive contexts for identity mobilization. In particular, our framework may help leaders to review the extent to which their organizational systems encourage or inhibit identity mobilization. For instance, hiring managers who or training managers to appreciate identity-related insights may encourage crafting. Broad rather than narrow career opportunities for employees who work with minority customers and constituents may reduce the pigeonholing tension. Practices that make challenging truly safe may reduce the activism tension. By working together in mobilizing identity as a resource, individuals and organizations may capitalize more fully on the value-added promise of diversity.

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Endnote

1 Although this paper builds theory on mobilizing a minority cultural identity, at times we use the terms “minority identity” and “minority group” as shorthand for “minority cultural identity” and “minority cultural identity group,” respectively, for the sake of concision.

References


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Accusations of Acting White: Links to Black Students’ Racial Identity and Mental Health

Myles I. Durkee¹ and Joanna L. Williams²

Abstract
The acting White accusation is a negative insult that many Black students encounter from peers, and research suggests that these experiences may be potentially detrimental to psychosocial outcomes. The current study examined the relationship between specific aspects of the acting White accusation (e.g., frequency of occurrence, induced discomfort), racial/ethnic identity (e.g., racial regard, exploration, commitment), and mental health (e.g., depressive symptoms, anxiety, emotional stress). Data from a sample of Black college students (n = 198) were evaluated using both variable-centered and person-centered analytical techniques. Results indicated that frequency of the accusation predicted lower racial/ethnic identity and more severe mental health symptoms, whereas the level of discomfort predicted higher racial/ethnic identification. Latent class analysis revealed that perceived experiences with the acting White accusation were represented by four distinct profiles, three of which differed significantly in dimensions of racial/ethnic identity. Findings suggest that the accusation of acing White is perceived differently by individual Black students and carries a distinctive risk for psychosocial outcomes.

Keywords
acting White, racial identity, mental health, African American, emerging adults

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John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham were among the first scholars to reference the notion of “acting White” within the academic research community. In a landmark ethnographic study of a predominantly Black high school in Washington, DC, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) found that Black students were intentionally underachieving to avoid being accused of acting White by their peers. Therefore, the acting White hypothesis was conceptualized as an explanation for the chronic underachievement of Black youth and the oppositional culture theory reframed prior notions of intellectual inferiority by highlighting the conscious decision of Black students to avoid academic achievement altogether (Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The opposition to academic achievement is believed to be driven by motivation to deter criticism and ridicule from peers for demonstrating behaviors associated with mainstream White culture. The acting White hypothesis has gained considerable attention within academic journals as well as mainstream literature, but most of the attention has been within the domain of academic achievement (Horvat & O’Connor, 2006; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). However, several researchers argue that the burden of acting White occurs under a variety of circumstances that extend much further than academic achievement and have implications for a broader range of outcomes (Carter, 2005; Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Singer, Murray, & Demmings, 2010). The current article assesses the psychological impact of the accusation of acting White, in terms of racial and ethnic identity and mental health outcomes, among a sample of Black emerging adults.

**Expanding the Accusation of Acting White**

Research suggests that the label known as “acting White is one of the most negative accusations one African American adolescent can hurl at another” (Neal-Barnett et al., 2010, p. 103). Although this accusation has been documented as young as elementary school, most Black youth experience it for the first time during early adolescence and receive the accusation most frequently during middle adolescence (Neal-Barnett, 2001; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). In addition to the traditional domain of academic achievement, it has been reported that Black youth experience the burden of acting White for a wide range of social characteristics and behaviors (Bergin & Cooks, 2008; Mickelson & Velasco, 2006). In fact, the basis for common encounters with the acting White accusation often includes behaviors such as style of speech, style of dress, racial make-up of friends, and music/dance preferences (Horvat & O’Connor, 2006; Neal-Barnett et al., 2010). However, style of speech, which pertains to the distinction between standard English (also referred to as “talking proper”) and African American
vernacular English, is suggested to be the single most common catalyst for the accusation among Black youth (Neal-Barnett et al., 2010). Although this label is likely to be interpreted in a derogatory fashion and may have significant mental health implications, the psychological consequences of the acting White accusation are not thoroughly understood and much more work is needed in this area.

To avoid being accused of acting White, current evidence suggests that many Black youth selectively code-switch between standard English and “Black English” depending on the specific audiences that they engage with (Carter, 2003; Hemmings, 2006). In fact, highly efficient code-switching has been found to elevate the social status of Black adolescents in both the classroom, where standard English is expected, and also with peers outside of class, where Black English is preferred (Hemmings, 2006). It appears that the ability to successfully code-switch between various settings enables some youth to maintain their social status among peers. Tatum (1997) suggests that acceptance from same-race peers may be especially important for Black youth in predominantly White settings because these peers often provide a safe context for youth to explore aspects of their identity with individuals that may have similar cultural understanding. Although peers can serve as a great source of support during the process of identity formation, findings also suggest that they may provide extensive criticism and stress when group-specific norms are violated (Contrada et al., 2001).

Several researchers have argued that nonacademic aspects of acting White are more pertinent to youth because they relate more closely to insecurities regarding personal identity and self-image (Mickelson & Velasco, 2006; Neal-Barnett et al., 2010). Neal-Barnett et al. (2010) designed the Adolescent Acting White Experiences Questionnaire (AWEQ) to assess for indirect attributes and behaviors associated with the accusation of acting White. Using this quantitative measure, they found that items relating to academic achievement did not predict whether or not a sample of 159 Black youth had been accused of acting White. However, they did find that nonacademic items were significant predictors of the accusation of acting White and these included behaviors such as style of speech (e.g., “The kids around me say I talk proper”), peer affiliations (e.g., “Because of my friends, my peers don’t think I’m Black enough”), and social interests (e.g., “People around me say I listen to White music”). Most important, Neal-Barnett et al. (2010) found that the nonacademic attributes of acting White were more significantly associated with psychological distress than academic traits. Additionally, the total amount of indirect experiences endorsed from the AWEQ was linked to increased anxiety (Murray, Neal-Barnett, Demmings, & Stadulis, 2012). Therefore, Black youth and emerging adults are likely to be accused of acting...
White for many behaviors outside of the traditional realm of academic achievement. However, additional work is needed to determine whether the cumulative frequency of the accusation and/or perceived distress is significantly linked to aspects of racial/ethnic identity and mental health.

The current study seeks to fill this gap by measuring the impact of accusation characteristics from explicit encounters with the acting White label. This investigation is informed by the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST), which emphasizes the influence of social factors (e.g., race/ethnicity) within an ecological framework and provides critical information about the subjective challenges that an individual may face (Spencer, 1995). PVEST privileges the perspective of the individual and does not assume that the same phenomenon will be experienced similarly by all individuals of a particular group. Thus, from the PVEST framework, the current study conceptualizes the acting White accusation as a phenomenon that is likely to afflict some, but not all, Black youth. Furthermore, PVEST suggests that the acting White construct holds unique meaning for each individual depending on their subjective experience with the accusation, and this meaning can contribute to emergent personal and social identities (Spencer 1995).

**Acting White and Racial/Ethnic Identity**

A large body of literature has validated the importance of racial/ethnic identity as an integral process in youth development (Pahl & Way, 2006; Williams, Tolan, Durkee, Francois, & Anderson, 2012), particularly in relation to psychosocial outcomes (Caldwell, Sellers, Bernat, & Zimmerman, 2004), racial discrimination (Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006), and academic achievement (Chavous et al., 2003). However, several models have been developed to empirically measure racial/ethnic identity and these frameworks typically utilize either a process orientation, focusing on the development of racial attitudes over time, or a content orientation, focusing on the significance and meaning attributed to racial attitudes (see Marks, Settles, Cooke, Morgan, & Sellers, 2004, for a review). Overall, the majority of identity measures have focused on the process of identity development through several stages of growth and a widely used example is the multigroup ethnic identity measure developed by Jean Phinney (1992). The framework supporting this scale suggests that individuals develop through progressive stages of ethnic identification based on low or high levels of exploration of cultural history and commitment to their own cultural group. According to this framework, higher exploration and commitment are positively associated with identity development and growth.
On the other hand, content-oriented models such as the multidimensional model of racial identity (MMRI; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998) focus on variation within the characteristics of racial attitudes. The MMRI approaches racial identity from an individual difference perspective and highlights the heterogeneity to which individuals embrace several dimensions of racial identity. One dimension that has received considerable attention in the literature is racial regard and this construct involves the affective attitudes that one attributes to their own racial group (private regard) as well as the extent to which they feel their racial group is viewed positively by the greater society (public regard). Current evidence suggests that in comparison with other racial identity dimensions, public and private regard have stronger associations with key psychological outcomes such as depressive symptoms, perceived stress, and psychological well-being (Hurd, Sellers, Cogburn, Butler-Barnes, & Zimmerman, 2013; Sellers et al., 2006). However, it is important to note that findings remain mixed within this body of literature and some studies have confirmed significant associations, whereas others have found no direct relationships between racial identity dimensions and psychological functioning (Neblett, Shelton, & Sellers, 2004; Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

Several scholars suggest that ethnic identity should be assessed in conjunction with racial identity because these constructs share overlapping beliefs—particularly for African Americans where the distinction between race and ethnicity is difficult to unravel due to the loss of ethnic ties from the slave trade (Scott, Cooke, Sellers, & Ford, 2010). Neal-Barnett et al. (2010) argue that the acting White phenomenon is deeply rooted within the racial identity literature and they advocate for future research to consider how process and content aspects of racial/ethnic identity are related to the acting White insult. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) proposed that oppositional culture theory was a framework for describing how Black students responded to the acting White label and suggested that opposition toward mainstream American values significantly shaped their sense of identity. However, several researchers have explicitly rejected the oppositional culture theory as a valid framework for Black racial identity, by highlighting its deficit approach, which assumes that Black youth equate normative behaviors (e.g., academic achievement) with White cultural practices (Neal-Barnett, 2001; Spencer et al., 2001).

In addition, Spencer et al. (2001) sampled more than 500 Black youth and found no evidence to suggest that oppositional attitudes influenced students’ beliefs toward academic achievement. However, they did find that academic achievement was higher for youth who identified more with their racial group through the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Parham & Helms, 1985). More
recent work from Neal-Barnett et al. (2010) has used the MMRI to demonstrate that African American adolescents with higher private regard were more bothered by indirect experiences of the acting White accusation. These associations were strongest for social features of the insult, such as being accused of “talking proper” or “listening to White music.” Additionally, public regard was a significant predictor of the extent to which individuals were bothered by the accusation, such that public regard predicted higher levels of discomfort. It is worth noting that racial centrality was not a significant predictor in the findings from Neal-Barnett et al. (2010). Previous studies have evaluated the association between the acting White burden and racial identity, but the present study will contribute by including several dimensions of racial/ethnic identity content and process models as well as psychological functioning.

**Acting White and Psychological Functioning**

To date, there is still a dearth of research that has empirically tested the impact of the acting White accusation on mental health and psychological functioning; yet, the acting White hypothesis has been theoretically associated with psychological well-being. For example, previous evidence suggests that some Black youth accused of acting White develop a “raceless” persona, rejecting Black culture and embracing White mainstream culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). This orientation may place youth at-risk for psychological dysfunction if they are not accepted by the dominant group and are left feeling alienated (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Fordham, 1996). In recent years, researchers have started evaluating the psychological distress and anxiety linked to the AWEQ (Murray et al., 2012; Neal-Barnett et al., 2010), but much more work is needed to test whether other indicators of mental health, such as depressive symptoms or emotional stress, are affected by the accusation of acting White.

**Current Study**

Despite widespread coverage of acting White within the academic achievement literature, few studies have explored the psychological implications associated with this accusation. Therefore, the current study analyzes how the accusation of acting White is associated with several outcome variables, including racial/ethnic identity, depressive symptoms, anxiety, and emotional stress. First, we assessed whether there were group differences between those who did or did not receive the accusation in their lifetime. Next, we tested whether the frequency in which participants were accused of acting
White or the amount of discomfort they associated with the accusation were each significant predictors of the outcome variables. The distinction between frequency and discomfort was necessary to better understand the phenomenological nature of this accusation. Additionally, we performed a person-centered profile analysis that grouped participants based on similar experiences with the accusation in order to assess the simultaneous influence of frequency and discomfort. Last, we compared these profiles to each other and evaluated if there were any significant differences between the profiles. To our knowledge, no other study has attempted to compare latent profiles for similar experiences with the accusation of acting White and the nature of these analyses are thus exploratory.

We hypothesized that participants accused of acting White would report more severe mental health symptoms because the accusation is likely to be perceived in a discriminatory fashion (Williams & Durkee, 2013) and previous research has linked perceived racial discrimination with negative mental health outcomes (Seaton, Neblett, Upton, Hammond, & Sellers, 2011; Sellers et al., 2006). Based on the same logic, we also hypothesized that frequency of the accusation and discomfort level would both positively predict negative mental health symptoms. Considering the sparse amount of research in this area, only a limited amount of a priori hypotheses could be made. However, it was expected that private regard and public regard dimensions of racial identity would be positively predicted by discomfort level, based on similar analyses in previous research (Neal-Barnett et al., 2010).

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of second- through fourth-year undergraduate students attending a predominantly White institution (PWI) located in a mid-Atlantic city in the United States. To be eligible for the study, students had to identify as Black or African American and be between 18 and 23 years old. A total of 219 students followed the link to the online survey, 198 started the survey and 145 students completed the survey. The mean age of the sample was 20 years ($SD = 1.31$), and an equal representation of second-, third-, and fourth-year college students (33% each) were included. The majority of participants were female (79%), and while there was a larger percentage of Black females (65%) compared with Black males (35%) attending the targeted institution, our sample still contained an underrepresentation of males. In terms of ethnicity, 69% of students identified as Black/African American, 10% as African, 7% as Caribbean/West Indian, and 13% as multiracial. Although
immigration status was not collected, international students were not excluded from the current study. In general, students came from highly educated families; 61% of mothers and 52% of fathers had obtained at least a bachelor’s degree.

**Procedures**

Students were recruited through university email lists that targeted members of the Black community and students who were affiliated with one of several student organizations designed for individuals of African descent (e.g., the Black Student Alliance). University administrators also assisted by distributing an email to all self-identified Black students, unless the individuals explicitly requested to be removed from the institution’s email list. Students received an email containing a description of the study and a link to the online survey. Individuals who completed the survey were entered into a raffle to win one of two $75 gift cards. Procedures were approved by the university’s institutional review board, and participants provided informed consent prior to beginning the survey.

**Measures**

**Accusation of Acting White.** To assess experiences with the accusation of acting White, participants were first asked, “Some Black students have been accused by their peer or friends of ‘acting White’. Have you ever been accused of ‘acting White?’” and response options included “yes,” “no,” and “I don’t know.” Those who reported “yes” were then questioned about the frequency and discomfort of these experiences. Participants were asked “how often have you been accused of ‘acting White?’” and responses were based on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (once or twice in your lifetime) to 6 (once a week or more). This question was followed by “when you were labeled as ‘acting White’ how much did it bother you?” and response options ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). Centered raw scores for each question were used in the analyses.

**Racial and Ethnic Identity.** The Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure–Revised (Phinney & Ong, 2007) is a 6-item questionnaire comprising two subscales: exploration and commitment. Exploration measured the extent that participants sought out information about their own ethnic group (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$), and commitment evaluated the extent to which individuals felt attached to their ethnic group (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$). Participants responded on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Two subscales for racial
regard were selected from the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997) to assess the positive feelings that society attributed toward the Black race (public regard) as well as the positive regard that individuals have for their own racial group (private regard). Responses to both public regard (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$) and private regard (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$) were on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Composite mean scores were computed for each subscale and used in the analyses.

Anxiety. The Carroll-Davidson Generalized Anxiety Disorder Screener (Carroll & Davidson, 2000) is a 12-item measure that assesses anxiety symptoms including “most days I cannot stop worrying” and “I get easily annoyed or irritated.” Participants were asked to select “yes” or “no” for each symptom they had felt most days over the past 6 months. Scores were calculated by adding the total number of items endorsed, and the scale had good reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$).

Depressive Symptoms. The Harvard Department of Psychiatry/National Depression Screening Day Scale (Baer et al., 2000) is a 10-item self-report questionnaire. Participants were asked to report how often they experienced each item in the past 2 weeks on a scale from 1 (none or little of the time) to 4 (all the time), and sample items include “been blaming yourself for things” and “been feeling no interest in things.” The mean of all 10 items was used in the analyses and the scale demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$).

Emotional Stress. The emotional well-being measure was taken from the Life Experiences and Stress subscale of the RaLES (Harrell, 1997) and assessed how much of a problem each of six items (e.g., “drug problems,” “controlling your temper”) were for participants on a scale from 1 (not a problem for me) to 6 (most serious problem). The mean of all items was computed and the scale showed adequate reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .74$).

Analyses

Analyses were conducted with SPSS 19.0 and Mplus 6.12. Data were first screened for outliers, normality of distribution, homogeneity of variance, and multicollinearity. All indicators were in the acceptable range (Huberty & Petoskey, 2000; Morrow-Howell, 1994); thus, it was not necessary to transform the data. $T$ tests were used to measure demographic differences between those with and without missing data. Next, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to evaluate group differences in racial/ethnic identity and mental
health outcomes between individuals who were and were not accused of acting White, while controlling for demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, and maternal education). For those accused of acting White, stepwise regression analysis was used to evaluate whether (a) frequency of the accusation or (b) discomfort from the accusation, were associated with racial/ethnic identity and mental health outcomes. Demographic control variables were entered into the first step of the regression models and predictor variables were entered into the second step. Participant age was included as a covariate in models predicting racial/ethnic identity, and maternal education was included as a covariate in models predicting mental health outcomes.

Additionally, a person-centered evaluation was conducted using latent class analysis (LCA) in Mplus to identify latent groups that represent profiles for similar experiences with the accusation of acting White (Muthen & Muthen, 2010). LCA classified these experiences using latent profiles that accounted for both the frequency and the amount of discomfort experienced from the accusation. A strength of LCA is that it accounts for error within each indicator variable whereas other techniques (e.g., cluster analysis) assume that observed variables are measured without error (Romesburg, 1990). The Bayesian information criterion (BIC) was used to determine the appropriate number of latent classes by capturing overall model fit and penalizing for oversaturation (Nylund, Asparouhov, & Muthen, 2007; Schwarz, 1978). Once the best fit model was selected, posterior probabilities for class membership were computed and participants were assigned to one of the latent classes based on the highest probability for class membership. Latent profiles were then compared using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to evaluate group differences in racial/ethnic identity and mental health. Additionally, group differences were further explored using Bonferroni post hoc analysis and this technique conservatively adjusted confidence intervals to reduce the likelihood of Type I error (Holland & Copenhaver, 1988).

Results

Descriptives

Independent-samples t tests were performed on participants who did and did not complete the entire survey, and there were no significant differences across demographic or predictor variables. In total, 74% of participants reported being accused of acting White at some point in their lifetime, 23% never received the accusation, and 3% did not know if they had been accused. Participants who indicated “I don’t know” were excluded from analyses due
to the small cell size. A higher proportion of females (80%) received the accusation than males (63%) and this difference was significant, \(\chi^2(1) = 4.39, p = .04\). Gender was the only demographic variable correlated with the accusation of acting White, \(r(151) = -.17, p = .04\); however, gender was not significantly correlated with either the frequency or discomfort of the accusation.

In terms of outcome variables, participant age was significantly correlated with racial private regard, \(r(136) = .24, p < .01\), and maternal education level was significantly correlated with both depressive symptoms, \(r(133) = .19, p = .03\), and anxiety, \(r(123) = .20, p = .03\). A correlation matrix and descriptive information is presented in Table 1.

**Comparisons Based on Occurrence of Acting White**

ANCOVA results indicated that after accounting for gender and age as covariates, there were no significant differences in racial/ethnic identity based on the accusation of acting White (all \(ps > .05\)). Although individuals accused of acting White did not demonstrate lower racial/ethnic identity than those who never received the insult, a marginal significant difference in this direction was found for ethnic commitment, \(F(1, 128) = 3.69, p = .057\). A second set of ANCOVA comparisons, with gender and maternal education as covariates, found no significant mental health differences between participants who did or did not receive the accusation (all \(ps > .05\)). Therefore, those accused of acting White did not demonstrate any more risk for depressive

### Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Bivariate Correlations for the Acting White Accusation and Outcome Variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Acting White</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Frequency</td>
<td>−.18*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Discomfort</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>−.00</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Private regard</td>
<td>−.10</td>
<td>−.32**</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Public regard</td>
<td>−.12</td>
<td>−.20*</td>
<td>−.11</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ethnic exploration</td>
<td>−.16*</td>
<td>−.24**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>−.09</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ethnic commitment</td>
<td>−.16*</td>
<td>−.26**</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.72**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Depressive symptoms</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>.26***</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>−.09</td>
<td>−.08</td>
<td>−.12</td>
<td>−.17*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Anxiety</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>−.06</td>
<td>−.23**</td>
<td>−.09</td>
<td>−.20*</td>
<td>.80**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Emotional stress</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>−.10</td>
<td>−.25**</td>
<td>−.20*</td>
<td>−.27**</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>.66**</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean: 0.76 3.28 2.89 6.06 3.53 3.79 3.99 1.90 4.14 1.82
Standard deviation: 0.43 1.38 1.30 0.83 1.08 0.91 0.88 0.72 3.65 0.82

Note: Frequency and discomfort items excluded participants who never received the accusation of acting White.

\*\(p < .05\) \**\(p < .01\)
symptoms, anxiety, or emotional stress than participants who never received the accusation. Group mean comparisons are reported in Table 2.

**Variable-Centered Analyses**

Results indicated that frequency of the accusation significantly predicted lower racial/ethnic identity across all four subscales (Table 3). However, the amount of discomfort experienced from the accusation significantly predicted higher racial identification in terms of private regard and ethnic exploration. Together frequency and discomfort explained 17% of the variance in private regard and 11% of the variance in ethnic exploration. For mental health outcomes, the amount of discomfort reported from the accusation of acting White did not yield any significant findings. Nonetheless, frequency of the accusation significantly predicted more severe mental health symptoms across all three indicators of psychological distress (Table 4).

**Person-Centered Profile Analyses**

LCA was performed on two-class, three-class, four-class, and five-class models. Lower BIC values indicate better model fit, and the five-class model had the lowest BIC value and overall best fit (BIC = 826.65). However, further examination revealed that the five-class model did not have sufficient power for multivariate analysis because the size of the latent classes were highly skewed and ranged from as few as 9 participants to as many as 50 participants. Therefore, the four-class model (BIC = 835.19) was selected due to the second lowest BIC value and a sample size distribution that satisfied the minimum power criteria of 20 participants per cell (Cohen, 1988).

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**Table 2. ANCOVA and Descriptive Statistics for the Accusation of Acting White.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ever accused of acting White?</th>
<th>Yes, M (SD)</th>
<th>No, M (SD)</th>
<th>F statistic</th>
<th>p Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private regard</td>
<td>6.03 (0.88)</td>
<td>6.23 (0.64)</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public regard</td>
<td>3.46 (1.11)</td>
<td>3.77 (0.99)</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic exploration</td>
<td>3.76 (0.89)</td>
<td>4.09 (0.88)</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic commitment</td>
<td>3.95 (0.87)</td>
<td>4.28 (0.85)</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressive symptoms</td>
<td>1.89 (0.74)</td>
<td>1.91 (0.71)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>4.09 (3.57)</td>
<td>4.19 (4.08)</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional stress</td>
<td>1.83 (0.84)</td>
<td>1.80 (0.76)</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Regression Analyses Predicting Racial and Ethnic Identity Outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private regard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.15 (.07)</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.14 (.06)</td>
<td>.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>−.20 (.06)</td>
<td>−.31**</td>
<td>−.31**</td>
<td>−.31**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discomfort</td>
<td>.17 (.06)</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.05*</td>
<td>.21***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public regard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−.08 (.09)</td>
<td>−.09</td>
<td>−.07 (.09)</td>
<td>−.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>−.16 (.08)</td>
<td>−.20*</td>
<td>−.20*</td>
<td>−.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discomfort</td>
<td>−.09 (.08)</td>
<td>−.11</td>
<td></td>
<td>−.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.06†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic exploration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.03 (.07)</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.03 (.06)</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>−.15 (.06)</td>
<td>−.24**</td>
<td>−.24**</td>
<td>−.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discomfort</td>
<td>.15 (.06)</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td></td>
<td>.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.11***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.04 (.07)</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.04 (.06)</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>−.16 (.06)</td>
<td>−.26**</td>
<td>−.26**</td>
<td>−.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discomfort</td>
<td>.08 (.06)</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.08***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

The latent classes within the four-class model were characterized by: low frequency and low discomfort ($n = 26$; from here on referred to as “low”), average frequency and average discomfort ($n = 32$; “average”), average frequency and high discomfort ($n = 41$; “high discomfort”), and high frequency and low discomfort ($n = 22$; “high frequency”). Therefore, LCA results suggested four unique profiles for how participants experienced the accusation of acting White. Figure 1 depicts the centered means of each profile in terms of frequency and discomfort associated with the accusation.

A MANOVA found significant differences between the latent profiles in terms of racial/ethnic identity, Wilks’s $\Lambda = .81$, $F(12, 256) = 1.85$, $p = .04$. The multivariate effect size indicated that 7% of the variance in racial/ethnic identity was accounted for by group comparisons between the latent profiles.
Table 4. Regression Analyses Predicting Mental Health Outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B (SD)</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>B (SD)</td>
<td>β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressive symptoms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom’s education</td>
<td>.08 (.04)</td>
<td>.18†</td>
<td>.08 (.04)</td>
<td>.18†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.15 (.05)</td>
<td>.27**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discomfort</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.06 (.06)</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td></td>
<td>.03†</td>
<td></td>
<td>.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom’s education</td>
<td>.42 (.22)</td>
<td>.19†</td>
<td>.42 (.21)</td>
<td>.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.62 (.26)</td>
<td>.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discomfort</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.25 (.27)</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td></td>
<td>.04†</td>
<td></td>
<td>.10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional stress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom’s education</td>
<td>.06 (.05)</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.05 (.05)</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.25 (.06)</td>
<td>.40***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discomfort</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.08 (.06)</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>.19***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

†p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Figure 1. Graph of the centered mean distributions for the latent class profiles.
One-way ANOVAs were performed for each of the racial/ethnic identity measures and significant differences were only found within private regard, $F(3, 102) = 2.88, p = .04, \eta^2 = .08$, and ethnic exploration, $F(3, 102) = 3.87, p = .01, \eta^2 = .10$. Bonferroni post hoc analysis revealed significant group differences between the high discomfort and the high frequency profiles. The high discomfort group had significantly more private regard than the high frequency group ($p = .03$), and also reported more ethnic exploration than the high frequency profile ($p = .04$). The high discomfort profile was also found to have significantly more ethnic exploration than the low profile ($p = .05$).

Overall, the high discomfort group reported the highest level of private regard and ethnic exploration among the four latent profiles, whereas the high frequency group reported the lowest level of racial/ethnic identity across each subscales except public regard (Table 5).

An additional MANOVA model assessed for group differences between the latent profiles in terms of mental health outcomes. However, no significant differences were found on the multivariate level, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .88$, $F(9, 217) = 1.25, p > .05$, and the latent profiles did not differ in terms of mental health indicators.

**Discussion**

Prior research has established that the accusation of acting White may be one of the most negative insults that Black youth can make toward one another; yet it is still unclear how this accusation relates to racial/ethnic identity and mental health (Neal-Barnett, 2001). The present study found no significant differences between individuals who did and did not report being accused of acting White. However, results suggest that the manner in which the accusation was experienced is meaningful. Specifically, the frequency in which participants were accused of acting White significantly predicted lower racial/ethnic identity across all four subscales and also predicted higher symptoms of mental health risk across all three measures of psychological distress.
amount of discomfort reported from experiencing the accusation of acting White significantly predicted higher levels of racial private regard and ethnic exploration, but was not associated with mental health indicators. The person-centered analysis revealed that four distinct profiles represented the manner in which participants experienced the accusation of acting White. Among these profiles, the high discomfort group reported the highest levels of private regard and ethnic exploration, and differed significantly from the high frequency profile who reported the lowest identification along these constructs.

While previous empirical studies have suggested that the direct accusation of acting White may independently be a risk factor for negative psychosocial outcomes (Murray et al., 2012; Ogbu, 2004), the current study found no group differences between those who did and did not explicitly receive the accusation in their lifetime. It is likely that the nonsignificant findings can be explained by the wide variation among individuals who experienced this label. Results indicate that participants varied in how frequently they were accused of acting White and the dichotomous report of whether or not they ever encountered the accusation may mask the overall diversity within these experiences. Furthermore, while the explicit report of acting White was not associated with any outcomes, characteristics pertaining to the nature of the accusation were linked to psychosocial variables. The discrepancy in findings between the explicit report and characteristics of the acting White accusation can be further explained by the PVEST framework, which emphasizes an individual’s subjective experience with racial stressors such as the acting White label (Spencer, 1995; Spencer et al., 2001). By placing the individual at the center of the phenomenological experience, PVEST suggests that internal attributes can be assessed to determine the degree of sensitivity and net stress that may be experienced from a particular stressor. Therefore, it is likely that the acting White insult may have been perceived differently by participants and thus elicited unique coping responses, which would explain the differential association with racial/ethnic identity and psychological outcomes.

The current study found strong evidence to suggest that the manner in which participants experienced the accusation of acting White, emphasizing the meaning-making process central to the PVEST perspective, was closely associated with psychosocial outcomes. In fact, the frequency to which they received the accusation was associated with lower racial/ethnic identity and also more severe mental health outcomes. The assessment of frequency enabled this study to tease apart the variance within the accusation and reveal the detrimental effect of more frequent experiences. Previous research with Black adolescents has confirmed that increased exposure to indirect accusations of acting White (e.g., “talking proper,” “dressing preppy”) were also a
significant predictor of anxiety (Murray et al., 2012). These findings contribute to the literature by suggesting that increased focus on phenomenological aspects of the acting White accusation may provide a better account of the subjective experience, compared with the general report of whether or not an individual has ever encountered the label.

The level of discomfort associated with acting White was also an informative aspect of this study. Results from both the current study and previous research suggest that discomfort is positively associated with private regard, such that individuals more bothered by the accusation of acting White also report more positive feelings toward their own racial group (Neal-Barnett et al., 2010). These findings also support qualitative evidence which argues that Black youth who identify with their racial group are more likely to experience psychological discomfort when they are accused of being a non-authentic member of that racial group (Bergin & Cooks, 2008; Fordham, 1996). Although discomfort was significantly associated with dimensions of racial/ethnic identity in the current study, it was not a significant predictor of mental health outcomes. However, previous research using Black adolescents has found that anxiety significantly predicted higher levels of discomfort from the AWEQ (Murray et al., 2012).

LCA enhanced the current study by using person-centered techniques to identify latent profiles within the data. These profiles were determined by similar experiences based on the nature of the acting White accusation and results indicate that the variance was best explained by four distinct profiles: high frequency, high discomfort, average (frequency and discomfort), and low (frequency and discomfort). This technique was helpful because it allowed us to identify the way that individuals experienced both frequency and discomfort in relation to one another. For example, participants in the high frequency profile not only received the accusation of acting White most often, but they also reported the lowest amount of discomfort from these experiences. Considering this unique contrast, it is very likely that the accusation of acting White may carry a different meaning for participants in the high frequency profile compared with those in the high discomfort group, who received the accusation an average amount but were highly bothered by these experiences. The PVEST model supports this argument because dimensions of racial/ethnic identity were significantly elevated in the high discomfort profile and the perceived level of distress may also be increased for this group because their racial/ethnic identification may sharply contrast with the accusation of acting White. The PVEST framework helps to explain why individuals may vary in terms of sensitivity toward the acting White accusation because both environmental and internal characteristics (e.g., identity, social status) may influence the level of distress that youth experience (Spencer, 1995).
It is worth noting that the sample in the current study was collected at a PWI, whereas previous research used samples from predominantly Black high schools (Fordham, 1996; Murray et al., 2012). However, both the current study and recent quantitative investigations have similarly analyzed samples that were overrepresented by female participants (Murray et al., 2012). Therefore, the collective findings from these studies may more accurately depict the experiences of Black female participants compared with Black males. Furthermore, it is likely that individuals in the current study may represent a particular segment of the Black population, considering their enrollment at a selective PWI. The salience of ethnic minority membership within a predominantly White context may have an influence on the type of acting White experiences that individuals encounter as well as their perceptions toward this label.

**Future Directions and Limitations**

Additional research is needed to uncover the underlying mechanisms by which the accusation of acting White influences psychosocial outcomes, particularly mental health. It is well documented that racial/ethnic identity can serve as a protective factor and buffer the harmful effects of interracial discrimination on mental health and well-being (Seaton et al., 2011; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). However, research suggests that Black youth most commonly receive the accusation of acting White from other Black peers (Fordham, 1996; Ogbu, 2004) and frequently perceive this label as a form of *intraracial* discrimination when it is perpetrated by fellow members of their race (Williams & Durkee, 2013). Similar to previous research (Murray et al., 2012; Neal-Barnett et al., 2010), the current study did not ask participants to specify the race of perpetrators who accused them of acting White and is thus unable to make implications in terms of intra- or intergroup accusations. Although previous work indicates that early encounters with interracial discrimination can trigger individuals to seek refuge with same-race peers (Cross, 1978; Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998), findings from the present study suggest that exposure to the acting White accusation may operate in the opposite direction and encourages individuals to identify less with their racial/ethnic membership. Given the uncertainty of the perpetrator’s racial background, it is important to further explore these nuanced dynamics through additional research to unpack the psychological implications that are specific to intragroup and intergroup encounters with the acting White accusation.

Generalizability of the present study is limited by the population in which the sample was collected. Data were obtained from students attending a
selective PWI in the mid-Atlantic region. Therefore, results may only be generalized to other Black students in similar environments because behavioral characteristics can vary widely across contexts (Cokley, 1999). Additionally, the sample size was somewhat small and until data are compared across several diverse environments, results from the current study may not be applicable to the full population of Black emerging adults. Although national trends suggest that a higher proportion of Black women are enrolled in college than Black men (U.S. Department of Education, 2011), the gender distribution in the current study was still not representative. Female participants were overrepresented in the present study and as a result gender was controlled for in most analyses to reduce potential threats to external validity.

Findings are also limited by the fact that the accusation of acting White was collected in a retrospective fashion where participants were instructed to report on cumulative experiences across their lifetime. Consequently, it is likely that the wide variation of when the accusation last occurred could have partially masked the influence of these experiences. However, the significant findings between previous exposure to the accusation and current psychosocial outcomes help to highlight the lasting impact of the acting White insult over time. Considering the cross-sectional nature of this study, longitudinal work is needed to test the directionality of pathways between the acting White accusation, mental health, and racial/ethnic identity.

Conclusions

While the burden of acting White has received a great deal of attention over the past two decades, the current study contributes to the literature by finding significant links between the accusation of acting White, racial/ethnic identity, and mental health outcomes. Findings suggest that the acting White accusation can potentially be a traumatic experience for Black emerging adults and lead to negative implications for mental health and racial/ethnic identity. The current study contributes additional clarity by finding very few group differences between those who did and did not experience the accusation of acting White in their lifetime. However, characteristics regarding the frequency and discomfort among those who did encounter the accusation were significantly associated with psychosocial outcomes. A combination of variable-centered and person-centered analytical techniques were used to identify significant associations with the accusation of acting White. Therefore, future studies should continue to focus on specific aspects of these experiences in order to more accurately explain the mechanisms by which the accusation of acting White affects psychosocial outcomes and identity development.
Acknowledgments

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*Child Development*, 82, 1850-1867. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01651.x


Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology

Cultural Invalidations: Deconstructing the “Acting White” Phenomenon Among Black and Latinx College Students
Myles I. Durkee, Elizabeth R. Gazley, Elan C. Hope, and Micere Keels

CITATION
Cultural Injuries: Deconstructing the “Acting White” Phenomenon Among Black and Latinx College Students

Myles I. Durkee and Elizabeth R. Gazley
University of Michigan

Elan C. Hope
North Carolina State University

Micere Keels
University of Chicago

Objectives: The accusation of “acting White” (AW) represents a common cultural invalidation that youth of color encounter during adolescence. However, few studies have examined the broader implications of AW beyond academic achievement and it is unclear how multiple racial/ethnic groups internalize this invalidation during late adolescence. The present study addresses these gaps by examining the meaning ascribed to AW among a diverse sample of youth and evaluates whether interpretations of AW vary across demographic factors (race/ethnicity, gender). Method: We utilized a subset of participants (n = 282; 47% Black; 53% Latinx; 68% female) from the Minority College Cohort Study—a longitudinal investigation of minority college students. Qualitative responses were analyzed through content analysis. Results: The AW construct was defined by four themes: speech/behavior, style/social preferences, cultural ideologies, and academics/success. AW was described most frequently in terms of speech patterns, while achievement/success was the least commonly described theme. Several important demographic distinctions are also highlighted and discussed. Conclusion: Results indicate that AW invalidations are interpreted in a similar fashion across diverse populations. Our sample defined AW in a manner that critically examined rigid racial/ethnic norms and stereotypes within U.S. society. Findings indicate that cultural invalidations, such as AW, should be examined more broadly because they are relevant for diverse populations and may yield significant psychological implications for individuals targeted by these threats.

Keywords: acting White, Black, cultural invalidations, Latinx

After three decades of research, there is still a lack of consensus regarding the practical and conceptual meaning of “acting White” (AW). The term AW was coined in the academic literature by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) to describe racial insults used by Black youth to discourage assimilation into White culture. The AW accusation implies that a person of color has violated the norms of their racial/ethnic group for demonstrating behaviors or traits that are stereotyped to be normative for White culture (Durkee & Williams, 2015; Murray, Neal-Barnett, Demmings, & Stadulis, 2012). In this article we propose that AW accusations lie within a broader framework, which we define as cultural invalidations—identity threats that intentionally or unintentionally discredit or undermine a person’s membership within one or more social identities.

Psychological studies find that AW accusations stem from social attributes (e.g., music, clothing, and style of speech) more commonly than academic attributes (e.g., academic achievement, academic behaviors; Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Neal-Barnett, Demmings, & Stadulis, 2010; Thelamour & Johnson, 2017). This distinction is noteworthy because the original AW hypothesis suggested that AW insults serve as a deterrent to academic achievement because high achieving Black youth are likely to be ostracized by their own race for modeling the norms and values of White culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). This hypothesis was fueled by the assumption that the norms of Black culture are less conducive to academic achievement than the norms of White culture (Ogbu, 2004). As a result, the bulk of literature examining the AW phenomenon has focused primarily on educational outcomes (see Cokley, 2014 and Sohn, 2011 for a detailed review). This study adds to the empirical literature by examining both racial/ethnic and gender differences in how youth define and internalize AW. Additionally, by focusing on late adolescence this study seeks to provide new developmental insights because the AW literature has primarily examined early and middle adolescence.

Cultural Injuries

We conceptualize cultural injuries as insults and identity threats that strategically undermine the validity of a person’s mem-
biership within one or more social identities. Social identity theory (Tajfel, Turner, Austin, & Worchel, 1979) argues that individuals develop a positive self-concept and self-esteem through the social groups they belong to. Threats to one’s social identity may result in aversive psychological outcomes (Hogg & Hornsey, 2006). AW insults are a form of identity invalidation because they imply that individuals who violate racial/ethnic norms are perceived as inauthentic members of their race/ethnicity (Durkee & Williams, 2015). Previous research has examined racial identity invalidations among multiracial populations (Franco, Katz, & O’Brien, 2016; Franco & O’Brien, 2018) and identity denial among monoracial and multiracial populations (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Johnson & Ashburn-Nardo, 2014). We argue that cultural invalidations provide a broader lens to capture identity threats and cultural policing across multiple social identities (race/ethnicity, gender, religion, social class, etc.). This term also unifies related constructs that focus primarily on threats to specific identities. Conceptually, cultural invalidations are similar to racial microaggressions and specifically microinvalidations—“communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). While microinvalidations primarily capture intra-racial prejudice, cultural invalidations are designed to capture both intergroup and intragroup identity threats.

Cultural invalidations such as AW most often target people of color who demonstrate behaviors or traits that are perceived to be normative for White culture. Cultural invalidations are used as a means of policing individuals who do not conform to the norms or stereotypes of a specific social identity (Contrada et al., 2001; Ethier & Deaux, 1994). Although cultural invalidations are commonly perpetrated by ingroup members to reinforce group norms, these insults are also perpetrated by outgroup members (Franco & Franco, 2016). Speech patterns are a common basis for cultural invalidations and research demonstrates that Black and Latinx adolescents who do not conform to prototypical speech patterns are likely to be accused of AW (Bergin & Cooks, 2002).

Broadening the Scope of “Acting White” (AW)

In an ethnographic study, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) found that some Black students were less drawn to high academic achievement because it was perceived as a core value of White culture. This observation prompted the “AW hypothesis”—a social dynamic where racially marginalized youth become less motivated to pursue high academic achievement because of AW accusations from peers who perceive their behaviors as culturally inauthentic (Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2004). This hypothesis suggests that embracing “White” cultural values may lead Black students to experience invalidations from peers who believe they are betraying their own culture. However, a sizable body of literature has challenged the theoretical underpinnings of the AW hypothesis and concluded that the burden of AW does not offer a viable explanation for the achievement of minority youth within the United States (see Cokley, 2014). In fact, Bergin and Cooks (2002) reported that among a sample of high-achieving Black and Latinx students from several high schools, “We did not hear a single comment from students admitting that they had altered their behavior, reduced their [academic] effort, or earned poor grades in order to avoid accusations of acting white” (p.132). While academic achievement does not appear to be the primary catalyst behind the AW accusation, several studies demonstrate that AW insults are still prevalent among youth of color (Durkee & Williams, 2015; Murray et al., 2012).

AW accusations most commonly result from social and behavioral attributes such as style of speech, music preferences, clothing, and extracurricular activities (Bergin & Cooks, 2002). Neal-Barnett and colleagues (2010) found that among Black high school students, style of speech was most frequently associated with AW accusations and these findings are consistent with several qualitative investigations (Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Carter, 2005; Mickelson & Velasco, 2006). Additionally, sociocultural factors (e.g., music preferences, racial composition of friends) are closely associated with AW accusations, whereas academic behaviors (e.g., studying a lot, getting good grades) were less commonly associated with these insults (Neal-Barnett et al., 2010). More work is needed to understand how cultural invalidations like AW are encountered across sociodemographics to determine whether race/ethnicity or gender play a major role in how youth internalize these invalidations.

Demographic Variation in “Acting White” (AW)

Race and Ethnicity

The AW literature has focused primarily on Black youth and only few qualitative studies have included Latinx youth (Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Carter, 2005). These investigations find that Latinx youth experience the AW accusation similar to Black youth, easily recall the AW label, and describe AW similarly to Black peers. Bergin and Cooks (2002) found that among youth who were directly accused of AW, both Mexican American and African American students denied having to give up aspects of their racial/ethnic identity to perform well in school. The primary distinction between Black and Latinx adolescents was that the inability to speak Spanish was an important marker of AW for Latinx youth. The biculturalism literature indicates that monolingual fluency can ostracize Latinx individuals from either mainstream American culture or Latinx culture (Basilio et al., 2014; Birman, 1998). A major limitation of the few AW studies containing Latinx participants is that these samples have been predominantly Black with only a small proportion of Latinx participants.

Gender

Qualitative investigations indicate that adolescent males who speak in a formal manner are often perceived as less masculine and consequently receive cultural invalidations pertaining to their masculinity interchangeably with the AW accusation (Carter, 2005, 2006). Therefore, males of color may be double stigmatized because AW insults can threaten both their race/ethnicity and masculinity. However, adolescent females are primarily invalidated in terms of their race/ethnicity when criticized for speech patterns and evidence from Carter (2005, 2006) indicates that female youth of color are targeted by AW accusations at a significantly higher rate than males because males are interchangeably targeted with masculinity substitutes for AW (i.e., acting “soft” or “like a punk”). This pattern is further supported by survey research, which finds that Black female students receive the AW accusation more frequently than Black males (Durkee & Williams, 2015; Neal-Barnett et al., 2010). However, less is known about the gender.
dynamics of other racial/ethnic groups because they have been understudied.

Age

The vast majority of AW literature has used adolescent samples recruited from middle schools and high schools (Thelamour & Johnson, 2017; Tyson, Daruty, & Castellino, 2005). One of the few studies to examine longitudinal changes in the meaning of AW found that Black middle school students complicated their understanding of AW after 1 year (Thelamour & Johnson, 2017). This research found that immigrant and nonimmigrant Black youth initially defined AW as primarily determined by one’s appearance and behaviors, but a year later the majority of participants shifted their definitions to comprise race-related beliefs regarding one’s cultural identity. This change demonstrates an important developmental shift in how youth conceptualize the AW label over time. It is likely that adolescents continue to develop a more in-depth understanding of AW as they age, but only a handful of studies have sampled late adolescents (Durkee & Williams, 2015; Webb & Linn, 2016). Missing from the literature is a clear comprehension of how late adolescents internalize AW invalidations.

Current Study

The present study is designed to examine the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender in relation to how late adolescents define AW. First, we evaluate how late adolescents describe AW to identify the most prevalent qualitative themes. Second, we determine whether interpretations differ by race/ethnicity, gender, or the intersection of these social identities.

Method

Procedures

Data were from the Minority College Cohort Study (MCCS)—a longitudinal examination of college transition and persistence among Black and Latinx students at five predominantly White universities in the Midwest. Administrators at each of the universities distributed an e-mail containing a study description and link to the online survey during September 2013. To qualify, participants were required to be full-time college freshman and self-identify as either African American/Black or Hispanic/Latinx. Six waves of data collection occurred during the first 2 years of college. Qualitative data for this study was collected at Wave 1 with an open-ended question. The Wave 1 survey required 45 min to complete and participants were compensated with a $25 gift card. The host institution’s Institutional Review Board approved all study procedures and data collection was managed using REDCap software hosted by the University of Chicago (Harris et al., 2009).

Participants

A total of 533 Black and Latinx students (41% and 59%, respectively) met the criteria for the study and were recruited at Wave 1. The mean age at recruitment was 18.2 years old (SD = 0.45). The sample was selected from 2 urban private universities, 1 urban public university, 1 rural public university, and 1 suburban public university, all located in the Midwest. The racial/ethnic composition of Black students within these universities ranged from 3 to 18% (M = 8.28, SD = 3.74), and the composition of Latinx students ranged from 9 to 25% (M = 16.16, SD = 6.76). Participants graduated from 255 different high schools (86% public). Forty-eight percent of Black students and 69% of Latinx students were first-generation college students. Approximately 75% of Black and 57% of Latinx participants were women; this is reflective of the current gender imbalance in college enrollment in the United States (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2015). The ethnic composition of Black participants was 84% African American, 6% African, 2% Caribbean, and 9% multiracial. The ethnic composition of Latinx participants was 68% Mexican, 8% Puerto Rican, 5% South American, 2% Central American, 2% Dominican, 1% Cuban, 4% Other Latinx, and 9% multiracial. Only 8% of the sample was foreign-born, but 57% of the sample had at least one foreign-born parent—25% of Black and 81% of Latinx participants.

An open-ended question at Wave 1 asked: “What does the ‘acting White’ label really mean to you? And how has it affected your life in anyway?” The term “acting White” was defined as an instance where they “received criticism for behavior that others didn’t consider to be ‘authentic’ Black/Latinx behavior.” The question was tailored to the participants’ respective racial/ethnic group. A total of 361 participants (68% of sample) provided a written response and these ranged in length from 1 to 10 sentences. Missing data analyses indicated that the response rate did not vary based on any demographics in the data set. Forty-seven individuals reported that they were unfamiliar with AW and these responses were excluded from analyses (9% of Black and 12% of Latinx participants). There were no demographic differences among participants unfamiliar with AW. An additional 32 participants provided obscure responses that did not match any codes in the codebook and were also excluded from analyses. Obscure responses described AW through vague stereotypes of White Americans or as a meaningless joke. There was a significant gender difference in obscure responses (females = 7%, males = 16%; χ²(1) = 6.77, p = .009) but no racial/ethnic differences were found. The final analytic sample contained 282 participants: 105 Black women (37%), 27 Black men (10%), 87 Latinx women (31%), and 63 Latinx men (22%). Pseudonyms were used to protect participants’ identities.

Analyses

Content analysis (Roberts, 2001) was utilized to identify the primary themes used to define AW. The present study followed the steps recommended by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) for a conventional content analysis: full data immersion, exploratory coding to identify initial codes, refinement of codes, development and implementation of a coding hierarchy, validity checks, and examination of results.

The authors read the open-ended responses multiple times and constructed an exhaustive list of codes. We were unable to tease apart the two dimensions of the open-ended prompt because participants did not distinguish the meaning of AW from how it affected them. The authors compared notes and reduced the exhaustive list from 74 to 11 codes. The final codes were organized...
into four themes. Two undergraduate research assistants conducted the final coding. The research assistants coded a random subset of 13 excerpts and the initial interrater agreement was 70.7%. Next, they read all of the transcripts and met with the first author to ask clarification questions. The research assistants then coded all the transcripts and interrater agreement was 93.2%. To obtain complete agreement, the research assistants discussed each discrepancy with the first author and reached a final consensus. To enhance validity, the second author had no contact with the research assistants and was able to audit their work for accuracy and consistency.

Results

The average number of codes reported by each participant was 1.70 (SD = .98). A t test comparison of means indicated that there were no racial/ethnic differences in the amount of codes reported by Black (M = 1.74, SD = 1.09) and Latinx participants (M = 1.67, SD = .87); t(280) = 63, p = .53. However, there was a significant gender difference and females (M = 1.80, SD = 1.01) reported more codes than males (M = 1.49, SD = .87); t(280) = 2.41, p = .02. Four themes emerged from the qualitative analysis: (a) speech and behavior, (b) style and social preferences, (c) cultural ideologies, and (d) academics and success. Each of these themes are described below (see Table 1). Quantitative results examining the frequency of codes are only discussed when significant differences between sociodemographics were observed. The sociodemographics of each code are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 1

<p>| “Acting White” (AW) Codes, Definitions, and Proportions Reported by the Sample |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes/Style and social preferences</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speech and behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Speech patterns</td>
<td>Styles of speech that preference standard English over other English dialects (Ebonics) or languages (Spanish)</td>
<td>53% (147)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Respectable behaviors</td>
<td>Carrying oneself in a manner that is described as “proper,” “preppy,” or “civilized”</td>
<td>31% (86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pretentious behaviors</td>
<td>Elitist mannerisms that carry a negative connotation such as “uptight,” “stuck up,” “condescending,” or “bougie”</td>
<td>23% (63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style and social preferences</td>
<td>Wearing particular clothing brands or dressing in a style that is described as “preppy”</td>
<td>11% (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Clothing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Music and dance</td>
<td>Listening to mainstream music genres (rock, pop, and electronic) or dancing in an awkward style</td>
<td>4% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Activities</td>
<td>Engaging in activities, sports, or hobbies that are less expected for racial/ethnic minorities</td>
<td>1% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Interracial contact</td>
<td>Extensive interracial contact, interracial friendships, or interracial dating experiences</td>
<td>19% (58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Food</td>
<td>Avoiding native cuisine or being very particular about food selection (gluten-free, organic)</td>
<td>14% (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural ideologies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Cultural alienation</td>
<td>Disconnected from one’s cultural heritage because of limited exposure or intentional cultural rejection to avoid stigma</td>
<td>9% (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Normalizing “White” as “American”</td>
<td>Assimilation process of “White” behavioral traits being construed as the default attributes for American culture</td>
<td>11% (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics and success</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Achievement and aspirations</td>
<td>Belief that high academic achievement or high aspirations for success are less common for racial/ethnic minorities</td>
<td>11% (32)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n = sample size. Proportions do not sum to 100% because participants could report multiple codes.
know plenty of White people who do not speak proper English and act, well, trashy. That’s a personal thing, not a racial thing.

Participants agreed that the AW label was used to describe Black and Latinx youth who did not use “slang” in their natural speech and they opposed social norms that placed linguistic restraints on how racial/ethnic groups should speak.

Latinx participants uniquely emphasized the inability to speak Spanish or intentional effort to avoid Spanish as important markers of AW. They reported that a strong preference for English over Spanish was perceived as AW within the Latinx community:

To me, acting white means acting “Americanized.” The Mexican culture stigmatizes people who speak English over Spanish. (Carlos, Latinx male)

[“Acting White” means] listening to just music in English, and just speaking in English. (Silvia, Latinx female)

Black students described speech patterns at a significantly higher rate than Latinx students (41 vs. 22%; \( p < .001 \); see Table 2). Black females reported speech patterns at a higher rate than Black males (48 vs. 15%; \( p = .003 \)), but there was no gender difference between Latinx females and males (24 vs. 18%; \( p = .36 \)). Black females described proper speech at a higher rate than any other demographic group in the sample (see Table 3).

Respectable behaviors. Participants (23%) emphasized that AW includes behaviors they are expected to demonstrate in order to maintain a respectable demeanor. These behaviors were described as “acting proper,” “civilized,” or “not ghetto.”

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latinx</th>
<th>( \chi^2 (df = 1, n = 282) )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speech and behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Speech patterns</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>12.27***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Respectable behaviors</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pretentious behaviors</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style and social preferences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Clothing</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Music and dance</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Activities</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Interracial contact</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Food</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3.62*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural ideologies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Cultural alienation</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Normalizing “White” as “American”</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13.60***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latinx</th>
<th>( \chi^2 (df = 1, n = 150) )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speech and behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Speech patterns</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8.94**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Respectable behaviors</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pretentious behavior</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style and social preferences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Clothing</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Music and dance</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Activities</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Interracial contact</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Food</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural ideologies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Cultural alienation</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Normalizing “White” as “American”</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics and success</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Achievement and aspirations</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \( n = \) sample size. Proportions do not sum to 100% because participants could report multiple codes.

\( * p < .10 \)  \( * * p < .05 \)  \( ** p < .01 \)  \( *** p < .001 \).
participants were uncomfortable with respectful behaviors being construed with AW, as indicated by the following responses:

“Acting White” in my experience has been associated with being proper—demeanor and speech included. It has affected my life by making me question why is the “White way” correlated with meaning the right way? (Tasha, Black female)

A subset of participants emphasized a social distance between themselves and their own racial/ethnic group because of their behavioral preferences:

“['Acting White'] just means acting proper and acting in a manner that is more acceptable to society and not Black people. It has made me want to act more White especially now that I am in a college environment. (Thomas, Black male)

For me ['acting White'] means acting civilized and not similar to my surrounding peers. Also I didn’t settle for less and I looked for ways to better myself while people like me just settled for less. In a way I felt like it meant acting better than the rest. It affected me in a sense that pushed me to work even harder to show my peers that being Latina was not a bad thing, if other people that represent the majority can do it, why cannot we. (Christina, Latinx female)

The previous excerpts demonstrate a desire to assimilate into the dominant culture while simultaneously internalizing negative stereotypes about one’s own culture (i.e., internalized oppression; David, 2013). Overall, participants were keenly aware that the AW label promoted “White” behaviors as ideal. Some participants expressed active resistance toward this connotation, whereas others accommodated this social dynamic.

Pretenentious behaviors. Participants (11%) described pretentious behaviors with a negative connotation and used labels such as “uptight,” “stuck up,” or “condescending.” These behaviors described an arrogant demeanor depicting someone who felt that they were superior to ingroup members or from a higher socioeconomic status. Pretentious behaviors were also ascribed to individuals who did not face financial adversity and were, thus, shielded from the economic difficulties commonly associated with Black and Latinx communities. As highlighted below, pretentious behaviors were described similarly across sociodemographics:

I feel like it means looking down on your race and essentially forgetting who you are as an individual. Blacks that do not like other Blacks or look down on them. (Kiki, Black female)

To me ['acting White'] means acting very pretentious and appearing as if you have a lot of money. Since I have heard a lot of people refer to me as “White” it has led me to identify less with my Hispanic culture. Most of the time it is my own race that accuses me of being White which is why I do not really like to surround myself with them as much as others. (Gizelle, Latinx female)

For the record, many of my friends are Black and Latino. When I accuse my friends of “acting White,” I am often referring to their sense of entitlement. Some of them do not understand what it means to struggle economically and live in areas where little examples of success are present . . . Thus, “acting White” has more to do with a sense of privilege that some folks develop and internalize. (Jamal, Black male)

Style and Social Preferences

The second theme that emerged for AW involved stylistic preferences and social interests. This theme was expressed by 27% of the sample and included the following five codes: clothing, music and dance, activities, interracial contact, and food.

Clothing. Participants (14%) described specific clothing styles and brands as AW.

“Acting White” is just a stereotyped label for doing things that our society categorizes as being most frequently associated with White people. For example, we would usually tease my Mexican friend for being more of a “White girl” with her UGG boots, Northface jackets, and coffee in the mornings. (Gabriella, Latinx female)

“['Acting White'] means] not dressing up “ghetto” or “gangster” in today’s terms. (Hector, Latinx male)

The “acting White” label should not mean anything to me, but it does . . . It means that you dress very preppy. (Sean, Black male)

Participants distinguished stereotypical “White” clothing brands/ styles from urban alternatives and highlighted the degree to which clothing serves as a marker of one’s cultural preference.

Music and dance. Participants (11%) described music and dance styles as components of AW. Listening to music genres outside of those stereotypically associated with their race/ethnicity would make them susceptible to AW accusations (e.g., pop, rock, alternative, and electronic). This sentiment was consistent across demographics:

I would say that “acting White” is being something opposite of what you should be acting like, based on what your racial background is. Since I am Mexican, I should be listening to Spanish music, but hey, I like Miley Cyrus so my mom sometimes says “you’re so White.” (Eva, Latinx female)

“['Acting White'] means] listening to music other than hip-hop/rap and being educated are only “White” traits, and when performed by a Black person are considered inappropriate. It’s affected me because I feel like I do not fit in with Black people. I feel like they’re judging me because I’m not “Black enough.” But I am Black. I’m not confused about my Blackness because I value education and listen to Paramore more than I listen to Kanye. (Monique, Black female)

Nonrhythmic dance styles were also described as AW:

I get accused of "acting White" . . . But other ways of being considered “White” would be through dancing, which is just stiff movements rather than soulful dancing. (Victoria, Latinx female)

Demographic patterns revealed that Latinx students described music and dance styles at a higher rate than Black students (16 vs. 7%; p = .02).

Activities. Participants (4%) associated specific extracurricular activities and sports with AW. Sports were the most frequently mentioned activities. Latinx students were stereotyped to play soccer, whereas Black students were stereotyped to play basketball or football. However, participation in any nonprototypical activities were associated with AW:
I was part of the band program ever since 4th grade and there has never been much diversity there. I have also done swimming since I was little and there weren’t many Hispanics, African Americans, or other races in that as well. So I was told that I do “White people” activities. (Amelia, Latinx female)

In my schooling environment, often times when I was referred to as “White,” it meant that I was not acting “Latino.” Which was in regards to me not playing soccer . . . I was often times called “White” by Latinos who represented Latinos in a negative light. It hasn’t really bothered me to be viewed as “White” because I didn’t identify as White. I knew I was Peruvian and Mexican, it just so happened that I enjoy to play baseball instead of soccer. (Christian, Latinx male)

Nonprototypical activities were described similarly across sociodemographics. Participants emphasized the extent to which extracurricular activities have been racialized within American society and they highlighted the process of negotiating racial boundaries while engaging in nonprototypical activities.

**Interracial contact.** Participants (4%) described extensive interracial contact as an indicator of AW and this included interracial friendships and interracial romantic relationships. Extensive interracial contact, particularly with White peers, made individuals more susceptible to AW accusations. This narrative was similar across sociodemographics:

To me, “acting White” truly means that you only want to surround yourself with White people and not embrace your own race. It’s not a problem to hang with people of other races, but it becomes a problem when you do it purposefully. (Sean, Black male)

[“Acting White” means] hanging out with people outside of your own race and enjoying yourself with them. I also do not fit in with “ghetto Black girls” so they like to throw the “you act White” at me too. (Shawna, Black female)

The “acting White” label means that a person talks like a White person and hangs out with White people more than their own race. (Maria, Latinx Female)

Interracial contact, by itself, was not perceived as a problem or uncommon. However, extensive interracial contact, especially with White peers, was interpreted as a preference for the dominant culture over one’s own culture and, thus, a determinant for AW.

**Food.** Participants (1%) reported food as an attribute of AW and this code was only mentioned by Latinx students. Food preferences were perceived to be an indicator of cultural authenticity through statements like “not eating the native food,” “being picky about food,” and “eating fast food.”

**Cultural Ideologies**

The third theme for AW involved perceptions of cultural ideologies. This theme was expressed by 19% of the sample and encompassed: cultural alienation and normalizing “White” as “American.”

**Cultural alienation.** Participants (14%) described AW as a sense of cultural alienation where one is disconnected from their racial/ethnic identity. Cultural alienation involved identity-conscious statements that depicted a sense of identity confusion or the absence of intraracial ties.

When other Black people use the phrase [“acting White”], they tend to suggest that one has lost, or is losing, a sense of their heritage and, thus, their identity. It implies that one is betraying their people. (Jamal, Black male)

[“Acting White”] seems to carry connotations of going against your own Hispanic heritage. You turn your back on being Latino if you “act White.” It’s annoying and a little hurtful to be looked at as a traitor by other Latinos. (Gloria, Latinx female)

Participants described culturally alienated individuals as people who may betray their own culture. These identity-conscious statements demonstrate the degree to which perceptions of cultural affiliation heavily influence interpersonal interactions.

**Normalizing “White” as “American.”** Participants (9%) defined AW as the process of adopting “White” norms to integrate into mainstream American culture. The content of these messages varied between Black and Latinx participants. Latinx students frequently described a process of assimilation into mainstream American culture and emphasized societal pressure to adopt “White” attributes over “Latino/Hispanic” attributes.

[“Acting White”] means to me, being assimilated with American culture and losing touch with your own culture. It has affected me negatively because I am criticized for not being able to speak Spanish. (Robert, Latinx male)

The Americanization of a culture and traditions. It has affected my life as it has taken me away from my origins. (Stephanie, Latinx female)

Although Black students never mentioned “assimilation,” they described how American culture has historically promoted “White” norms, and Sasha (Black female) describes how this process contributes to self-hatred:

[“Acting White” is] a strong affinity for mainstream American culture coupled with a strong disregard for the importance of Black historical or political presence. It has affected my life by bringing to my attention that the presence of such behavior indicates self-hatred because of race and sparked within me the desire to learn more about my history and educate my peers and Black youth about their history so that they can have race pride and a better sense of self while living and functioning as a Black person in America today.

Additionally, participants expressed frustration with White culture being construed as the default norms for all Americans:

Once my ex-boyfriend, who was White, said, “you do not look Mexican.” So I asked him, “what do I look then?” He responded with, “I do not know . . . normal. Aren’t you part White?” I am 100% Mexican, and this made me mad. People consider “White” as a kind of default normal human, at least in the U.S. (Selena, Latinx female)

This excerpt demonstrates how White individuals may perpetrate AW insults by normalizing specific characteristics as “White” and invalidating the identity of people of color.

Normalizing “White” as “American” was mentioned more frequently among Latinx students compared with Black students (15 vs. 2%; p < .001).

**Academics and Success**

A fourth theme included a single code for achievement and aspirations. Participants (11%) expressed resentment toward the
portrayal of academic achievement and success as AW, but they noted that peers and family still accused them of AW for embodying these attributes. This dynamic is highlighted in the following responses:

I grew up with mostly White people and I hate when someone says “you act like a White person” when the person is simply educated... Intelligence and education are not exclusive to the White race and saying that someone “acts White” when they are well-manered is a reason why segregation and racism still exist. It’s a pet peeve of mine and it irritates me when someone tells me I “act White.” (Miguel, Latinx male)

To me [“acting White”] means that I m an intellectual individual and that I strive to be the best in everything I do. I am very educated and my academic performance reflects that. (Leah, Black female)

Although the vast majority of participants maintained high achievement attitudes despite being accused of AW, there was one case where a male student described a reduction in academic effort to avoid the AW accusation:

It angers me because just because I am trying to make something out of myself, it makes me "act White." Most of the Time I would act less intelligent since I did not want to be accused of “acting White.” (Michael, Latinx male)

Female participants described academic achievement interchangeably with aspirations for success, whereas male participants focused primarily on achievement. The following response highlights the overlap between achievement and aspirations among female participants:

“Acting White” to me means being educated and wanting more for myself. Staying focused on the bigger things in life. Being this way has shown me that I can do whatever I set my mind to no matter how I “act.” (Tiffany, Black female)

The combination of academic achievement and high aspirations among female students demonstrates that AW accusations did not deter these individuals in pursuing their goals. Although male students did not integrate achievement and aspirations to the same degree as females, they still maintained high achievement attitudes with only one exception.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand how a diverse sample of late adolescents define AW, and examine how AW may be understood differently across sociodemographics. We uncovered depths of meaning and manifestations of AW that highlight the capacity of Black and Latinx late adolescents to critically examine cultural invalidations within American society.

Findings indicate that 11 unique codes, categorized into four themes, captured the breadth of meaning associated with AW. Several themes, including speech and behavior, style and social preferences, and academics and success, replicate previous investigations with younger adolescents (Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Neal-Barnett et al., 2010). Speech patterns were the most frequently reported characteristic of AW and this supports previous research indicating that speech patterns are the most heavily targeted attributes of AW (Neal-Barnett et al., 2010; Webb & Linn, 2016). Black females in this study emphasized speech patterns 2–3 times more frequently than any other sociodemographic. Prior gender differences have been found (Carter, 2005, 2006), but the present study is one of the first to identify a racialized gender difference where Black females reported speech patterns twice as frequently as Latinx females. Existing research in linguistics has demonstrated that cultural dialects of English, such as African American Vernacular English and Latinx/Chicano English, are associated with greater discrimination within residential housing, employment, and salaries (Grogger, 2011; Purnell, Idsardi, & Baugh, 1999; Rickford et al., 2015). However, these studies have yet to parcel out discrepancies to determine whether women face greater risk for language-based discrimination than men. This is one of the first studies to explicitly examine whether the meaning of AW differs for males and females across racial/ethnic groups.

Academic achievement was the least frequently reported theme for AW and this finding, along with recent work (Webb & Linn, 2016), suggests that academic achievement is not as central to AW as previous literature suggested (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Although Fordham and Ogbu (1986) proposed the “AW hypothesis” as a deterrent to academic achievement, results from this study indicate that the vast majority of Black and Latinx youth continue to hold high academic beliefs despite being frustrated by AW accusations. These findings align with meta-analyses showing positive relationships between academic achievement and racial/ethnic affect among Black and Latinx students (Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Considering that the AW label reinforces stereotypes about marginalized racial/ethnic groups and normalizes “White” attributes, it is likely that youth of color with a well-developed racial/ethnic identity may resent the underlying messages implied by the AW accusation and become motivated to defy negative stereotypes ascribed to their culture (i.e., stereotype threat; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Cultural ideologies represent a unique theme that has not received much attention in the AW literature and this sample of late adolescents utilized their keen sense of social norms and racial/ethnic identity to reconstruct AW. Specifically the sample reflected heavily on their understanding of race/ethnicity to describe the sense of cultural alienation that defines AW. Cultural ideologies likely emerged in this study because late adolescents are more attuned to racial/ethnic identity and social norms compared with research with younger adolescents (Bergin & Cooks, 2002). The transition into college is another catalyst that may have made cultural ideologies more salient because identity exploration increases dramatically during college as students try to comprehend their social identities (Arnett, 2016; Phinney, 2006).

While several demographic differences emerged in how students define AW, there was great consistency in AW definitions across social identities. The considerable amount of similarity in AW definitions suggests that these cultural invalidations are relevant for youth from multiple racial/ethnic backgrounds. While little research has examined AW among Latinx youth, this study demonstrates that this population faces AW invalidations regularly. Although Latinx populations in the United States possess distinct norms and stereotypes, a common denominator among marginalized racial/ethnic groups is that they must navigate a challenging racial climate where nonconformity to racial/ethnic norms and stereotypes may lead them to be targeted by cultural invalidations. It is important to examine the meaning-making processes of cultural invalidations, because the salience of these
threats may vary across individuals, social identities, and contexts. The present study contributes to the literature by providing a detailed taxonomy of how late adolescents make meaning of AW during college-entry.

Implications of Cultural Invalidations

This study highlights many distinguishing features of AW that should be further examined to enhance our understanding of cultural validations. For example, the content of AW varied widely and validations pertaining to speech patterns, clothing, or activities may each have unique psychological consequences. Second, cultural invalidations may carry distinct implications for various sociodemographics (e.g., invalidations pertaining to speech patterns may have distinct consequences for Black women vs. Latinx women). Third, the present study demonstrates that peers, close friends, parents, and White individuals may all perpetrate AW accusations, but the psychological consequences of these invalidations may vary across perpetrators. More research is needed to explore each of these important implications of AW. Classifying AW within the broader construct of cultural invalidations will help to unify this body of work with a single terminology that encompasses multiple variants of identity threats for specific social identities: racial identity invalidations (Franco & O’Brien, 2018), racial microvalidations (Sue et al., 2007), and identity denial (Johnson & Ashburn-Nardo, 2014).

Limitations and Conclusion

Several factors limit the generalizability of the present findings. First, the sample included high achieving minority students who were admitted to 4-year, predominantly White universities in the Midwest. Therefore, the findings do not generalize to late adolescents who enrolled at minority-serving institutions or those who did not matriculate to college. Additionally, Black males were underrepresented in the study and quantitative results may not accurately capture the experiences of this group because $X^2$ statistics are sensitive to sample size (Roscoe & Byars, 1971). Lastly, the most salient features of AW were prioritized and findings are not intended to provide an exhaustive list of all AW characteristics.

While the present study focused on the meaning of AW, it is important to understand how diverse populations internalize cultural invalidations. AW represents a common invalidation for people of color and a broader examination of cultural invalidations may help researchers classify identity threats that discredit or undermine specific social identities (e.g., gender, religion, social class, etc.). Claude Steele (2010) argues that all human beings are susceptible to stereotype threats; we posit that all human beings are similarly susceptible to cultural invalidations whenever the prototypical norms of a social identity are violated. As additional research dissects these intricate social dynamics, the breadth of cultural invalidations will become more evident and improve our understanding of their robust implications.

References


Racial stereotyping of gay men: Can a minority sexual orientation erase race?☆,☆☆

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ABSTRACT
Decades of research indicate that the traits we ascribe to people often depend on their race. Yet, the bulk of this research has not considered how racial stereotypes might also depend on other aspects of targets' identities. To address this, researchers have begun to ask intersectional questions about racial stereotypes, such as whether they are applied in similar ways to men and women, or to children and adults. In the present studies, we examine whether men who are described as gay (vs. not) become de-racialized in the minds of perceivers. That is, we test whether gay (vs. non-gay) men are perceived as less stereotypic of their own racial or ethnic groups. Results consistently support the de-racialization hypothesis, regardless of whether targets are Black, White, Asian, or Hispanic. Moreover, when Black and Hispanic men are described as gay (vs. not), they become stereotypically “Whitened” in addition to seeming less stereotypic of their own racial groups. This “Whitening” effect is explained by Black and Hispanic men's seeming more affluent when described as gay (vs. when not), an effect that holds even when controlling for changes in these men's stereotypic femininity. Collectively, these findings underscore the point that race and sexual orientation are not orthogonal in the minds of perceivers. A minority sexual orientation can alter the racial characteristics ascribed to men, reducing the perceived presence of race-typical traits and, for low-SES men, increasing their perceived “Whiteness.”

1. Introduction
Within 100 milliseconds of seeing someone's face for the first time, we make up our minds about what their gender is, what their race is, whether they are old or young, and even about whether they are homosexual or heterosexual (Todorov, Olivola, Dotsch, & Mende-Siedlecki, 2015). Put simply, we have a strong, effortless tendency to engage in social categorization—to sort ourselves and other people into meaningful social groups (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). This process of social categorization, and the ability to think categorically about the world more broadly, is an adaptive psychological tendency (Hamilton & Trolier, 1986; Taylor, 1981). And yet, this tendency is often deleterious for the targets of our perceptions. Merely categorizing someone as an outgroup member, even on the basis of something arbitrary, like a coin toss, is sufficient to elicit biases disadvantaging that person (Brewer, 2010; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). Likewise, categorizing someone as a member of a racial group can spontaneously activate stereotypes in our minds (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996), and these stereotypes can color our perceptions of that person's behavior.

Complicating matters is the fact that perceivers do not always respond to others in terms of isolated dimensions of social identity. Instead, social impressions arise holistically, with different identity dimensions being interpreted interactively (Cole, 2009; Freeman & Ambady, 2011; Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015). For example, when a person is upper-class, as opposed to working-class, perceivers are more inclined to categorize them as White (Freeman, Penner, Saperstein, Scheutz, & Ambady, 2011; Lei & Bodenhausen, 2017). In addition, Black targets are categorized as men faster than White targets are (Goff, Thomas, & Jackson, 2008; K. L. Johnson, Freeman, & Pauker, 2012), and more masculine stereotypes are applied to them (Galinsky, Hall, & Cuddy, 2013; Hall, Galinsky, & Phillips, 2015). Thus, perceptions of social categories, as well as the stereotypes these categories imply, can be augmented and attenuated by perception of seemingly orthogonal social categories to which a person belongs.

In the present paper, we investigate whether the racial stereotypes...
perceivers apply to a person depend on that person’s sexual orientation. Our first hypothesis is that labeling men as gay (vs. not) will cause them to become de-racialized in the minds of perceivers. By “de-racialized,” we mean that gay men, compared with men whose orientation is not mentioned, will seem less typical of their constituent racial or ethnic groups. For example, perceivers will characterize gay (vs. non-gay) White men as “less White,” gay (vs. non-gay) Black men as “less Black,” and so on for targets of other racial and ethnic groups. In addition to testing the de-racialization hypothesis, we examine evidence in favor of a second hypothesis: that when low-SES groups of men are described as gay (vs. not) they will seem stereotypically Whiter to perceivers. Both of these hypotheses are rooted in research on cultural prototypes, described below. We focus on perceptions of traits that are stereotypically associated with Black, White, Asian, and Hispanic racial/ethnic groups because these perceptions—perceptions of racial prototypicality—are often correlated with targets’ likelihood of facing racial discrimination.

Generally speaking, people who seem more stereotypic of their racial groups are at greater risk of being discriminated against on the basis of their race (Kleider-Offutt, Bond, & Hegerty, 2017; Maddox & Perry, 2018; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Numerous studies support this idea in the criminal sentencing domain (e.g., Blair, Judd, & Chapleau, 2004; Eberhardt, Davies, Purdie-Vaughns, & Johnson, 2006), but this principle applies to other domains as well. People who seem more stereotypic of their racial groups experience greater racial discrimination in personnel selection (Harrison, Reynolds-Dobbs, & Thomas, 2008; Wade, Romano, & Blue, 2004), in earnings (Devaraj, Quigley, & Patel, 2018), in educational settings (M. Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Murguia & Telles, 1996), and in contexts of intergroup interaction more generally (Hebl, Williams, Sundermann, Kell, & Davies, 2012; Uzogara, Lee, Abdou, & Jackson, 2014). As such, understanding the factors that accentuate or attenuate how stereotypic someone seems of their racial group is of broad interest to psychologists and laypeople alike.

Our principal hypothesis—that gay (vs. non-gay) men will be de-racialized in the minds of perceivers—is informed by research on cultural prototypes. In general, people construct prototypes of social groups in ways that presume default standing (i.e., majority-group status) on other social identities (Bodenhagen & Peery, 2009; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). In the United States, where the present studies were conducted, this means that the most prototypic members of social groups are typically presumed to be White (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Hegarty, 2017), male (Bailey, LaFrance, & Dovidio, 2018; Eagly & Kite, 1987), and heterosexual (Herek, 2007; Herek & McLemore, 2013; Lick & Johnson, 2016) by default. These default assumptions are usually termed cultural ethnocentrism, androcentrism, and heterocentrism, respectively. When Americans call to mind their prototypes of non-White individuals, default presumptions of Whiteness are of course replaced by the relevant focal ethnicities, but even in these circumstances, the group prototype continues to be defined in terms of male and heterosexual group members. Thus, racial prototypes presume heterosexuality, and any deviation from heterosexuality could imply reduced racial prototypicality. Specifically, when contemplating gay (vs. non-gay) members of a racial group, the addition of stereotypically gay characteristics can displace, conflict with, and potentially erase racial characteristics that would otherwise be present in the group prototype. We hypothesize that this “de-racialization” process applies to gay (vs. non-gay) members of all racial and ethnic groups.

So far, we have argued that when prototypes of gay men are combined with prototypes of particular racial groups, the presumptions of heterosexuality inherent in the racial prototypes are challenged in ways that reduce racial prototypicality. In addition to this direct clash of stereotypes, there can also be more indirect conflicts relating to other kinds of default assumptions about the two original ‘parent’ categories. In the present research, we focus on assumptions about socioeconomic status (SES). We focus on SES because of the widespread recognition of its fundamental role in social relations (e.g., Fiske & Markus, 2012; Manstead, 2018). In the U.S., gay men are stereotypically viewed as economically successful. Although LGBT people in America are actually more likely to experience economic challenges such as housing and food insecurity than their heterosexual counterparts, they are commonly stereotyped as affluent and as living self-indulgent, cosmopolitan lifestyles in trendy neighborhoods (McDermott, 2014). Sociological analyses confirm that gay men are often depicted in the media as economically comfortable White men (Barrett & Pollack, 2005; Bérubé, 2001; Shugart, 2003; Valocchi, 1999), despite the much greater diversity that actually characterizes gay communities (e.g., Greene, 1997). Given these common cultural representations, the prototype of gay men in America is likely to entail assumptions of socioeconomic success.

Stereotypic assumptions about socioeconomic success also vary widely across different racial and ethnic groups, with White and Asian groups being perceived as higher in SES than Black and Hispanic groups (e.g., Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Zou & Cheryan, 2017). This means that for gay men belonging to stereotypically lower-SES racial and ethnic groups, there is not only a clash of stereotypes concerning sexuality-related traits but also concerning SES-related traits. Gay prototypes presume relative affluence, and stereotypes of affluence in turn implicate Whiteness (Freeman et al., 2011; Lei & Bodenhagen, 2017; Penner & Saperstein, 2008). Given this set of tensions, we hypothesize that gay (vs. non-gay) men from stereotypically low-SES racial groups will be seen as possessing stereotypically Whiter characteristics, presumably because they will be thought of as possessing higher SES. For gay men from racial groups that are stereotyped as economically successful, there should be no corresponding tension, and hence, no ensuing “Whitening.”

2. The present studies

We conducted several experiments to compare Americans’ stereotypes of men at various intersections of racial and sexual orientation categories. Because it provides a common approach for assessing stereotypes toward multiple groups, we relied primarily on the checklist method first developed by Katz and Braly (1933) and adapted in many subsequent studies (e.g., Devine & Elliot, 1995; Galinsky et al., 2013; Karlins, Coffman, & Walters, 1969). In this task, one group of participants chooses from a checklist the traits that come to mind when thinking of a specified group of people. New participants then rate these traits on dimensions of interest (for example, on how stereotypically Asian they seem). This procedure allows us to compute, for each target group, the degree to which participants nominate traits that are seen as stereotypically Black, White, Asian, and Hispanic. If Americans’ default assumption is that prototypic members of a racial group are heterosexual (e.g., Herek & McLemore, 2013; Lick & Johnson, 2016), then explicitly labeling groups of men as gay could reduce their racial prototypicality and, consequently, decrease how stereotypic they seem of their racial groups (i.e., ‘de-racialization’). If it is also true that Americans’ prototype of the gay community is economically successful by default (e.g., Bengry, 2009; Valocchi, 1999), and economic success is in turn associated with Whiteness, then men from stereotypically low-SES groups (e.g., Black men) may not only be de-racialized when described as gay (vs. not), but regarded as psychologically Whiter as well.

Our data and experimental materials can be found on the Open Science Framework (OSF; https://osf.io/bktjs/). We report all data exclusions and measures. Key results are accompanied by unstandardized effect sizes (M_{uns}), 95% confidence intervals around these effect sizes (95% CIs), and standardized effect sizes (fs). Unless noted otherwise, all results are accompanied by these standard errors. 1

1 Of note, stereotypes of Black and Hispanic men differ from those Asian and White men in ways that extend well beyond SES positioning (e.g., stereotypic positivity vs. negativity, stereotypic masculinity vs. femininity). We will return to this issue in the Meditational Interlude of this paper.
otherwise, we used a rule-of-thumb strategy of recruiting 75 participants per condition. This gave us 80% power to detect between-condition differences as small as 0.32 standard deviations (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009).

3. Checklist traits and trait ratings

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Trait selection
We used a checklist measure of stereotyping that contained 99 trait terms. Eighty-four of these traits came from Katz and Braly’s (1933) original checklist. 9 were traits that Devine and Elliot added in 1995, and 6 were traits that Galinsky, Hall, and Cuddy added in 2013 (for the full list of traits, see materials on OSF).

3.1.2. Trait ratings
Participants rated how stereotypic each of these traits seemed of four racial groups: Black Americans, White Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans. These ratings were collected as each group became focal in the research program. To avoid redundancy, we summarize the general method for collecting each type of rating here. The instructions accompanying these ratings were the same across all four focal groups, and we ensured that participants who provided one type of rating were excluded from providing other types of ratings.

3.1.2.1. Participants and procedure. A total of 320 Mechanical Turk (MTurk) participants completed a brief survey in exchange for $0.85. We excluded all participants (n = 5; 1.6%) who did not respond “yes” to the question, “Did you take this survey seriously?” The 315 remaining participants were primarily White (244 White, 26 Asian, 23 Black, 16 Latinx, 3 multiracial, 1 Pacific Islander, 2 non-specified), and the majority were men (208 men, 119 women, 2 transgender, 2 non-specified). Participants’ ages spanned from 18 to 74 (M = 33.85, SD = 4.41, on a 10-point scale from 1 = extremely liberal to 10 = extremely conservative).

Participants rated the 99 checklist traits on one of four dimensions, depending on the study for which they were recruited. Regardless of study, all participants saw the instructions, “we are interested in understanding the cultural stereotypes that are attributed to ____ [Black, White, Asian, or Hispanic] individuals in the U.S.” They then learned that they would view 99 personality traits in a random order, and that they would be asked to rate all 99 traits on how stereotypic they seemed of a group of people, from 1 = Not at all ____ [Black, White, Asian, or Hispanic] to 7 = Very ____ [Black, White, Asian, or Hispanic]. As a strategy to reduce concerns about appearing socially undesirable (e.g., see Devine & Elliot, 1995; Ghavami & Peplau, 2013) participants were told “Please note that we are not interested in your personal beliefs. Rather, we want you to tell us how stereotypically ____ [Black, White, Asian or Hispanic] the average American would regard these traits to be.” Participants then made their ratings, completed a demographic questionnaire, and they received compensation for their time.

3.2. Results

For each of the 99 traits, we computed a score of how stereotypically Black, White, Asian, and Hispanic participants’ ratings were, on average. Table 2 contains the correlations between these rating dimensions. To illustrate some of the diversity in these stereotypes, we report the five most- and least-stereotypic traits for each racial group in Table 1.

4. Experiments 1a, 1b, and 1c

In Experiments 1a, 1b, and 1c, we examined participants’ stereotypes of Black and White men as a function of whether or not these men were described as gay. We hypothesized that both groups of men would be de-racialized when described as gay (vs. not). Thus, we anticipated that gay (vs. non-gay) Black men would be characterized by checklist traits that were rated as “less Black,” and that gay (vs. non-gay) White men would be characterized by checklist traits that were rated as “less White.” In addition to being viewed as less prototypically Black, we hypothesized that gay (vs. non-gay) Black men would be stereotypically “Whitenized.” That is, the traits selected as typical of gay Black men were expected to be rated as higher in stereotypic Whiteness, on average, than those selected as typical of Black men. In Experiment 1a, we used the checklist method to examine preliminary support for these hypotheses. In Experiment 1b, we examined whether these results depended on how we semantically described the target men (i.e., as “gay Black men” vs. “Black gay men”). In Experiment 1c, we tested whether non-gay men—men whose orientation is not mentioned (e.g., “Black men”)—are indeed stereotyped similarly to men whose orientation is explicitly denoted as heterosexual (e.g., “straight Black men”). In addition, Experiment 1c examined whether the results of Experiments 1a and 1b would replicate when using a free-response method of assessing group stereotypes.

4.1. Experiment 1a

Participants listed their stereotypes about one of four groups of men: gay Black men, Black men, gay White men, or White men. The overall design was a 2 (target orientation: gay, control) × 2 (target race: Black, White) between-person experiment.

4.1.1. Method

4.1.1.1. Participants. A total of 300 online participants completed a survey in exchange for $0.85. We excluded all participants (n = 7; 2.3%) who did not respond “yes” to the question, “Did you complete this study carefully?” The final sample consisted of 293 respondents (161 men, 130 women, 2 non-specified). They were mostly White (220 White, 23 Asian, 19 Black, 17 Latinx, 3 American Indian, 1 Pacific Islander, 9 multi-racial, and 1 non-identified) and their ages ranged from 18 to 71 (M = 33.57, SD = 11.92). They were also generally well educated (42.66% held a bachelor’s degree or higher), moderately liberal (M = 4.02, SD = 2.27, on the same scale as above), and predominantly (88.40%) heterosexual.

4.1.1.2. Procedure. Participants completed a survey on “perceptions of various social groups.” They learned that the research team wanted to know about current societal stereotypes—defined for participants as Americans’ culturally shared beliefs—about one of four groups of men, by random assignment: gay Black men, Black men, gay White men, or White men.

Participants saw all 99 traits, arranged in a randomized order, and they were instructed to “select ALL traits that are part of the current cultural stereotype of” their randomly assigned target group. After viewing all of the traits and selecting the ones that were relevant to the cultural stereotype about their target group, participants were shown the traits they chose one more time, and they were asked to narrow their trait selections down to the 10 most stereotypic traits about the focal group. Using the Whiteness and Blackness scores for each trait described in the section above (see Checklist Traits and Trait Ratings), we computed how stereotypically White and how stereotypically Black each participant’s top 10 traits were, on average.2 At the end of the

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2Our conclusions remain the same regardless of whether we analyze all of participants’ trait nominations, or simply the top 10. For analyses on all trait
nominations, including traits that did not make it into participants’ top 10, see supplemental analyses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stereotypically Black (N = 78)</th>
<th>Stereotypically Asian (N = 81)</th>
<th>Stereotypically Hispanic (N = 78)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( M_a )</td>
<td>95% Cl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>[5.77, 6.31]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic</td>
<td>5.97</td>
<td>[5.70, 6.24]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louid</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>[5.33, 5.95]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythmic</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>[5.23, 5.87]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ostentious</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>[5.28, 5.82]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>[5.28, 5.82]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>[1.83, 2.38]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delicate</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>[1.81, 2.37]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientifically Minded</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>[1.82, 2.34]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shy</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>[1.75, 2.28]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>[1.73, 2.25]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Four unique samples of participants rated all 99 traits (sample Ns are included in parentheses). \( M_a \) = how “Black” a trait was rated, on average; \( M_W \) = how “White” a trait was rated, on average; \( M_A \) = how “Asian” a trait was rated, on average; and \( M_H \) = how “Hispanic” a trait was rated, on average. All means are enclosed by 95% confidence intervals.

4.1.2.2. Whiteness ratings. We next conducted a 2 × 2 ANOVA on how “White” participants’ trait nominations were. This ANOVA yielded a main effect of target race, such that participants characterized Black targets as less stereotypically White than non-gay Black men. We next conducted a 2 × 2 ANOVA on how “White” participants’ trait nominations were. This ANOVA yielded a main effect of target race, such that participants characterized Black targets as less stereotypically White (\( M = 3.98, SD = 0.50 \)) than White targets (\( M = 4.53, SD = 0.26 \)), \( F(1, 289) = 223.47, p < .001, \) \( M_{diff} = −0.55, 95\% CI [−0.62, −0.48], \beta = −1.14 \). In addition, this analysis yielded a main effect of target orientation, such that participants nominated stereotypically Whiter traits for gay targets (\( M = 4.39, SD = 0.25 \)) than for non-gay (‘control’) targets (\( M = 4.12, SD = 0.61, F(1, 289) = 56.24, p < .001, \) \( M_{diff} = 0.28, 95\% CI [0.20, 0.35], \beta = 0.57 \). Finally, we found a two-way interaction between these two effects that corresponded to our predictions, \( F(1, 289) = 121.00, p < .001, \) \( \omega^2_p = 0.29 \), as depicted in Fig. 1 (right panel). Participants thought of White targets as less stereotypically White when described as gay (vs. not), \( F(1, 289) = 6.15, p = .014, \) \( M_{diff} = −0.13, 95\% CI [−0.23, −0.03], \beta = −0.27, \) but they did the reverse for Black targets. That is, participants thought of gay Black men as substantially Whiter, stereotypically speaking, than non-gay (‘control’) Black men, \( F(1, 289) = 170.56, p < .001, \) \( M_{diff} = 0.68, 95\% CI [0.58, 0.78], \beta = 1.41 \). These results support both hypotheses: gay White men were de-racialized relative to non-gay White men, and gay Black men were accorded stereotypically Whiter qualities than were non-gay Black men.

4.1.3. Discussion

Experiment 1a supports the notion that racial group prototypes are presumed heterosexual by default (Herek & Mclemore, 2013; Lick & Johnson, 2016). Men who were labeled as gay (vs. not) deviated from this presumption and were, consequently, de-racialized in the minds of
perceivers. This is to say that gay (vs. non-gay) White men were characterized as “less White,” and that gay (vs. non-gay) Black men were characterized as “less Black.” In addition, these findings support our second hypothesis: that when stereotypically low-SES men are described as gay (vs. not), they may be stereotypically Whitened in addition to being de-racialized.

4.2. Experiment 1b

Experiment 1b provided a replication of our initial results regarding perceptions of Black targets who are (or are not) described as gay, and also examined whether the previously obtained results depend on whether targets are described as “gay Black men” versus “Black gay men.” In the first case, gayness modifies a referent identity of “Black men.” But in the second case, Blackness modifies a referent identity of “gay men.” Given that linguistic distinctions between modifiers and referents can influence the content of perceivers’ conceptual combinations (Gagné & Shoben, 1997; Wisniewski & Gentner, 1991), we wanted to ensure that the above findings were not simply a product of the particular way target groups were labeled in Experiment 1a.

4.2.1. Method

4.2.1.1. Participants. Two hundred and twenty-eight participants completed an online survey in exchange for $0.85. Again, we excluded all individuals (n = 7; 3.1%) who did not respond “yes” to the question, “Did you complete this study carefully?” Our final sample consisted of 221 respondents (127 were men, 93 were women, 1 was non-specified). This sample was mostly White (153 White, 21 Black, 20 Latinx, 17 Asian, 2 American Indian, 9 multi-racial), and had ages ranging from 18 to 69 (Latinx, 17 Asian, 2 American Indian, 9 multi-racial), and had ages non-specified). This sample was mostly White (153 White, 21 Black, 20

4.2.1.2. Procedure. Instructions and survey structure were identical to those of Experiment 1a. This time, however, participants either reported on the stereotypes about Black men, Black gay men, or gay Black men, by random assignment.

4.2.2. Results

As in Experiment 1a, analyses are broken down by dependent variable. For both dependent variables, we regressed our outcomes onto contrast codes that corresponded to our research questions [statistically equivalent to running one-way ANOVAs (Judd, McClelland, & Ryan, 2009)].

4.2.2.1. Blackness ratings. Subjecting Blackness ratings to a one-way ANOVA yielded a sizable main effect of target sexual orientation, suggesting that participants characterized men who are both Black and gay (M = 4.32, SD = 0.52) as less stereotypically Black than men who are Black and non-gay (i.e., ‘control’ Black men: M = 5.15, SD = 0.33), F(1, 218) = 157.51, p < .001, M_{diff} = −0.83, 95% CI [−0.96, −0.70], β = −1.37. Moreover, the magnitude of this effect was similar regardless of the ordering of the Black and gay descriptors. Participants characterized “gay Black men” as no more or less stereotypically Black than “Black gay men,” F(1, 218) = 2.18, p = .141, M_{diff} = −0.11, 95% CI [−0.26, 0.04], β = −0.19 (see Fig. 2, left panel).

4.2.2.2. Whiteness ratings. Turning to the Whiteness of these stereotypes, a one-way ANOVA yielded a sizable main effect of target sexual orientation, suggesting that participants characterized Black men who are gay (M = 4.35, SD = 0.28) as stereotypically Whiter than Black men who are not (M = 3.56, SD = 0.33), F(1, 218) = 348.86, p < .001, M_{diff} = 0.79, 95% CI [0.71, 0.88], β = 1.66. As before, we found no evidence that how we described these men influenced participants’ stereotypes. Participants characterized targets as equally (stereotypically) White regardless of whether these targets were described as “gay Black men” or as “Black gay men,” F(1, 218) = 0.49, p = .484, M_{diff} = 0.03, 95% CI [−0.06, 0.13], β = 0.07 (see Fig. 2, right panel).

4.2.3. Discussion

These findings indicate that stereotypes of gay-and-Black men are not meaningfully contingent on which word—“gay” or “Black”—serves as a modifier and which one serves as a referent. Thus, conceptual knowledge of race-by-orientation category combinations does not appear to be affected by word ordering, as knowledge of other category combinations can be (e.g., Gagné & Shoben, 1997). Instead, perceivers show a robust tendency to de-racialize Black men who are labeled as gay (vs. not), and they show a separate, robust tendency to regard these men as stereotypically Whiter as well.

4.3. Experiment 1c

Experiment 1c replicated the design of Experiment 1a, but it added conditions in which Black and White men were explicitly described as heterosexual. If the observed de-racialization effects really stem from perceivers’ assumption that racial group prototypes are heterosexual by default (e.g., Herek, 2007; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), then men who are labeled as gay—but not men who are labeled as heterosexual—should be de-racialized in in the minds of perceivers.

4.2. Experiment 1b
contrast, if de-racialization effects stem from the fact that gay men are simply a more specialized subset of their racial category than are non-gay men (Hinzman & Maddox, 2017; Kunda & Oleson, 1995), and if being more specialized is what de-racializes targets, then perhaps adding any adjective to the racial category that restricts its inclusiveness (including the adjective “straight”) will lead to de-racialization effects. Experiment 1c tested whether men who are explicitly labeled as heterosexual (vs. not) are de-racialized. If racial group prototypes are presumed heterosexual by default, there should be no differences between men who are explicitly described as heterosexual vs. those who are not (i.e., ‘control’ targets).

Experiment 1c also further examined the robustness of our initial results by using a different approach to measuring stereotypes. As previously noted, the checklist approach offers valuable advantages, but it does limit the respondents’ stereotypes to a fixed set of trait descriptors. Although the list of trait descriptors we used is extensive and diverse, it is nevertheless of interest to examine whether our hypotheses receive continued support when using a more open-ended procedure for stereotype assessment, as others have done (e.g., Cox & Devine, 2015; Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Niemann, Jennings, Rozelle, Baxter, & Sullivan, 1994).

4.3.1. Method

Experiment 1c had a two-phase design. In Phase 1, participants were randomly assigned to list up to five stereotypes about one of six groups of men defined by a 3 (target orientation: gay, heterosexual, control) × 2 (target race: Black, White) between-person experiment. Of men defined by a 3 (target orientation: gay, heterosexual, control) × 2 (target race: Black, White) experiment, with repeated measures on the second two factors. Designs of Phase 2 were a 2 (rating dimension: Blackness, Whiteness) × 3 (target orientation: gay, heterosexual, control) × 2 (target race: Black, White) experiment, with repeated measures on the second two factors.

4.3.1.1. Phase 1

4.3.1.1.1. Participants and procedure. We aimed to recruit approximately 50 people per condition.4 Our final sample consisted of 314 people (187 men, 127 women) was primarily White (215 White, 38 Asian, 31 Latinx, 22 Black, 2 Pacific Islander, 2 American Indian, 4 multiracial) and had ages spanning from 18 to 68 (M = 31.57, SD = 10.20). Much of the sample (49.68%) held at least a bachelor’s degree, they were somewhat politically liberal on average (M = 4.18, SD = 2.23, on same scale as above), and most (87.90%) were heterosexual.

The opening instructions to Phase 1 were identical to the instructions in Experiment 1a. However, this time participants were asked to report on current cultural stereotypes about one of six groups of men, by random assignment. These men were either Black or White, and their orientations were either not specified (e.g., “Black men”), stipulated to be heterosexual (e.g., “straight Black men”), or stipulated to be homosexual (e.g., “gay Black men”). Participants were presented with five free-response boxes, along with these instructions: “Please list the five stereotypes of [the randomly assigned group] that come to mind most quickly, regardless of whether you believe them to be true.” Participants could write as much or as little as they wanted in these boxes. After providing their stereotypes, participants completed the demographic questions and were compensated for their time.

4.3.1.2. Phase 2. In Phase 2, new participants rated the entries we acquired in Phase 1 on one of two dimensions, by random assignment: either on how stereotypically Black the entries seemed, or on how stereotypically White the entries seemed. Participants from Phase 2 saw an even number of stereotype sets (n = 8) from each of Phase 1’s conditions, drawn randomly for each participant from the total pool of stereotype sets that we had previously collected. Thus, the overall design of Phase 2 was a 2 (rating dimension: Blackness, Whiteness) × 3 (target orientation: gay, heterosexual, control) × 2 (target race: Black, White) experiment, with repeated measures on the second two factors.

4.3.1.2.1. Participants and procedure. We aimed to recruit approximately 100 participants per between-person condition.5 A total of 204 participants completed our survey in exchange for $0.85. Of these, we excluded n = 11 (5.39%) for failing to reply “yes” to the question, “Did you take this study seriously?” Our remaining 193 participants (113 men, 77 women, 3 non-specified) were primarily White (144 White, 16 Asian, 15 Black, 10 Latinx, 1 American Indian, 1 Pacific Islander, 6 multiracial) and their ages spanned from 19 to 71 (M = 36.21, SD = 10.18). Our sample was also generally well educated (59.07% held at least a bachelor’s degree), somewhat politically liberal (M = 4.97, SD = 2.81, on an 11-point scale from 1 = extremely liberal...
to 11 = extremely conservative), and predominantly (89.12%) heterosexual.

Upon entering the online survey, we informed participants that “in a previous study, we collected open-ended descriptions of different social groups,” and we told them that their task would be “to read some of the descriptions provided by previous respondents and rate them on a particular dimension.” After this, participants rated the responses of 48 randomly selected people who had participated in Phase 1. Specifically, they rated 8 responses from each of the 6 combinations of race (Black or White) and sexual orientation (straight, gay, or unspecified). Each of these 48 responses contained the five freely generated stereotypes, in their original order, that participants in Phase 1 had listed for their designated target groups. Phase 2 participants were asked to look at the five stereotypes listed in each of these 48 responses, and to indicate how stereotypically Black [White] the average American would perceive them to be (from 1 = not at all to 7 = extremely) on the whole. The presentation order and selection of the 48 responses was randomized for each participant. After participants provided their ratings of either “Blackness” or “Whiteness,” they completed several demographic questions and were compensated for their time.

4.3.2. Results

We conducted two sets of analyses: one among participants who provided ratings of how stereotypically Black the previously generated descriptors seemed, and one among participants who provided ratings of how stereotypically White these descriptors seemed. To conduct these analyses, we created two multilevel models in R (using the `lme4` package, (Bates, Mächler, Bolker, & Walker, 2014)), one for each analysis. Both models allowed for random intercepts of participant, and both allowed for random intercepts of stimuli. The former adjusts for the fact that observations were nested within person, and the latter adjusts for the fact that each participant saw a random subset of all the possible stereotype sets (i.e., stimuli) generated in Phase 1. Because target race and orientation were manipulated within participants, Experiment 1c had >96% power to detect effects (of target race, target orientation, or their interaction) as small as β = 0.20, according to Monte Carlo simulations.7

4.3.2.1. Blackness ratings. Subjecting Blackness ratings to the model described above is akin to running a 2 (target race: Black, White) × 3 (target orientation: gay, heterosexual, control) model containing the five freely generated stereotypes, in their original order, that participants in Phase 1 had listed for their designated target groups.6 Phase 2 participants were asked to look at the five stereotypes listed in each of these 48 responses, and to indicate how stereotypically Black [White] the average American would perceive them to be (from 1 = not at all to 7 = extremely) on the whole. The presentation order and selection of the 48 responses was randomized for each participant. After participants provided their ratings of either “Blackness” or “Whiteness,” they completed several demographic questions and were compensated for their time.

4.3.2.2. Whiteness ratings. Subjecting Whiteness ratings to the same 2 (target race: Black, White) × 3 (target orientation: gay, heterosexual, control) model yielded a main effect of target race, indicating that participants rated the descriptors of Black targets as less stereotypically White (M = 2.86, SD = 1.10), on average, than those of White targets (M = 4.44, SD = 1.11), F(1, 307) = 562.50, p < .001, Mdiff = −1.58, 95% CI [−1.71, −1.45], β = −0.82. In addition, this analyses yielded an interaction between target race and target orientation, F(1, 306) = 178.86, p < .001, Mdiff = 0.50, 95% CI [0.33, 0.67], β = 0.36. When White men were labeled as gay (M = 3.46, SD = 1.28), they seemed less stereotypically White to perceivers than when labeled as heterosexual or not labeled at all (M = 4.93, SD = 1.28), F(1, 309) = 217.36, p < .001, Mdiff = −1.47, 95% CI [−1.66, −1.27], β = −0.76. However, when Black men were labeled as gay (M = 3.14, SD = 1.29), perceivers characterized them as more stereotypically White than when labeled as heterosexual or not labeled at all (M = 2.71, SD = 1.27), F(1, 303) = 17.96, p < .001, Mdiff = 0.43, 95% CI [0.23, 0.63], β = 0.22. Thus, we again replicated the pattern of results that we found in Experiment 1a.

As before, this model contained a contrast to examine how stereotypically White heterosexual targets (M = 3.79, SD = 1.16) were regarded in comparison to targets whose orientation was not mentioned (‘control’ targets: M = 3.61, SD = 1.13). This contrast was not significant, F(1, 313) = 0.33, p = .57, Mdiff = 0.06, 95% CI [−0.15, 0.27], β = 0.03, and it did not interact with target race, F(1, 313) = 0.45, p = .50, β = 0.03. Consistent with the idea that heterosexualism is a default component of racial group stereotypes, this pattern indicates that nominated racial stereotypes were quite similar regardless of whether men were explicitly described as heterosexual or whether their sexual orientation was unmentioned (see Fig. 3, left panel).

4.3.3. Discussion

Experiment 1c is informative in two noteworthy ways. First, it demonstrates that perceivers’ racial stereotypes are applied in similar ways to men who are labeled as heterosexual vs. men whose orientation is not mentioned (i.e., ‘control’ targets). This accords with the argument that gayness de-racializes targets because group prototypeness—in these studies, racial prototypeness—are constructed around presumptions of heterosexuality (e.g., Herek, 2007; Herek & McLemore, 2013). In addition, Experiment 1c shows that the results of earlier experiments can be replicated when using a very different approach to assessing stereotype content. In particular, Experiment 1c shows that de-racialization and Whitening effects can be replicated when participants are allowed to freely nominate (as opposed to select from a checklist) the attributes that constitute their stereotypes of men at various intersections of race and sexual orientation.
5. Experiment 2

Findings from Experiments 1a–1c consistently support our hypotheses. Because group prototypes are constructed around notions of heterosexuality (Herek, 2007; Lick & Johnson, 2016), labeling men as gay (vs. not) causes them to become de-racialized in the minds of perceivers, rendering them less typical of their own racial groups. In addition, these experiments support the idea that men from low-SES groups are not only characterized as less race-typical under these conditions, but as correspondingly “Whiter” as well. Finally, Experiments 1a-1c rule out the possibilities that a) the findings are contingent on how target men are described, and that b) the findings are limited to a particular method of stereotype assessment.

Experiment 2 examined whether our hypotheses would also apply to the case of stereotypes about gay Asian men. Asian men serve as an interesting comparison group to Black men for two main reasons. First, some past research suggests the possibility that Asian men may actually seem more typical of their racial group when described as gay, rather than less. The logic of this competing prediction hinges on the idea that people tend to stereotype gay men as gender-inverted, or as more feminine than their heterosexual counterparts (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009; Kite & Deaux, 1987). This tendency is important in light of the previously noted finding that racial categories are imbued with gender connotations (Galinsky et al., 2013; Hall et al., 2015; K. L. Johnson et al., 2012). According to this literature, people in the U.S. tend to stereotype Asian Americans as more feminine than White or Black Americans. Given that Americans associate Asian individuals with stereotypic femininity, and given that they also stereotype gay (vs. heterosexual) men as more feminine, gay Asian men may seem more feminine, and consequently, more stereotypically Asian to perceivers than their non-gay counterparts. In contrast to this line of thinking, research based on the stereotype content model (Fiske et al., 2002) has shown that Asians are broadly stereotyped as high in competence but low in warmth. This pattern stands in sharp contrast to common cultural stereotypes of femininity. From this perspective, as well as from the argument that heterosexuality is a default assumption of racial/ethnic prototypes, we anticipate that gay (vs. non-gay) Asian men will be de-racialized in the minds of perceivers—that they will seem “less Asian” in the minds of perceivers, rather than more.

Experiment 2 also provides leverage on the expectation that the Whitening effects observed in the previous experiments are due to clashing assumptions about SES. Unlike Black Americans, who are stereotyped as lower in SES, Asian Americans are often stereotyped as economically successful (e.g., Zou & Cheryan, 2017). Thus, assumptions about the SES of Asian Americans are redundant (rather than clashing) with common assumptions about the aflueness of gay men (e.g., Shugart, 2003). Because we hypothesize that men who are labeled as gay (vs. not) should seem “Whiter” only when their being labeled as gay causes them to seem higher-SES, gay Asian men should not necessarily be “Whitened” in the same way that gay Black men are.

5.1. Method

Experiment 2 had two phases. Phase 1 involved collecting additional ratings of how stereotypically masculine and feminine the checklist attributes are. Phase 2 involved gathering participants’ stereotypes about gay and non-gay groups of Asian men.

5.1.1. Phase 1

5.1.1.1. Participants. A total of 161 participants completed a survey in exchange for $0.85. Two of these participants (1.2%) did not respond “yes” to the question, “Did you complete this study carefully?” and were therefore dropped from analyses. The final sample was mostly male (90 male, 66 female, 3 non-specified), mostly White (106 White, 18 Black, 15 Asian, 14 Latinx, 1 American Indian, 3 multiracial, 2 non-specified), diverse in age (M=32.98, SD=9.27; range: 18 to 69), well-educated (52.2% held at least a bachelor’s degree), and slightly liberal (M=4.13, SD=2.22, on the 10-point ideology measure we have been using).

5.1.1.2. Procedure. Participants completed an identical procedure to the one described in the Checklist Traits and Trait Ratings section (above). However, in this case, participants either provided ratings of how stereotypically masculine the traits seemed, or how stereotypically feminine the traits seemed (on a scale from 1 = not at all to 7 = very masculine/feminine). As was the case with earlier trait ratings, participants reported how the average American would perceive these traits. At the end of the survey, participants completed demographic measures and were compensated for their time. The 5 highest and lowest traits on the dimensions of masculinity and femininity are shown in Table 4.

5.1.2. Phase 2

5.1.2.1. Participants. A total of 150 participants completed a survey in Experiment 2. Phase 2 of Experiment 2 actually had a 2 (target orientation: gay, control) × 2 (target race: Asian, Black) between-person design, and included a total of 300 participants. However, we have already extensively reported on stereotypes about Black men in the preceding 3 experiments, and the data in this experiment fully replicated the very same pattern of stereotyping shown in Experiments 1a-1c. Full details of this direct replication are available in the supplemental analyses. For brevity’s sake, we focus here on the novel conditions
exchange for $0.85. Five of these participants (3.3%) did not respond “yes” to the question, “Did you complete this study.”

Carefully?” and were thus dropped from analyses. Our final sample consisted of 145 participants (75 men, 69 women, 1 non-specified) who mostly identified as White (112 White, 12 Asian, 9 Black, 8 Latinx, 1 American Indian, 1 Pacific Islander, 2 multi-racial). Their ages ranged from 21 to 73 (M = 35.04, SD = 10.38), they were well educated on the whole (51.03% had at least a bachelor’s degree), and they were politically somewhat left-leaning on average (M = 4.50, SD = 2.47, on the 10-point scale we have been using). Again, most respondents (91.72%) were heterosexual.

5.1.2.2. Procedure. As in the previous experiments, participants learned that the researchers were interested in examining the cultural stereotypes Americans harbor toward various groups of men. Participants saw the previously described checklist of traits, the order of which was randomized for each person, and they were asked to characterize (using the same instructions as in Experiments 1a and 1b) the cultural stereotypes of either (‘control’) Asian men, or gay Asian men, by random assignment.

5.2. Results

As in Experiments 1a–1c, results are broken down by dependent variable. We list the ten most-nominated traits for gay vs. non-gay (‘control’) Asian men in Table 5.

5.2.1. Gender ratings

As noted above, men who are labeled as gay are often stereotyped as possessing more feminine and less masculine attributes than men who are not. Phase 2 participants’ trait nominations for groups of Asian men replicate this trend. Stereotypes of gay Asian men were rated, on average, as less masculine (M = 3.81, SD = 0.50) than stereotypes of non-gay (‘control’) Asian men (M = 4.03, SD = 0.39), F(1, 286) = 10.98, p = .001, Mdiff = −0.22, 95% CI [−0.36, −0.09], β = −0.52. In addition, gay Asian men were characterized as more stereotypically feminine (M = 4.63, SD = 0.58), according to trait ratings, than were non-gay Asian men (M = 4.21, SD = 0.33), F(1, 286) = 31.24, p < .001, Mdiff = 0.42, 95% CI [0.27, 0.56], β = 0.58. Moreover, these two effects do not seem to be statistically redundant with one another. The stereotypical femininity of attributes was only moderately correlated with the stereotypic masculinity of these attributes, r(97) = −0.40, p < .001.

5.2.2. Asianness ratings

The analysis above reveals that gay (vs. non-gay) Asian men were indeed stereotyped as possessing gender-inverted qualities—but does this also imply that participants stereotyped them “more Asian”? An analysis of how stereotypically Asian participants’ trait nominations were revealed very strong evidence to the contrary. Consistent with the de-racialization hypothesis, gay (vs. non-gay) Asian men seemed less stereotypically Asian by more than a full standard deviation, F(1, 286) = 189.06, p < .001, Mdiff = −1.10, 95% CI [−1.25, −0.94], β = −1.11 (see Fig. 4, left side). Thus, participants’ de-racialization of gay (vs. non-gay) Asian men occurred in spite of the fact that these men were stereotypically feminized in perceivers’ minds, and in spite of the fact that stereotypic femininity—in our data as in others’—was correlated with stereotypical Asianness, r(97) = 0.47, p < .001.

5.2.3. Whiteness ratings

We next examined whether Asian men who are labeled as gay (vs. not) are stereotypically “Whitened,” as are Black men. Here, too, we found evidence to the contrary. Consistent with our hypothesis that the Whitening effect will be limited to stereotypically low-SES groups, gay Asian men were not characterized as any stereotypically Whiter than non-gay (‘control’) Asian men. If fact, gay Asian men were characterized as less stereotypically White than their non-gay counterparts, F(1, 286) = 4.34, p = .038, Mdiff = −0.09, 95% CI [−0.17, −0.01], β = −0.20 (see Fig. 4, right side). Thus, whereas gay Black men seem stereotypically Whiter than their non-gay counterparts, gay Asian men do not.

5.3. Discussion

Experiment 2 expands the evidence for the de-racialization hypothesis in a particularly noteworthy way. Even though gay (vs. non-gay) Asian men were indeed stereotyped as more feminine, and even though feminine attributes were rated as “more Asian” overall, we still found support for the de-racialization hypothesis: gay Asian men were stereotyped as “less Asian” than (‘control’) Asian men. This accords with the argument that all racial/ethnic prototypes inherently presume heterosexuality, whatever else they may assume about degrees of relative femininity. Gayness clashes with this presumption, and a reduction in racial prototypicality ensues.

The results of this experiment also confirm that the “Whitening” hypothesis does not apply to the case of gay men from a stereotypically affluent minority group. Rather than being characterized as “Whiter” when described as gay (vs. not), Asian men were characterized as “less White” under these conditions. Although we did not anticipate that gay (vs. non-gay) Asian men would seem “less White” to participants, it is conceivable that Americans’ stereotypes of Asian-American men were high enough in stereotypic SES that gay Asian men from this group could only be stereotyped as lower in SES. If gay (vs. non-gay) Asian men seemed “lower-SES” to participants, even to a small degree, this could help explain why participants characterized them as relatively lower in stereotypical Whiteness (see supplemental analyses for more on this point). We examine the contours of who is and is not “Whitened” in the remaining experiments.
6. Experiment 3

Across experiments, our hypotheses have received robust support. Black, White, and Asian men have been consistently de-racialized in the minds of perceivers when described as gay (vs. not), and Black men—but not Asian men—have been correspondingly “Whitened” under these same conditions. We have argued that a likely reason for these discrepant findings is that African Americans and Asian Americans are stereotyped as occupying different socioeconomic status (SES) positions in American society; whereas Black men are stereotyped as low-SES, Asian men are stereotyped as high-SES (Lin, Kwan, Cheung, & Fiske, 2005; Siu & Cheryan, 2013). This is relevant because, as we have noted, gay men are stereotyped as economically advantaged in the United States (Bengry, 2009; H. Hughes, 1997; Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005; Peters, 2010). Consequently, labeling men as gay (vs. not) can raise the perceived SES of men whom perceivers would ordinarily stereotype as low-SES (like Black men), but not the perceived SES of men whom participants ordinarily stereotype as high-SES (like Asian men). Because higher SES and Whiteness are strongly confounded in Americans’ minds (e.g., Freeman et al., 2011), elevations in perceived SES can explain why gay Black men—but not gay Asian men—are stereotypically “Whitened” by perceivers.

A different reason why gayness “Whitens” Black (but not Asian) men, however, could lie in the tendency for Americans to think of racial Whiteness and Blackness as having an oppositional relationship to each other (Norton & Sommers, 2011), just as the color terms black and white do. Data previously reported in Table 2 provide some credence for this possibility in that ratings of the stereotypical Blackness and Whiteness of the checklist traits were significantly negatively correlated (albeit only modestly, $r = -0.319$). Other racial minority groups, such as Asians, may not be considered as having the same inherently oppositional relation to the White majority group.

The present experiment examines stereotypes about Hispanic men. Consistent with the de-racialization hypothesis, we anticipated that gay Hispanic men, relative to non-gay (‘control’) Hispanic men, would be stereotyped as seeming “less Hispanic.” However, the competing explanations outlined above make divergent predictions about whether gay Hispanic men will seem stereotypically Whiter than their non-gay counterparts. Because Hispanic men are stereotyped as similar to Black men in terms of SES positioning (Koch, Imhoff, Dotsch, Unkelbach, & Alves, 2016; Zou & Cheryan, 2017), our prediction is that Hispanic men will, like Black men, seem stereotypically Whiter when they are described as gay (because of a boost to their presumed SES). On the other hand, Hispanicness is not oppositional to Whiteness in the same way that Blackness is (e.g., Norton & Sommers, 2011; see also Table 2). If the operation of a race-specific oppositional heuristic explains why gay Black men are characterized by stereotypically Whiter traits, then stereotypes about gay Hispanic men may, like those of gay Asian men, fail to show any evidence of “Whitening.”

6.1. Method

6.1.1. Participants

A total of 149 people took an online survey in exchange for $0.85.

Table 2
Correlations (Pearson’s $r$) between dimensions of racial stereotypicality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Asian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>$-$</td>
<td>$-$</td>
<td>$-$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>$-0.319^{*}$</td>
<td>$-$</td>
<td>$-0.639^{*}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>$-0.722^{*}$</td>
<td>$-0.620$</td>
<td>$-0.094$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>$-0.512$</td>
<td>$-0.020$</td>
<td>$-$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Because we correlated ratings of 99 traits, we had adequate power (80%) to detect correlations as small as $r = 0.27$. $^{*}p \leq .001$.

6.1.2. Procedure

As in previous experiments, we instructed participants to think about the current cultural stereotypes in the United States toward either gay Hispanic men, or non-gay (‘control’) Hispanic men, by random assignment. Participants viewed the same checklist as before, and they nominated up to 10 traits for their assigned group.

6.2. Results

As in earlier experiments, we list the ten most-selected stereotypes among participants in each condition (see Table 6).

6.2.1. Hispanicness ratings

We expected to find continued support for the de-racialization hypothesis. To test this, we conducted an independent $t$-test on the Hispanicness of participants’ trait selections in each condition. This analysis supported our predictions. Participants’ trait selections for gay Hispanic men were indeed less stereotypically Hispanic, on average, than their trait selections for non-gay (‘control’) Hispanic men, $t (146) = 8.34, p < .001, M_{diff} = -0.48, 95% CI[-0.60, -0.37], \beta = -1.13$ (see Fig. 5, left side).
Table 4
Most- and least-stereotypically feminine and masculine traits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Stereotypically feminine (N = 79)</th>
<th>Stereotypically masculine (N = 75)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delicate</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>[5.94, 6.21]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentle</td>
<td>5.99</td>
<td>[5.84, 6.13]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensual</td>
<td>5.74</td>
<td>[5.60, 5.88]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talkative</td>
<td>5.74</td>
<td>[5.58, 5.89]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>[2.13, 2.42]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>[2.01, 2.31]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>[1.78, 2.04]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>[1.73, 2.02]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically Dirty</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>[1.58, 1.82]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Per-study sample Ns are included in parentheses. $M_p =$ how stereotypically feminine a trait was rated to be, on average; $M_M =$ how stereotypically masculine a trait was rated to be, on average. All means are enclosed by 95% confidence intervals.

Table 5
Ten most-selected traits for groups of Asian men in Experiment 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Gay Asian men (n = 73)</th>
<th>Asian men (n = 72)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
<td>Trait Freq.</td>
<td>Trait Freq.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sensitive</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>Intelligent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neat</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>Loyal to family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually perverse</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>Tradition-loving</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>Quiet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delicate</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Scientifically Minded</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pleasure-loving</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Efficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talkative</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>Reserved</td>
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<tr>
<td>Witty</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>Industrious</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artistic</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Shy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ostentatious (Showy)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Ambitious</td>
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Note. Sample sizes of people in each condition are listed in parentheses. When two or more traits tied for the 10th most-selected trait, we chose to present the trait(s) that came first alphabetically. Freq. = the percentage of participants in a condition who selected a given trait.

6.3. Discussion

As was the case with Black, White, and Asian men, gay Hispanic men were characterized as less prototypic of their racial/ethnic group than their non-gay counterparts—that is, they were de-racialized (or rather, ‘de-ethnicized’). The present results also indicate that stereotypic Whiteness does not depend on the operation of a race-specific oppositional heuristic. Instead, these data corroborate the proposition that being gay “Whitens” men who would otherwise be stereotyped as low-SES. Given that the gay identity is inflected with notions of social class (e.g., Bengry, 2009; Valocchi, 1999), knowledge that a man is gay can cause him to seem higher-SES than he would otherwise—and this in turn may cause him to seem stereotypically Whiter in the minds of American perceivers (e.g., Freeman et al., 2011).

7. Mediation interlude

Our experiments are quite consistent with the de-racialization hypothesis. All groups of men seem less typical of their own racial/ethnic groups when described as gay (vs. not). In addition, our expectation that members of low- but not high-SES racial/ethnic groups would be stereotypically “Whitened” in perceivers’ minds was also supported. We now turn to a more direct investigation of this mediating mechanism. Specifically, we test whether Black and Hispanic men seem “Whiter” when labeled as gay because gayness elevates their presumed SES (e.g., Bérubé, 2001; Valocchi, 1999), and because elevated SES is in turn associated with increases in stereotypic Whiteness (e.g., Penner & Saperstein, 2008). In addition, we examine whether SES-based assumptions explain variation in “Whitening” above and beyond alternative explanations—specifically, above and beyond explanations relating to gender stereotypes and to stereotypic positivity.

As experimental psychologists have repeatedly demonstrated, perceivers tend to stereotype gay (vs. non-gay) men as gender-inverted (e.g., Bashill & Powlishta, 2009; Cox & Devine, 2015; Kite & Deaux, 1987). In addition to this, gay men from stigmatized racial groups are occasionally evaluated more positively than their non-gay counterparts (at least in the U.S.: Remedios, Chasteen, Rule, & Plaks, 2011; Wilson, Remedios, & Rule, 2017). This implies that when Black and Hispanic men are described as gay (vs. not), they may seem more stereotypically feminine and positive to perceivers in addition to seeming “higher-SES.” If these qualities overlap with assumptions about Whiteness, then the “Whitening” of Black and Hispanic men may result from stereotypic changes to their femininity and valence rather than their SES. Given the multidimensional nature of cultural representations of gay men, we examined a multiple mediation model in which each of these considerations is included as a possible basis for the “Whitening” of gay (vs. non-gay) Black and Hispanic men. Our central contention is that SES-related assumptions play a unique role in this process, over and above
Our conclusions remain the same regardless of whether we conduct omnibus tests of what mediates the "Whitening" phenomenon, or whether we analyze the data separately by study (Experiment 1a, Experiment 1b) and Hispanic men (Experiment 3)—that is, the groups of men for whom gayness induces a “Whitening” effect. We relied in the “psych” package in R to estimate all indirect effects.

When we imputed newly-collected ratings into the stereotype nominations from these earlier experiments, we found that gay Black and Hispanic men were indeed stereotyped as “higher-SES” (M = 4.05, SD = 0.42) than their non-gay (‘control’) counterparts (M = 3.35, SD = 0.58), t(513) = 15.82, p < .001, Mdif = 0.70, 95% CI[0.61, 0.79], β = 1.16. Replicating past work, these new ratings revealed that gay Black and Hispanic men were also stereotyped more positively (M = 4.05, SD = 0.74), on average, than non-gay (‘control’) Black and Hispanic men (M = 3.16, SD = 0.89), t(513) = 12.46, p < .001, Mdif = 0.90, 95% CI[0.76, 1.04], β = 0.97. Unsurprisingly, gay men from these groups were also stereotyped as more feminine (M = 4.41, SD = 0.48) than non-gay (‘control’) men from these groups (M = 3.42, SD = 0.55).

7.2. Results

An omnibus analysis was conducted using our previously collected checklist stereotypes of Black men (Experiment 1a, Experiment 1b) and Hispanic men (Experiment 3)—that is, the groups of men for whom gayness induces a “Whitening” effect. We relied in the “psych” package in R to estimate all indirect effects (Revelle, 2018).

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7.1. Method

Two new, independent samples of Americans rated either the extent to which the 99 checklist attributes seemed “high-SES,” or the extent to which they seemed stereotypically positive vs. negative. For ease of presentation we describe the demographics of these two samples simultaneously.

We then use these ratings—along with previously collected ratings of masculinity and femininity—to examine what about gay (vs. non-gay) Black and Hispanic men causes them to seem stereotypically Whiter to perceivers.

7.1.1. Participants

A total of N = 156 MTurkers participated in exchange for $0.85. Of these participants, we dropped n = 2 (1.3%) for not answering “yes” to the question, “Did you complete this study carefully?” Our remaining n = 154 participants had very similar characteristics to the samples studied in the preceding experiments: 61% were male (94 men, 59 women, 1 non-specified), they were mostly White (113 White, 16 Asian, 15 Latinx, 6 Black, 1 American Indian, 1 Pacific Islander, and 1 biracial), their ages spanned from 19 to 70 (M = 33.98, SD = 11.13), they were generally well-educated (42.2% held at least a bachelor’s degree), and they leaned somewhat toward political liberalism on average (M = 4.33, SD = 2.33, on the same 10-point scale as before).

7.2. Results

An omnibus analysis was conducted using our previously collected checklist stereotypes of Black men (Experiment 1a, Experiment 1b) and Hispanic men (Experiment 3)—that is, the groups of men for whom gayness induces a “Whitening” effect. We relied in the “psych” package in R to estimate all indirect effects (Revelle, 2018).

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SD = 0.58), $t(513) = 21.05, p < .001, M_{diff} = 0.98, 95\% CI[0.89, 1.08], \hat{\beta} = 1.38$, and they were also stereotyped as less masculine ($M = 4.01, SD = 0.37$) than their non-gay (‘control’) counterparts ($M = 4.13, SD = 0.34$), $t(513) = −3.83, p < .001, M_{diff} = −0.12, 95\% CI[−0.19, −0.06], \hat{\beta} = −0.34$. In summary, labeling Black and Hispanic men as gay influenced perceivers’ stereotypes about these men in several notable ways, some of which relate to gender stereotypes, to valence, and importantly, to stereotypes about socioeconomic status.

What explains why gay Black and Hispanic men seem “Whiter” than their non-gay counterparts? According to the parallel mediation analysis, stereotypes related to femininity do tell part of the story. To the extent that gay (vs. non-gay) Black and Hispanic men seem “more feminine” to perceivers, they are likely to seem stereotypically Whiter: indirect $\hat{\beta} = 0.65, 95\% CI [0.52, 0.78]$. Importantly, however, the parallel mediation analysis also documents an indirect effect related to changes in SES-related stereotypes. That is, when Black and Hispanic men are described as gay (vs. not), they are stereotyped as possessing “higher-SES” attributes that in turn predict their seeming “Whiter” to perceivers. This indirect effect explains unique variance in stereotypic Whitening, above and beyond the other pathways that we included in the model: indirect $\hat{\beta} = 0.58, 95\% CI [0.47, 0.69]$. Pathways related to stereotypic SES and femininity are depicted in Fig. 6 on gray backgrounds.

Simultaneous mediation also suggests that changes in stereotypic positivity and masculinity—depicted on white backgrounds in Fig. 6—are not particularly suitable for explaining why Black and Hispanic men seem “Whiter” to perceivers when described as gay (at least not above and beyond what stereotypic SES and femininity can explain). Although it is true that gay (vs. non-gay) Black and Hispanic men seem more stereotypically positive and less stereotypically masculine to perceivers, these changes either weakly predict gay men’s likelihood of seeming “Whiter” (as in the case of positivity: indirect $\hat{\beta} = 0.08, 95\% CI [0.02, 0.14]$), or they actually suppress the very pattern of Whitening we are trying to explain (as in the case of masculinity: indirect $\hat{\beta} = −0.04, 95\% CI [−0.07, −0.02]$).

7.3. Discussion

These data support two conclusions. First, the “Whitening” phenomenon is multiply determined. Gay (vs. non-gay) men can seem stereotypically Whiter for reasons that relate to stereotypic SES as well as to stereotypic femininity. But second, and more critical to our account, stereotypic SES appears to play a role in who gets “Whitened” above and beyond gayness’s influence on femininity. This finding is particularly interesting because, to our knowledge, the majority of experimental research on how gay men are stereotyped has revolved around gay men’s sexual- and gender-related attributes (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009; Calabrese et al., 2018; Kite & Deaux, 1987; but see Clausell & Fiske, 2005). Much less common in experimental research has been a focus on whether perceivers stereotype gay men as possessing attributes that are inflected with notions of social class (e.g., Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005; Peters, 2010). These data suggest not only that perceivers do stereotype gay (vs. non-gay) men in class-inflected ways, but also that, because SES is correlated with notions of “White-ness” in the United States, labeling low-SES groups of men as gay (vs. not) can stereotypically Whiten them in the minds of perceivers. Still, it is important to note that the above findings are only correlational. More convincing evidence would come from an experiment in which target race is held constant and target men’s SES is manipulated.

8. Experiment 4

In Experiment 4, we manipulated participants’ assumptions about the socioeconomic positioning of Asian men and Black men to examine whether changes in perceived SES can indeed cause corresponding changes in the extent to which minority men seem stereotypically Whiter. Following past research (e.g., Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2011; Koenig & Eagly, 2014), we manipulated the perceived SES of groups by describing changes in the representation of minority groups in various social roles. Because Black men are currently stereotyped as occupying lower-SES roles, describing them as moving into high-SES occupations should produce an upward shift in their perceived SES, whereas describing them as occupying low-SES roles would represent the status quo. In contrast, because Asian men are currently stereotyped as occupying higher-SES roles, describing them as moving into low-SES occupations should produce a downward shift in their perceived SES, whereas describing them as occupying high-SES roles would represent the status quo.

Participants were randomly assigned to project future Americans’ stereotypes about one of four groups of men: gay Asian men, Asian men, gay Black men, or Black men. But before participants nominated stereotypes about these men, they were told that in the future, their assigned racial group was projected to be well-represented in social roles that were either congruent with current SES stereotypes about their group (that is, that Asian men would be in relatively high-SES roles, or that Black men would be in relatively low-SES roles), or the

![Fig. 6. Simultaneous mediation model in which stereotypic SES, positivity, masculinity, and femininity are entered as mediators of the “Whitening” phenomenon for Black men (Experiments 1a and 1b) and Hispanic men (Experiment 3). Mediators with gray backgrounds offer more explanatory power than mediators with white backgrounds.](image-url)
reverse—that their group would be well-represented in roles that are incongruent with current SES stereotypes about their group (that Asian men would be in low-SES roles, or that Black men would be in high-SES roles). Thus, the total design of this study was a 2 (target race: Asian, Black) × 2 (orientation: gay, control) × 2 (social roles: SES-congruent, SES-incongruent) between-person experiment.

8.1. Method

8.1.1. Participants

A total of 602 participants completed a survey in exchange for $0.85. We dropped 26 participants (4.3%) for not responding “yes” to the question, “Did you take this survey seriously?” The final sample consisted of 576 participants (289 men, 283 women, 1 other, 1 non-specified) who mostly identified as White (415 White, 59 Asian, 44 Black, 41 Latinx, 5 American Indian, 1 Pacific Islander, 11 multi-racial). Their ages ranged from 19 to 70 (M = 34.89, SD = 10.80), they were generally well educated (54.69% held at least a bachelor’s degree), they leaned somewhat toward political liberalism (M = 5.29, SD = 2.71, on an 11-point scale anchored at 1 = extremely liberal, 11 = extremely conservative), and the majority of them (89.06%) were heterosexual.

8.1.2. Procedure

Participants read about demographic changes that are likely to occur in the United States over the next 25–30 years. They were asked to anticipate how Americans of the future might stereotype a randomly-selected demographic group on the basis of these changes. We used the following instructions, taken directly from Koenig and Eagly (2014, p. 382): “There have been some surprising shifts of social groups into new occupations that they have rarely held in the past. We want you to think about the implications of changing occupations.”

At this point in the survey, participants learned about ostensible social role changes expected to occur over the next 30 years. For example, they learned that Republican women were likely to become prevalent among substance abuse counselors, and that older Americans would, in the coming 30 years, become well-represented among data security analysts. Finally, participants read a critical demographic projection that varied by experimental condition in a 2 (race: Asian, Black) × 2 (social roles: SES-congruent, SES-incongruent) matrix. In every case, the critical projection had the structure of the following paragraph, whose content was varied as noted:

In 25–30 years, demographers predict that Black men will be more common in the occupations of lawyers, doctors, and upper-level managers than would be expected based on their overall numbers in the U.S. population. In other words, Black men will become especially well-represented in these occupations.

The above instructions were shown to participants assigned to the SES-incongruent Black target condition. Participants in the SES-congruent Black target condition read the same instructions, except the roles “lawyers, doctors, and upper-level managers” were replaced with the roles “fast-food service workers, custodians, and janitors.” These same roles were used in reverse for the two conditions in which Asian men were the targets. We selected these roles because people perceive these as some of the most-characteristic roles of upper-middle-class people, and of poor people, respectively (based on a total sample of N = 628, reported in Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

After reading about these “shifts of social groups into new occupations,” participants were given the trait checklist and instructed to guess how Americans in the year 2042 might stereotype either gay men from their randomly assigned racial group (e.g., gay Black men), or non-gay (“control”) men from their randomly assigned racial group (e.g., Black men). At the end of the experiment, participants completed a demographic questionnaire, and they were compensated for their time.

8.2. Results

To test whether beliefs about SES play a causal role in the stereotypical Whitening of minority gay men, we subjected the Whiteness ratings of participants’ stereotypes to a 2 (target race: Asian, Black) × 2 (social roles: SES-congruent, SES-incongruent) × 2 (orientation: gay, control) ANOVA. As expected, this analysis yielded a significant three-way interaction between target race, social role congruence, and target sexual orientation, $F(1, 568) = 25.62, p < .001, \omega_p^2 = 0.041$.

Because we expected to replicate our previously established “Whitening” effects in the SES-congruent conditions, we first discuss the data patterns in these conditions only.

8.2.1. SES-congruent conditions

When modeling effects among participants in the SES-congruent conditions, we found a two-way interaction between target race and target sexual orientation, $F(1, 568) = 31.33, p < .001, \omega_p^2 = 0.051$. Planned contrasts reveal the same pattern observed in prior experiments. When participants thought that Black men of the future would remain in low-SES roles, they characterized these men as stereotypically Whiter when they were described as gay than when not not, $F(1, 568) = 38.39, p < .001, M_{diff} = 0.46, 95\% CI [0.32, 0.61], \beta = 0.93$. In addition, when participants thought that Asian men of the future would remain in high-SES roles, they did not think of gay Asian men as any stereotypically Whiter than generic Asian men. If anything, there was a trend for participants to characterize gay (vs. non-gay) Asian men as less stereotypically White, though this trend was non-significant: $F(1, 568) = 2.98, p = .085, M_{diff} = -0.13, 95\% CI [-0.28, 0.02], \beta = -0.26$ (see Fig. 7, left panel).

8.2.2. SES-incongruent conditions

When modeling effects among participants in the SES-incongruent conditions, we did not find a significant two-way interaction between target race and sexual orientation, $F(1, 568) = 2.29, p = .131, \omega_p^2 = 0.002$. Despite this non-significant interaction, we proceeded with planned contrasts as before. These contrasts revealed that when participants thought Black men of the future would occupy high-SES social roles, they no longer characterized gay Black men as stereotypically Whiter than generic Black men, $F(1, 568) = 0.05, p = .821, M_{diff} = -0.02, 95\% CI [-0.16, 0.13], \beta = -0.03$. However, when participants thought Asian men of the future would occupy low-SES positions, there was only marginal evidence that participants characterized gay Asian men as stereotypically Whiter than non-gay (“control”) Asian men, $F(1, 568) = 3.72, p = .054, M_{diff} = 0.14, 95\% CI [-0.01, 0.28], \beta = 0.28$.

In short, we found no “Whitening” effect when Black men were thought of as occupying high-SES social roles. The expected tendency for participants to “Whiten” low-SES Asian men was directionally evident but far from robust (see Fig. 7, right panel).

8.3. Discussion

Experiment 4 provides causal (if imperfect) evidence for the idea that assumptions about SES play an important role in the Whitening of gay minority men. Only when the men are assumed to be of lower SES does stereotypic Whitening result. Elevating the salient SES of Black men eliminated participants’ tendency to “Whiten” gay men from this

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12 Our social role manipulation arguably confounds an SES manipulation with a manipulation of positivity. It is worth noting that our conclusions remain the same even when we control for changes in stereotypic positivity (see supplemental analyses for specifics).

13 When we add positivity as a covariate (see footnote 11), this contrast becomes significant in the hypothesized direction. In addition, adding this covariate unveils the hypothesized race × orientation interaction in the SES-incongruency conditions (see supplemental analyses).
group. However, manipulating the ostensible SES positioning of Asian men induced only a marginal tendency to “Whiten” gay (vs. non-gay) Asian men. It may simply be that participants were less persuaded by the idea that Asian men would show overall downward mobility in the coming decades, given Americans’ general preference to presume an upward socioeconomic trajectory (Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Information describing a downward economic trajectory for a group that is stereotypically viewed as high in competence would presumably threaten our participants’ sense of social justice and thus they may have resisted it (e.g., see Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007).

9. General discussion

In everyday discourse, people routinely disaggregate others along racial, gender, and sexual orientation boundaries, even though in interpersonal encounters these distinctions are always intertwined (e.g., Ridgeway & Kricheli-Katz, 2013). For example, social perceivers readily offer generalizations about “Black people,” acting as if other dimensions of identity need not be considered relevant to the validity of the preferred generalization. As Ridgeway and Kricheli-Katz put it, these disaggregated groupings can be considered as “culturally distinct systems of difference and inequality not because they really are separate, but because people routinely understand them to be so” (p. 296). People’s readiness to consider these dimensions of difference as if they were orthogonal suggests the possibility that they may hold and apply stereotypes in a modular, one-size-fits-all way. For example, stereotypes of “Black people” may seem to apply broadly to all category members, irrespective of a person’s gender, sexual orientation, religious identity, or other cross-cutting demographic categories. The present results speak against this view of orthogonal social identities. Instead, across six experiments, we report robust evidence that people stereotype gay men, compared with men whose orientation is unmentioned, in ways that are de-racialized. This is true whether these men are Asian, Black, Hispanic, or White. This pattern is consistent with the argument that race and sexuality are mutually constituted social representations (Vidal-Ortiz, Robinson, & Khan, 2018), and that by default, Americans presume that group prototypes are heterosexual (e.g., Herek, 2007). If assumptions of heterosexuality did not help constitute racial prototypes—if heterosexuality were instead orthogonal to racial prototypes—then learning that a man is gay (vs. not) would not cause him to seem de-racialized in the minds of perceivers.

Although the de-racialization effect was predicted and found for all of the racial/ethnic groups that we examined, the de-racialization effect size using the checklist methodology was smaller for White targets than for non-White targets. This may reflect the fact that, given its status as the culturally unmarked, default identity, prototypes of Whiteness may be less well defined (e.g., see Brekhus, 1998) and therefore more tolerant of variability. In a related vein, given that the majority of respondents across these studies were White, this result could also be shaped in part by the tendency to view one’s ingroup as more heterogeneous than outgroups (e.g., Mullen & Hu, 1989). Beyond variation in effect sizes across target groups, another feature of de-racialization effects (discussed at length in the supplemental analysis document; see footnote 10) is that each racial group seems to become de-racialized in perceivers’ minds for reasons that are uniquely their own. The particular elements of gayness that displace, conflict with, or erase what it means for Hispanic men to be “Hispanic” are not necessarily the same as those that displace, conflict with, or erase what it means for Asian men to be “Asian.” It may be the case, for example, gay (vs. non-gay) Asian men seem “less Asian” because gayness conflicts with stereotypes that they are traditional and reserved (see Table 5). For a different ethnic group, like Hispanics, it may be the case that gayness instead induces de-racialization because it conflicts with stereotypes that Hispanics value religion and family ties (see Table 6). Future work should directly investigate this point. While the phenomenon of de-racialization may generalize across most racial and ethnic groups, it may involve distinct mechanisms and effect sizes depending upon the group(s) in question. This diversity of mechanisms underscores the multifaceted nature of cultural representations of gay men; the social perception of gay men entails many assumptions that go beyond presumed femininity. Thus, default notions that are salient in racial and ethnic group prototypes can clash in different ways and to differing degrees with these diverse components of the gay-male prototype.

The tendency for perceivers to stereotype gay (vs. non-gay) men as “Whiter” was consistently observed for men from stereotypically low-SES groups (i.e., Black and Hispanic men). Mediation tests accorded with a model in which increases in the selection of traits associated with high SES could account for corresponding increases in the stereotypical Whiteness of these men. However, for Asian men, who are already stereotyped as relatively affluent, designation as gay produced no increment in perceived affluence and resulted in no change in perceived “Whiteness.” A final experimental test of the role of SES showed that Black gay men were subject to stereotypic Whitening when they were imagined as holding a lower-SES position in society, but not when they were imagined as holding a higher-SES position. These results collectively provide novel, consistent evidence that clashing default assumptions about SES play a role in how people redefine racial prototypes in the case of a minority sexual orientation.

As Ridgeway and Kricheli-Katz (2013) note, social unprototypicality can create both binds and freedoms. Seeming unprototypical of a disadvantaged identity such as a racial minority group can result in greater freedom from those disadvantages. For example, as previously
noted, racial discrimination is disproportionately directed toward individuals who seem more race-typical (Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Maddox, 2004). If gay men seem, to the average American perceiver, de-racialized relative to their non-gay counterparts, then they may be less often subjected to race-based discrimination (although they may of course face other kinds of disadvantages based on their sexuality). Indeed, research indicates that minority gay job applicants may face less racial discrimination in hiring contexts than their heterosexual counterparts (Pedulla, 2014). Asian Americans are known to face a different set of discriminatory challenges, based on their ostensibly positive designation as a “model minority” (see Cherney & Bodenhausen, 2011), which can result in unrealistically high expectations and envious forms of prejudice. It would be interesting to determine whether gay Asian men are less vulnerable to these distinct forms of intergroup bias than their counterparts who are not openly gay. Above and beyond seeming less race-typical (de-racialized), seeming stereotypically Whiter, too, may carry advantages in certain contexts. For example, seeming “Whiter” may increase perceived national belonging in the U.S., where perceivers tend to associate what it means to be American with Whiteness (Devos & Banaji, 2005; but see Sibley & Liu, 2007). Thus, gay (vs. non-gay) Black and Hispanic men might be treated more like in-group members by White American perceivers when these targets’ sexual orientations are salient. Future research should investigate this possibility.

On the other side of the coin, seeming de-racialized—as well as, for certain groups, seeming stereotypically Whiter—likely carries disadvantages in many contexts. For example, when African Americans (Sesko & Biernat, 2010) and Asian Americans (Schug, Alt, & Klauer, 2015) seem less race-typical, American college students are less likely to remember what they say and what they look like. Moreover, reduced racial prototypicality can influence how fellow in-group members treat targets. African-American individuals who seem counter-stereotypic—for example, because they are affluent (J. D. Johnson & Kaiser, 2019), or because they have mostly White friends (J. D. Johnson & Ashburn-Nardo, 2014)—receive less sympathy and inclusion from racial ingroup members. Americans’ tendency to stereotype gay men in de-racialized ways, and to characterize some of these men as stereotypically Whiter in particular, is likely to be a double-edged sword. More research is needed to understand the conditions under which that sword cuts one way or the other.

Beyond focusing on these important issues, future research should address what influences the salience (to perceivers) of a man’s sexual orientation. While there are numerous demonstrations that sexual orientation can be detectable even from very minimal information (like what a person’s face looks like; Rule, Macrae, & Ambady, 2009), it is also likely that there are contextual variables that differentially accentuate the extent to which perceivers pay attention to targets’ race, targets’ sexual orientation, or both of these target features simultaneously (e.g., Oakes, Turner, & Haslam, 1991). The effects that we document here are likely to be consequential for how targets are treated by perceivers, but presumably only to the degree that perceivers are motivated and able to attend to targets’ sexual orientation.

Future research should also consider the inverse of the research question we have focused on here—that is, it should consider the question of whether targets’ racial categories moderate how stereotypically they seem of their sexual orientation groups. If sexual orientation and race are truly correlated dimensions in the minds of perceivers, then certain racial groups may seem more stereotypically gay or heterosexual than others. If prototypes of heterosexuality presume Whiteness by default (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), for example, then perhaps White men seem “more heterosexual” than men from other racial and ethnic groups. In contrast, if notions of heterosexuality hinge on how stereotypically masculine (and non-feminine) target men seem (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009), then perhaps Black men—who are stereotyped as more masculine than White or Asian men (Hall et al., 2015)—will be stereotyped as most psychologically heterosexual. Of course, these possibilities presuppose that sexual orientation stereotypes are in fact modified by target race. An alternative possibility is that even though racial stereotyping is dependent on target sexual orientation, the reverse may not be true. Perhaps all heterosexual men seem stereotypically heterosexual to the same degree, or perhaps all gay men seem stereotypically gay to the same degree. This latter possibility is substantiated by the fact that, in the present data, participants’ most-nominated traits of gay men tended to be quite similar regardless of target men’s racial or ethnic group membership (see Tables 3, 5, and 6).

Beyond investigating the extent to which sexual orientation stereotypes are dependent on target race, future research should seek to answer some of the open questions that we cannot address here. For example, the present findings cannot be generalized to how perceivers stereotype women at various intersections of sexual orientation and racial categories. This of course does not help to address the already pervasive problem in psychological science that most research on homosexuality is focused on men rather than women (Lee & Crawford, 2007). In addition, the present research cannot address to what extent these findings are moderated by perceiver demographics.14 In particular, the present research cannot address to what extent the phenomena we observe are restricted to or generalize beyond the United States. Given that heterocentrism and sexual prejudice appear to be a global phenomena (Bartoş, Berger, & Hegarty, 2014), it is conceivable that the de-racialization of men who are labeled as gay (vs. not) occurs cross-nationally. However, given that the socioeconomic and gendered arrangements of racial groups that we examined are, for the most part, specific to the United States, the “Whitening” phenomenon may not generalize beyond our sample. These are no doubt important avenues for further empirical inquiry.

Race and sexual orientation are not orthogonal dimensions in the minds of social perceivers, even if we routinely make generalizations as if they were. Learning that a man is gay—compared with learning nothing of his sexual orientation—can cause him to become de-racialized in the minds of perceivers. Beyond making a contribution to intersectional person perception, these findings make a contribution to intergroup psychology more generally. If learning that a man is gay causes him to seem less race-typical, and if seeming race-typical is correlated with experiencing racial bias (e.g., Maddox & Perry, 2018), then gayness should also have the power to alter when and with what frequency racial minority men face racial bias. We look forward to the development of research on this point, and indeed, to the progress of research on intersectional stereotyping more broadly.

Appendix A. Supplementary analyses, data, and materials

Supplementary analyses for this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsep.2019.03.002. Data files, code books, and materials can be found on the OSF website at the following link: https://osf.io/bktjs/.

References


14 Notably, we did have enough data to effectively examine whether gay (vs. presumptively heterosexual) Black men are stereotyped differently by perceivers who are White vs. non-White, heterosexual vs. non-heterosexual, etc. In general, we found little to no moderation of the reported effects by perceiver demographics (see online supplement).
RECASTing Racial Stress and Trauma: Theorizing the Healing Potential of Racial Socialization in Families

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For youth and adults of color, prolonged exposure to racial discrimination may result in debilitating psychological, behavioral, and health outcomes. Research has suggested that race-based traumatic stress can manifest from direct and vicarious discriminatory racial encounters (DREs) that impact individuals during and after an event. To help their children prepare for and prevent the deleterious consequences of DREs, many parents of color utilize racial socialization (RS), or communication about racialized experiences. Although RS research has illuminated associations between RS and youth well-being indicators (i.e., psychosocial, physiological, academic, and identity-related), findings have mainly focused on RS frequency and endorsement in retrospective accounts and not on how RS is transmitted and received, used during in-the-moment encounters, or applied to reduce racial stress and trauma through clinical processes. This article explores how systemic and interpersonal DREs require literate, active, and bidirectional RS to repair from race-based traumatic stress often overlooked by traditional stress and coping models and clinical services. A novel theory (Racial Encounter Coping Appraisal and Socialization Theory [RECAST]), wherein RS moderates the relationship between racial stress and self-efficacy in a path to coping and well-being, is advanced. Greater RS competency is proposed as achievable through intentional and mindful practice. Given heightened awareness to DREs plaguing youth, better understanding of how RS processes and skills development can help youth and parents heal from the effects of past, current, and future racial trauma is important. A description of proposed measures and RECAST’s use within trauma-focused clinical practices and interventions for family led healing is also provided.

Keywords: racial socialization, African American families, RECAST, race-based traumatic stress, clinical healing

When my mother says get home safe
her voice is the last coin she owns,
and everything is a wishing well.
She is praying to every god she can find
that a cop does not
make a hashtag out of my body. (Johnson, 2016)

Racial discrimination—or the unfair and prejudicial treatment based on racial demographic characteristics (American Psychological Association [APA], 2013)—remains a powerful and harmful reality in the United States (APA, 2013). Within a month of the 2016 presidential election, nine out of 10 educators who replied to a voluntary survey reported witnessing emotional and behavioral changes in students, with over 1,000 incidents attributed to discrimination based on race and immigration (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). In particular, empirical findings demonstrated that the overwhelming majority (i.e., 90%) of African American adults and children report discriminatory racial encounters (DREs; Helms, Nicolas, & Green, 2012; Pachter, Bernstein, Szalacha, & García Coll, 2010). Al-
though many explicit forms of racial discrimination are now illegal, blatant and subtle DREs that negatively impact youth of color are propagated through various systems and quickly amplified through the Internet (Tynes, Giang, Williams, & Thompson, 2008). These DREs, which can occur at interpersonal, institutional, and systemic levels (Harrell, 2000), include suspensions and expulsions within schools (Skiba & Williams, 2014), racial profiling (A. Thomas & Blackmon, 2015), and killings by police and authority figures (Buehler, 2017), to name but a few. It is important to note that families and mental health professionals struggle to protect and affirm children of color exposed to these events (see Fischer & Shaw, 1999), particularly given that racial stress reactions often accompany DREs and, if left unaddressed, may lead to trauma that can have debilitating effects on health and well-being (Carter, 2007).

In light of the negative stress effects of recently increasing racial hostility in the American social climate, scholars have called for culturally grounded theories, healing practices, and interventions that effectively capture how people cope with and reduce the symptoms of racially stressful encounters (Williams & Medlock, 2017). Families have used racial socialization (RS)—or communication about racial dynamics—as an approach to help youth cope with DREs and develop healthy racial identities (Hughes et al., 2006). In this article, we advance the Racial Encounter Coping Appraisal Socialization Theory (RECAST) as a theoretical enhancement to the current literature on RS by proposing that the relationship between racial stress and coping is explained by racial coping self-efficacy, which is moderated by RS competency. We propose that, as a moderator, RS must promote a form of literacy that is more user-friendly, planned, and responsive in managing DREs. Through literacy, the definition of RS is broadened to include the explicit teaching and implementation of racially specific emotional regulation and coping skills that can be observed, trained through a lens of competency, and evaluated in specific interventions. We also point to and call for burgeoning efforts (e.g., an intervention and measure) that use RECAST’s reframing of RS to respectively better combat and understand race-based traumatic stress for youth and parents.

Race-Based Traumatic Stress

Harrell (2000) defined racism-related stress as “race-related transactions between individuals or groups and their environment that emerge from the dynamics of racism and that are perceived to tax or exceed existing individual and collective resources or threaten well-being” (p. 44). Such race-based traumatic stress can be due to direct (or firsthand) and vicarious (or secondhand) DREs (Carter et al., 2013; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). Research has demonstrated a link between race-related stress and anxiety disorders (Soto, Dawson-Andoh, & Belue, 2011), cardiovascular reactivity (Williams & Leavell, 2012), poor immunological functioning (Sawyer, Major, Casad, Townsend, & Mendes, 2012), and various facets of sleep disturbance (Adam et al., 2015), all symptoms that can impact daily functioning.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.) criteria assert that people must directly experience or witness an event to be diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Despite many DREs not meeting these criteria, individuals may experience debilitating psychological symptoms from distant racial encounters. To be sure, studies have found effects from both direct (e.g., rumination, anger, overidentification, emotional suppression, or avoidance; Hoggard, Byrd, & Sellers, 2012; Soto et al., 2011; Terrell, Miller, Foster, & Watkins, 2006) and vicarious (e.g., anxiety, depression; Tynes et al., 2008) DREs. Whether experienced directly or vicariously, DREs present significant challenges to youth of color and their parents given that they are constantly exposed to the insidious stressor (e.g., Comas-Díaz, 2016). As such, parents may feel underprepared to address in-the-moment DREs. Active responses to racial threat are physiologically exhausting for targets of discrimination (Richeson & Trawalter, 2005) and, given anxiety-based avoidant responses to overwhelming and threatening racial encounters (Gudykunst, 1995), require advanced understanding and practice to navigate.

Racial Socialization as a Buffer to Race-Based Traumatic Stress

Raising children to effectively cope with the stress inherent in peer, schooling, neighborhood, and virtual ecologies is a basic competence demand for parenting accomplished
through socialization (Kliewer, Fearn, & Miller, 1996). Racial socialization, furthermore, has been conceptualized as the verbal and nonverbal racial communication between families and youth about racialized experiences (Lesane-Brown, 2006). Although some discrepancies exist within the RS literature over the past four decades, research has generally found positive associations between parents’ frequent use of RS and a host of youth well-being indicators (i.e., psychosocial, physiological, academic, identity; Hughes et al., 2006). RS studies have typically focused on the extent to which the frequency of a single type or combination of RS message(s) predict(s) psychosocial well-being (e.g., externalizing behavior; Rodriguez, McKay, & Bannon, 2008), academic outcomes (e.g., educational aspiration; Wang & Hughley, 2012), self-esteem (Murry, Berk, Brody, Miller, & Chen, 2009), and/or racial identity (e.g., public regard; McGill, Hughes, Alicea, & Way, 2012; Stevenson & Arrington, 2009). Although the histories of racial and ethnic immigration, discrimination, and political engagement in the United States represent different socialization themes for different racial and ethnic groups (Huynh & Fuligni, 2008; Seol, Yoo, Lee, Park, & Kyeong, 2016), this article illustrates experiences of racial discrimination and socialization for African American families given the preponderance of literature detailing the detrimental impact of discrimination on and protective qualities of racial socialization in this population.

Optimally, the greatest benefit to youth’s psychological well-being would be the eradication of racism. As it currently stands, however, RS has been largely identified as a protective factor against persistent and deleterious effects of racial discrimination (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997) wherein parents provide their children with verbal and/or behavioral messages of four primary content types: cultural socialization (cultural pride), preparation for bias (discriminatory preparation), promotion of mistrust (wariness regarding interracial encounters), and egalitarianism—silence about race (mainstream orientation or racial avoidance; see Hughes et al., 2006). Parents provide strategies in which they often use both protective (e.g., preparation for bias) and affirmational (e.g., cultural socialization) RS to navigate potentially challenging racial terrain (Harris-Britt, Valrie, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2007).

Most parents, however, use preparation for bias reactively, or, for example, after discovering that their child has been treated unfairly at school because of race (White-Johnson, Ford, & Sellers, 2010) or following a highly publicized racial assault (e.g., the stalking and fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin; A. Thomas & Blackmon, 2015). During these conversations, parents often communicate fears for their children’s safety (Coard, Foy-Watson, Zimmer, & Wallace, 2007), information about the history of domestic racial terrorism (Thornhill, 2016), a recounting of personal DREs (Crouter, Baril, Davis, & McHale, 2008), and/or information about general and racial coping strategies (Stevenson, Davis, & Abdul-Kabir, 2001). Preemptive conversations, however, may afford youth greater psychological protection relative to reactive approaches (Derlan & Umaña-Taylor, 2015; D. E. Thomas, Coard, Stevenson, Bentley, & Zamel, 2009).

In addition to these discussions, youth are also powerfully affected by their parents’ behaviors (e.g., protests). In silent or physical practices, RS can be said to be occurring, and children can make meaning of these subtle or direct communications (Caughy, Nettles, Lima, & 2011). What is less known is whether parents explain why they choose to protest or ignore, so that youth can be more accurate in understanding why parents find these communications important. Ostensibly, the more youth know explicitly why parents use RS and for what purpose, the more they can effectively use what they learn to combat systemic, domestic, and interpersonal DREs in developmentally appropriate ways. Although theories have conceptualized in what context socializing African American youth may be necessary (e.g., triple-quantary theory; Boykin & Toms, 1985), current theories are sorely lacking with respect to how the transmission of RS reduces youth’s stress in DREs and buffers against erosion to their well-being outcomes (e.g., process model of ethnic-racial socialization; Yasui, 2015).

**Racial Socialization From a Legacy Approach**

Extant literature is replete with the potential mental health and academic benefits associated with frequent delivery of RS (Neblett, Philip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006; Reynolds & Gonzales-Backen, 2017); however, prior research has been...
based almost exclusively on recall of the frequency and content of racial messages that parents communicate and youth receive within a given time span (Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006). Stevenson (2014, p. 118) noted that this approach to RS emphasizes a “legacy” form of communication that focuses on the subtypes as beliefs, attitudes, and messages that are ideological and historical. Such an approach assumes that declarative and static parental communication leads not only to youth’s awareness and knowledge about race and racial dynamics but also to effective coping behaviors. However, this notion that parental communication leads directly to knowledge and coping efficacy underappreciates the bidirectional, reciprocal nature of RS between youth and parents (e.g., Hughes & Chen, 1999) and the complexity of the emotional, process-oriented coping strategies needed to resolve past, in-the-moment, and future racial conflicts (Stevenson, 2017). For example, parents must deconstruct history and personally relevant events, make meaning of them, and discern both what content to communicate to their children and how they will communicate that content in the service of helping their children navigate racial dynamics. In turn, children must decipher, make meaning of, and apply the content of the verbal and behavioral messages that they receive from their parents. For families to collectively tackle the traumatic effects of DREs, greater understanding of the mechanisms involved in the meaning making of RS transmission is necessary. A legacy approach to RS has been mostly aspirational and informational by emphasizing the importance of knowledge about race relations in this country: DREs are scripts signifying multidimensional, omnipresent, predictable, and emotionally stressful interactions (Worrell, Vandiver, Schaefer, Cross, & Phagen-Smith, 2006). It is asserted that RS must become a literacy-focused strategy that involves the practiced encoding, decoding, interpretation, and transmission of intellectual, emotional, and behavioral beliefs and skills regarding these matters. As a form of literacy, RS functions in this context to enhance youth’s and adults’ ability to read and recognize DREs, protect and affirm their progressive development of individual and collective racial coping self-efficacy, stimulate effective reappraisals of racially stressful encounters as workable, and promote successful engagement in and resolution of conflict-laden racial interactions. To successfully navigate these encounters, families must translate these scripts, investigate how congruent they are with their own narratives of humanity, and jettison dehumanizing meanings. Given this assertion, how must one modify RS to be able to evaluate its effectiveness in developing youth behaviors that reduce the stress and trauma from DREs?

**Transitioning From a Legacy to Literacy Approach**

A practical RS leads to an individual or group’s being able to accurately, quickly, and healthfully read, recast, and resolve the emotional text and subcodes of a racial situation and the actors involved. Whereas legacy RS endeavors to describe the state of race relations and offers general maxims as advice for coping with race-related realities (e.g., “As a Black person, you have to work twice as hard to be considered half as good as Whites”), a literacy approach focuses on youth’s ability to agentically read, rehearse, recall, and successfully enact direct, anticipatory, and practiced approaches with caretakers in their efforts to navigate DREs (e.g., “It can feel painful when someone is treating you as racially inferior, but just remember it’s based on a false myth of superiority and is meant to be destructive to your definition of yourself, your family, your people, and your culture, so you can choose any of the strategies we’ve rehearsed or rejected that inferiority”). A literacy approach to RS investigates how competently and efficaciously parents and youth can transmit and youth then execute coping strategies for predictable distal or proximal DREs. Thus, a literate perspective of RS centers on how prepared youth are to see, speak to, emote about, remain mindful of, and implement a variety of racially literate skills learned from RS transmission with parents in the face of racially fraught moments.

**Theorizing Racial Socialization Through a Literacy Approach**

*Literacy* refers to the ability to read and write, which requires an understanding of a particular language as well as how to decode the communication tools or text of that language (Byrne & Fielding-Barnsley, 1995). *Racial literacy* is the ability to accurately read (e.g., decode, interpret, appraise), recast (e.g., reappraise or rewrite stereotyped narratives), and resolve (e.g., engage in healthy decision making) the language of racially stressful encounters (Stevenson, 2014). It is posited that DREs represent a narrative about race relations in this country: DREs are scripts signifying multidimensional, omnipresent, predictable, and emotionally stressful interactions (Worrell, Vandiver, Schaefer, Cross, & Phagen-Smith, 2006). It is asserted that RS must become a literacy-focused strategy that involves the practiced encoding, decoding, interpretation, and transmission of intellectual, emotional, and behavioral beliefs and skills regarding these matters. As a form of literacy, RS...

**Racial Encounter Coping Appraisal and Socialization Theory**

Stevenson (2014) offered RECAST as a frame for conceptualizing how youth and families anticipate, process, and respond when confronted by racially stressful encounters. RECAST is the racially specific complement to Lazarus and Folkman’s transactional model of stress and coping (TMSC; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) by asserting that RS is a critical factor in how individuals reduce the stress associated with DREs. This conceptual frame also suggests that explicit and
practiced RS improves one’s confidence and competence to employ multiple conflict resolution options for improved long-term well-being outcomes.

In the TMSC, a stressor is a demand requiring action to reduce the imbalance in resources and demands. The model attends to how stressors are appraised (e.g., threat, challenge, or insignificant), the extent to which individuals believe that they have the capacity to control or manage the stressor (e.g., meaning-based coping), and the extent to which employed coping strategies yield desired results (e.g., positive or negative outcomes; Provencher, 2007). Although several researchers have situated racial discrimination in stress and coping paradigms (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Harrell, 2000; Major, Kaiser, O’Brien, & McCoy, 2007), how this stress relates to RS has not yet been theorized. Furthermore, scholars have argued that the TMSC does not fully appreciate dyadic stress and coping processes inherent in familial environments (Bodenmann, 1997). Bodenmann (1997) described an element of dyadic coping particularly salient for RS, that is, that the supportive dyadic coping from one family member to another (e.g., parent to child) may inevitably serve as a reduction in parental stress, especially through a trauma-focused lens. As such, a racial stress and coping theory requires youth’s attention to initial appraisals of racialized events as threatening or challenging to receive supportive dyadic coping from their parent(s). Likewise, parents must have skills and efficacious beliefs in themselves to reduce their own stress prior to effectively attending to their children via the transmission of supportive coping strategies. Thus, RECAST integrates the dyadic and racial components missing from the TMSC and utilizes RS as a strengths-based protective factor.

Elements of RECAST

The developmentally flexible RECAST model (see Figure 1) asserts that coping with race-related stressors requires a dynamic and cyclical process wherein events are perceived and read with respect to their appraisal as DREs. Pertaining to the TMSC, there are two types of appraisal: primary appraisal refers to whether an event, in this case a DRE, is a threat. Secondary appraisal refers to an assessment of one’s coping resources available to match the demands of the stressor. In RECAST, the identification of a DRE as racial or not is important and is best understood as occurring during primary appraisal processing at the moment of the DRE. For the sake of clarity in the description of RECAST, we assume that the parent and child would perceive the DRE as a racial threat, and thus the RS interaction or conversation would occur in light of the potential threat. Moreover, the secondary appraisal process occurs at evaluation of one’s self-efficacy or coping resources to engage a DRE effectively. The relationship between DRE stress and coping (reappraisal, decision-making, and resolution) is believed to be mediated by parents’ and children’s confidence and expectations of the outcome of coping effectively with DREs. In no previous work has racial coping self-efficacy been posited to mediate the relationship between DRE stress and coping, where RS competency is theorized to moderate the role of self-efficacy. Next, each element of the model is elaborated upon.

![Figure 1](https://example.com/RECAST_diagram.png)

**Figure 1.** The moderating role of racial socialization in stress, self-efficacy, and coping processes through the Racial Encounter Coping Appraisal and Socialization Theory (RECAST). RS = racial socialization.
Perceiving DREs and their stressfulness as racial is key to becoming literate given that DREs can be seen accurately, inaccurately, or not at all (Clark et al., 1999). One must have knowledge that DREs are possible, can occur at multiple levels, and are between various actors. RECAST asserts that racial stress appraisal allows people to recognize that the encounter is racial; to become aware that the encounter creates in one’s self and others cognitive, emotional, and physiological reactions; and to recognize that those reactions can occur during and after the encounter. Assessing the extent and intensity of these reactions is important in determining if any potential threat is present for any given DRE.

Racial coping self-efficacy is the belief or confidence in one’s ability to resolve racially stressful encounters and is foundational to the application of one’s intended actions (e.g., Schwarzer & Renner, 2000). If coping self-efficacy is what individuals believe they can manage during racially stressful moments, then coping is what they do to demonstrate that management. But what one does and what one believes can be done are different (e.g., Weisz, 1986). Thus, self-efficacy is central to reappraising an experience to confidently believe in its manageability while one determines how to overcome it. The focus on building racial coping self-efficacy is through the use of cognitive-behavioral-based mindfulness (e.g., attentional self-regulation and orientation; Bishop et al., 2004) and stress reduction during and after DREs (e.g., Woods-Giscombé & Black, 2010). Racial self-efficacy addresses the sense of helplessness during DREs by improving one’s confidence and increasing the availability of multiple decisions (Bandura, 1997).

Racial socialization competency—or how well families are skilled and confidently prepared to engage in RS communication—is a crucial element of RECAST. This is a key difference between the legacy and literacy approaches: instead of the attitudinal importance or frequency of RS messages that are central to legacy RS, the focus of this aspect of RECAST is on how well racially socialized coping skills for DREs are understood, transmitted, received, and/or implemented. A competency perspective to RS is consistent with other literatures that assess the development rather than solely the frequency of the skill (e.g., parent training; Pisterman et al., 1992). Although the four subtypes (e.g., cultural socialization) of RS are still relevant within the competency perspective, RECAST argues that families transmitting RS messages can develop an increased sense of competence when skills and confidence are also considered as components of RS (Anderson, Jones, & Stevenson, 2018).

Racial socialization stress is rarely discussed within the literature; however, it can be rather stressful for parents to talk to children about race (Bentley, Adams, & Author, 2009; Hamm & Coleman, 2001). Conversely, it may be equally difficult for youth to solicit, correct, or receive race-related communication from parents and other providers (Hughes & Johnson, 2001). Therefore, a key goal of RECAST is to account for how well competent RS helps to reduce the stress in racial communication. Personal (e.g., parental history of DRE coping) and contextual dimensions of DRE complicate how the conversations are transmitted between parent and child. Moreover, not all parents want to talk to children about racial matters or see it as meaningful to well-being and may be fearful of these conversations (Hughes et al., 2006). Because it is stressful to engage in racial discussions, both parents and children might approach initiating and responding to these conversations with varying degrees of hesitation and reticence. For those parents and youth who use emotion-focused rather than problem-focused approaches to manage the stress of racial conversation, they may be more prone to avoiding or not persisting through progressive racial discussions. This avoidance could undermine the level of competency in the delivery and acquisition of RS literacy skills. As such, it is important to determine how well parents have historically managed their own stress appraisal, reappraisal of, and coping with DREs. Additional considerations (e.g., parental delivery based on life experiences; child reception and application given age, sex, and comprehension ability) are also important regarding RS stress levels.

Coping is defined as “the cognitive and behavioral efforts made to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts among them” (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980, p. 223). Both adaptive and maladaptive coping (e.g., approach, accommodation, self-help, avoidance, and self-punishment; Zuckerman & Gagne, 2003) are at anyone’s disposal. The latter two strategies represent maladaptive approaches that are frequently utilized in stressful DREs (Clark et al., 1999). Given that parents often socialize youth to cope with general stressors explicitly (e.g., coping socialization), families would also need to racially socialize themselves with adaptive racial coping strategies specific to racial stressors (Anderson, Jones, Anyiwo, McKenny, & Gaylord-Harden, 2018). Racial coping is defined as learning to positively reappraise a DRE as less threatening and make decisions during racial encounters that are choices, not reactions; more problem-focused than emotion-focused; and more likely to be healthy and productive to one’s sense of self and management of the DREs. Although research has found that greater RS frequency is associated with racial identity centrality (Stevenson & Arrington, 2009) or academic achievement (Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, & West-Bey, 2009; Neblett et al., 2006), intermediate coping variables may explain why these outcomes are present. Through RECAST, it is posited that racial coping, including reappraisal, decision-making, and resolution, predicts youth well-being outcomes (Anderson, McKenny, Mitchell, Koku, & Stevenson, 2018; Scott, 2003).
Given that accurate appraisal of the encounter as racial leads to assessing one’s ability to manage thoughts, behaviors, and emotional reactions (social cognitive theory: Bandura, 1997), racial coping reappraisal refers to cognitive strategies for reevaluating a situation to determine its threat potential and manageability. In the same way a stressor must be initially appraised as a threat, challenge, or insignificant occurrence, reappraisal allows for an evaluation of the stressor as “benign, beneficial, and/or meaningful” (Garland, Gaylord, & Fredrickson, 2011, p. 60). It is akin to the concept of benefit finding (Affleck & Tennen, 1996), which refers to cognitive-behavioral coping strategies that enable the individual to potentially appraise a difficult situation as manageable (e.g., Fava, Rafanelli, Cazzaro, Conti, & Grandi, 1998; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). Through re-appraisal, the experiences of DREs become predictable, modifiable, and illuminating of the limits and strengths of one’s context and one’s abilities. Positive reappraisal, then, is about empowerment, agency, and control in addressing a stressor as a workable challenge rather than a paralyzing threat or avoidant-laden insignificant event through a reexamination of internal and external resources (Garland et al., 2011). As an empowerment strategy, coping reappraisal also stands in contrast to the attenuation and habituation of repeated exposure to stressful and traumatic DREs which may lead to acceptance of and hopelessness regarding racial conditions.

Although the anticipation of negative outcomes of DREs can spiral toward psychological positions of paralysis and uncertainty (Gudykunst, 1995, 2005; Gudykunst & Shapiro, 1996), this anxiety can also be modified to activate effective coping skills that lead to rewarding racial encounters (Stevenson, 2014). If anxiety can trigger threat or challenge, then racial coping decision-making becomes a tool for defining potential and multiple resolutions to the racial encounter. Besides a benefit of positive reappraisal, having multiple options and decisions reframes DREs and the actors as more predictable. This could explain why scripting, rehearsal, and role-playing common racial moments using different choice points can reduce the uncertainty that underlines one’s confidence in decision-making (Avery, Richeson, Hebl, & Ambady, 2009).

Resolution of racial stress involves individuals making healthy decisions that are neither an under- nor an overreaction during and after a DRE. For example, to appraise a DRE as mild (e.g., a 4 on a scale of 1–10) when it is actually experienced viscerally and physically as extreme (e.g., a 9) would make resolution of the conflictual stress difficult. The coping literature would suggest that the more successful individuals are in accurately evaluating and resolving a stressful DRE, the more positive their well-being outcomes (Folkman, 2013). As such, options presented from RECAST include youth’s engagement with the stressor or perpetrator to the extent that psychological discomfort would be moved away from their internalizing mechanisms to problem-focused and assertive thoughts and behaviors (e.g., letters, legal advocacy).

Outcomes from the aforementioned coping processes are anticipated to be more predictable than are some of the mixed findings inherent in current legacy approaches to RS (see Hughes et al., 2006). Indeed, the frequent use of RS does not consistently produce positive outcomes for youth simply by virtue of its presence in one’s upbringing, social networks, or learning environments. To best explain subsequent and long-term psychological, academic, identity, and self-esteem outcomes, the field should conceptualize the process-oriented nature of the relationship between DRE stress, self-efficacy, coping, and RS for acquiring the accompanying skill sets necessary to competently navigate encounters. Although RS is related to these outcomes, it is posited to be through the mechanism of enhanced efficacy and coping processes that provide the cognitive and behavioral elements critical for youth comprehension and implementation. At the conclusion of a RECAST-informed feedback loop, parents and youth can evaluate to what extent their response to a DRE has improved. If it is indeed better than for other experiences they previously had, the outcomes will help to inform stress, efficacy, RS competency, and coping during the next set of racialized experiences.

As such, a testable set of hypotheses of this model includes the following:

Hypothesis 1: DRE stress will have a negative direct relationship with racial coping.

Hypothesis 2: This relationship will be significantly reduced or eliminated via racial self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 3: The role of the mediator will be moderated by levels of RS competency. We expect that self-efficacy will be enhanced for parents and youth who endorse high levels of RS competency relative to those who endorse low levels of RS competency.

Hypothesis 4: The moderated mediation of DRE stress, coping, self-efficacy, and RS competency will be predictive of youth outcomes.

RECAST in the Real World

One of the more challenging duties for African American parents is when and what to say to their children about how to respond if they come in conflictual contact with police. Communication about how to respond to the police comes in verbal and nonverbal forms but is generally referred to as “The Talk”. In one example of The Talk, The New York Times focused on a Black high school adolescent stopped no fewer than 60 times as a result of New York City’s highly scrutinized practice of “stop-and-frisk” (Dressner & Martinez, 2012). In its video documenting the experience of Tyquan, The New York Times revealed the adolescent’s
immediate confusion upon his first police stop. He stated, “I thought you had to do something for them to really stop you, but after that, I seen (sic) that you didn’t have to do nothing to get stopped.” The realization that he was not being stopped because of any wrongdoing on his part led Tyquan to perceive his subsequent stops as racially motivated.

Tyquan spontaneously described his appraisal of his stress during the DRE. He answered the question of whether the racial stress was a challenge (i.e., difficult but manageable) or a threat (i.e., difficult and potentially dangerous) by indicating that when he asked the officers why he was being stopped, he felt “threatened” by them. In the reappraisal process, he assessed whether he could effectively survive and manage racial stress with adequate resources. After spending several days in jail for asserting himself with the police, he reasoned that he did not have the ability or resources to manage the DRE to which he was exposed in his repeated contact with the police. Thus, Tyquan’s coping process was inhibited by a lack of racial coping self-efficacy. As a result, he chose to remain at home and disengage from contact with his friends. This avoidant racial coping strategy prevented him from enjoying normative adolescent behaviors. However, after Tyquan told his teacher and mentor, Drew, about his DRE, Drew likewise shared what he was subjected to in his own police experiences. Drew then provided Tyquan with a checklist of questions he had developed over time, serving as an important socialization tool for Tyquan which helped him to develop critical skills that he could use to navigate future experiences with the police. The practice of such skills in the development of RS competency also led to greater processing of emotions between Drew and Tyquan, as they cried after indicating how fearful and painful (i.e., traumatic) these encounters were for them. Tyquan indicated that his self-efficacy was enhanced, and he became able to reappraise and resolve his racial stress after he spoke to Drew and other providers while learning about legal and statistical information regarding stop-and-frisk practices. Finally, Tyquan saw improved long-term behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and social outcomes that were related to the ways in which Drew and other providers effectively socialized and efficaciously supported him to cope with DREs.

As illustrated through Tyquan’s experience, and as is evident in the RECAST model, RS operates as a moderator of racial stress, efficacy, and coping in the intermediate process to predict well-being outcomes. To cope with DREs, youth, parents, and other providers must first believe they can engage in stressful encounters through the execution of adaptive and literate racial coping skills. But literacy requires knowledge and action – and acting on one’s beliefs and knowledge requires skills, confidence, and practice (e.g., Avery et al., 2009). To gain skills, enhance confidence, and engage in intentional practice to address race-based traumatic stress and its symptomatic sequelae, therapeutic services and strategies for parents, youth, and the family system should continue to serve a critical role in the facilitation of healing processes for such stressful encounters.

Clinical Implications of Racial Socialization as a Practice for Healing

As a cognitive–behavioral intervention process, emotional regulation and processing of DREs can reduce anxiety, promote self-efficacy, and promote racial coping and agency for competent actions and reactions (e.g., Katsikitis, Bignell, Rooskov, Elms, & Davidson, 2013). Thus, a major implication for the threat appraisal role of RS is the potential benefit of cognitive restructuring. We expect that RECAST will predict how well African American youth can critically and consciously reappraise and resolve racial conflicts by facing and challenging the habitus of expendable Black humanity. Increased self-efficacy can help youth and parents to engage racial stress as a modifiable and problem-solving reality for systemic change, rather than a barrier that is insurmountable, through supportive dyadic coping.

Competence is developed through the practice and utility of contextually and problem-specific behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and social skills (e.g., Markus, Thomas, & Allpress, 2005). Although skills involving mindfulness and discernment of contextual conflict and regulation of emotions are teachable through practice and transferrable to a variety of coping contexts and demands (Hays & Iwamasa, 2006), RS themes have rarely been used to frame the development of these skills for youth to resolve racial encounters (Stevenson, 2003). Beyond the contribution of enhanced RS processes to the psychosocial, emotional, physical, and academic outcomes of youth, the need to reduce race-based traumatic stress in parents is often overlooked. As an example, while parents navigate the stress associated with DREs, negative affect may emerge that makes difficult the goal of reappraising an encounter as manageable (Coard & Sellers, 2005). It is interesting that negative RS communication may relieve stress in a manner similar to that of more positive RS (e.g., cultural pride): both forms of RS, in their own way, provide avenues for resolution of the conflict. However, negative RS communication comes at a hefty price for both parents and youth. The challenge lies in reframing the narrative: being Black itself is not the problem; rather, it is the effect of systematic and repeated exposure to negative racialized experiences that come from being of African descent in America (Carter & Forsyth, 2009). Presumably, such a shift to purposeful and mindful RS may relieve parents of their own emotional and psychological consequences from race-based traumatic stress. As such, there is a need for interventions to situate RS as a modifiable mechanism by which families of color
can increase in efficacy and coping abilities to heal from stressful quotidian and cumulative DREs.

Although this article endeavors to clearly describe the tenets of a unifying and novel theory, there is also great need for empirical evidence that supports this model for applied purposes. The Engaging, Managing, and Bonding through Race (EMBRace; Anderson & Stevenson, 2016) intervention was developed from RECAST (Anderson, McKenny, & Stevenson, in press) and shows promise in advancing coping processes for parents, children, and the family unit (see Anderson, Jones, Navarro, McKenny, & Stevenson, 2018; Anderson, McKenny, Mitchell, Koku, & Stevenson, 2018). Other interventions with RS as a component (e.g., Black Parenting Strengths and Strategies: Coard et al., 2007; Preventing Long-term Anger and Aggression in Youth; Stevenson, 2003) can also benefit from the theoretical advancements brought forth from RECAST as they strive to improve parenting practices and child well-being.

Conclusion

Because research on youth development continues to lack an appreciation for the unique psychological conditions that racial experiences propel upon youth ecologies, a new RS theory must grapple with racial stress as historically traumatic, intergenerational, and pervasive in the daily fabric of family life (Carter, 2007; DeGruy-Leary, 2004). RECAST posits that an enhancement to the traditional legacy approach to RS (e.g., procedural, static) would require understanding, self-efficacy, and coping skills to more accurately read, recast, and resolve DREs through racial literacy (e.g., comprehension, transmission; Stevenson, 2014). RECAST and its practical application through clinical intervention (i.e., EMBRace) pushes the field toward the active utilization of RS to decrease race-based traumatic stress and improve psychological, health, academic, and identity-related long-term outcomes.

An implication of RECAST and intervention research that expects families to reach a level of competency in RS (a) delivery, (b) acquisition, and (c) implementation is that it symbolizes going from “The Talk” to “The Walk” during DREs. This approach also includes the development of measurement for trials of interventions infused with explicit, repeated, and practiced RS teaching targeted for specific racially stressful or uplifting social interactions to measure intervention components (e.g., fidelity) and RECAST elements (e.g., self-efficacy, coping; Stevenson, 2014, 2017). As such, this recommended model can also drive measurement and methodology better suited to assess the longitudinal dynamic of cognitive and behavioral processes inherent in the resolution of DREs through RS, including a corresponding observational and self-report assessment of RS competency designed for sensitivity to pre- to posttest change (see Anderson et al., 2018). Such a measure can provide supplemental information to the frequency of RS practices by further assessing skills and preparation.

Although RECAST attempts to more cohesively bridge frameworks and approaches for stress reduction, several important elements require more investigation. To be sure, the unique experiences of biracial and multiracial individuals will become increasingly salient in the coming generations. RS research on intersectionality beyond race and gender is sorely lacking, and given the abundance of evidence suggesting that gender is a factor in the socialization process and its reception (Cooper, Brown, Metzger, Clinton, & Guthrie, 2013; Hughes et al., 2006), interrogating the theory with parents and children of varying genders will also greatly contribute to RECAST processes. Furthermore, other child sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., age, phenotype) and temperament are strongly related to and inform parenting practices and thus would likewise need to be considered when theorizing RS practices with youth. Given that young children notice race throughout their development (e.g., Quintana, 1998), research would have to be conducted for RECAST to lend itself to various developmental periods. In the same way reading a novel would be challenging to a young child, reading a complicated racial situation would also prove difficult. As such, RS approaches for young children would not be absent; rather, would need to be modified to be understood within the scope of children’s developmental capacity (e.g., via hair-combing interactions; Lewis, 1999). Last, given that inferential evidence is limited, future large-scale research, particularly through intervention studies, will be crucial to support the authors’ claims. Indeed, future research aiming to test the theoretical postulates of RECAST would provide evidence for the model while also contributing to sorely needed clinical and community interventions for healing from racial stress and trauma.

Future Recommendations

Although limitations to this proposition are certain, this theorizing is meant to consolidate some aspects of research and attempts to position RS as reflected in verbal and nonverbal interactions that can relieve the racial stress, self-efficacy, and coping struggles of parents and children. However, to push the field of RS research in the future, clarity on the role of RS is just one step toward many in developing more sophisticated psychological and ecological measures and interventions. In addition to mindfully tracking how DREs are debilitating, future research might study how beneficial practiced responses can be in mitigating racial insult (e.g., debating, “comeback lines”; Stevenson, 2014). Given that racial stressors are arguably dissimilar from other stressors, extensions of this theory that consider how individuals make meaning of and cope with DREs...
during pivotal and specific developmental periods will be invaluable. Finally, although the focus of examples throughout the text has been on preparation for bias in the face of discrimination, this does not suggest that cultural socialization, for example, would not be a suitable strategy in addressing threat. This also does not imply that youth are naturally prepared for positive racial interactions without RS. The assertion cannot be made more strongly that if RS is provided without a core and primary commitment to affirming the cherished humanity of people of color, then it is undermining the competence necessary for youth to navigate current and future racialized environments.

#NoHashtag

In the text of the opening poem, the author details his mother’s helplessness in protecting him from a triggered police officer that would result in yet another tragic hashtag. In another poem, that author considers his nephew and reflects on one of the key elements of RECAST: literacy.

Don’t like the fact that he learned to hide from the cops before he knew how to read.

Angrier that his survival depends more on his ability to deal with the “authorities” than it does his own literacy. (Johnson, 2013)

Without explicit RS feedback on how to navigate DREs both internally and interpersonally, children and parents may be left to physiologically and emotionally restrictive reactions when they arise. With legacy RS, families are made aware of the complexity of race relations that go well or awry and may recommend procedural responses (e.g., “be polite”). But a literacy RS would expect more practicing of not only the procedural responses to make but, more important, the emotion regulation necessary to assertively address the DRE and count its emotional cost toward a psychologically healthy experience (e.g., appraise, grow in efficacy, cope, and achieve desired outcomes through heightened RS competency techniques). RECAST posits that, unlike the hopes and prayers of the mother in the opening poem, RS strategies must represent more than just a wishing well’s chance for survival and safe return home.

References


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BRIEF REPORT

Can White Children Grow Up to Be Black? Children’s Reasoning About the Stability of Emotion and Race

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Recent research questions whether children conceptualize race as stable. We examined participants’ beliefs about the relative stability of race and emotion, a temporary feature. Participants were White adults and children ages 5–6 and 9–10 (Study 1) and racial minority children ages 5–6 (Study 2). Participants were presented with target children who were happy or angry and Black or White and were asked to indicate which of 2 adults (a race but not emotion match or an emotion but not race match) each child would grow up to be. White adults, White 9- to 10-year-olds, and racial minority 5- to 6-year-olds selected race matches, whereas White 5- to 6-year-olds selected race and emotion matches equally. These data suggest that beliefs about racial stability vary by age and social group.

Keywords: racial concepts, cognitive development, social group differences, minority groups, social cognition

Research Highlights

1. Young White children do not expect race to be stable from childhood to adulthood—that is, they reason that race is not more (or less) stable than emotional expression.

2. In contrast, racial minority children, like older White children and adults, reason that race is stable over time.

3. These studies show that children’s concepts of race vary by age and social group membership.

U.S. children’s concepts of race reveal both early awareness and developmental change. On the one hand, children often use race to make social inferences. They report that a person’s race is inherited from their parents, and they use skin color to categorize and remember others (Dunham, Stepanova, Dotsch, & Todorov, 2015; Gaither et al., 2014; Hirschfeld, 1995; Roberts & Gelman, 2015). Children also use race to make inferences about a person’s personality and likability (e.g., when White children are shown faces of White children and faces of Black children, they are more likely to associate White faces with positive attributes, such as niceness; Aboud, 2003; Baron & Banaji, 2006). On the other hand, young children often overlook race and focus on other social categories instead (e.g., Weisman, Johnson, & Shutts, 2015). They believe that gender (more than race) marks different “kinds” of people (Rhodes & Gelman, 2009), and when asked with whom they want to be friends or share preferences, they select children of the same gender or same accent more than those of the same race (Kinzler, Shutts, Dejesus, & Spelke, 2009; Shutts, Roben, & Spelke, 2013). Children also privilege attractiveness, such that they infer that attractive people have positive traits and unattractive people have negative traits, and are less likely to make trait inferences on the basis of race (Rennels & Langlois, 2014).

Moreover, several studies question the extent to which children believe that race is stable over development—a belief that adults hold as intuitive (Bastian & Haslam, 2006). Early findings were somewhat inconsistent. Hirschfeld (1995) asked children who an adult was as a child, with race pitted against body build or occupation (e.g., for a Black adult in a police uniform, the choices were a White child in a police officer uniform or a Black child in plain clothing). Although by 7 years of age, children judged race to be more stable than either body build or occupation, 4-year-olds did not judge race to be more stable than body build; they judged race as more stable than occupation only. Furthermore, young children’s use of race on the occupation trials may have reflected a lack of attention to occupation rather
than an affirmative judgment of the stability of race, as there were no control trials to test children’s awareness of each dimension individually. Finally, because the participant sample was predominantly White and the test stimuli were simplified line drawings, the data do not speak to how diverse samples conceptualize racial stability when confronted with real-world faces (with both within-race and between-race variation).

Pauker, Ambady, and Apfelbaum (2010) examined children’s reasoning about racial stability using photographs of real-world individuals. They provided a three-item test, asking what a child would look like as an adult (e.g., Black child matched with Black adult and White adult choices), what an adult looked like as a child (e.g., White adult matched with Black child and White child choices), and whether someone could change their skin color if they really wanted to and why. Children who answered all three questions as stable and verbalized essentialist reasoning (e.g., “He can’t change. You’re born one way and you can’t change after that” [Pauker et al., 2010, p. 1804]) were coded as racially essentialist. On this measure, most of the younger children (3–6 years of age) did not show essentialist beliefs about race. The implications for children’s understanding of racial stability are unclear. On the one hand, children’s tendency to view race as stable by the age of 6 years may have reflected the fact that race was not pitted against any other dimension. On the other hand, younger children’s difficulty with explaining race constancy may have been amplified by the verbal demands of the task, thus leaving open how they would perform on a less demanding measure. Finally, Pauker et al. (2010), like Hirschfeld (1995), focused on a predominantly White sample, thereby leaving unclear how diverse samples would perform.

Kinzler and Dautel (2012) showed White and Black children a series of triads consisting of one child and two adults: one who matched the child in race but not language (race match) and one who matched the child in language but not race (language match). Each item (image plus voice clip) was presented individually and hidden behind a screen before and after presentation. This design feature was necessary so that children’s access to the verbal and visual information was controlled over the two dimensions (race vs. language). On each trial, children were asked to identify the adult that the target child would grow up to be. White 9- to 10-year-olds and Black 5- to 6-year-olds chose the race match, but White 5- to 6-year-olds chose the language match. These results suggest that young White 5- to 6-year-olds do not consistently conceptualize race as stable and that concepts of racial stability develop differently across social groups. However, although these results demonstrate the relative importance of language as a significant social category for young White children, what they say about race concepts is less clear. For young White children, language is often conceptualized as a salient, informative, stable, and inherited social category (Hirschfeld & Gelman, 1997; Kinzler, Dupoux, & Spelke, 2007). When language and race are placed in a head-to-head comparison, young White children may reason that language is more stable. However, it is possible that if race were pitted against a category other than language, they might view race as more stable. Also, because the test images were not visible during the test question (i.e., race was occluded during the test and children never saw more than one face at a time), this raises questions about whether attention or memory processes contributed to young White children’s difficulty rather than beliefs about racial stability per se.

The Present Studies

Based on the research summarized above, it is unclear when children of different racial backgrounds first believe that race is stable over time. On the one hand, research reporting that young children treat race as stable may have overestimated children’s ability by providing a contrast dimension (occupation) that was insufficiently salient and by depicting race as overly homogeneous across individuals by using line drawings (Hirschfeld, 1995). On the other hand, research reporting that young children treat race as nonstable may have underestimated children’s ability by providing a contrast dimension (language) that is itself viewed to be stable over time by not permitting children to view the images under consideration simultaneously (Kinzler & Dautel, 2012) or by requiring explicit verbal justifications (Pauker et al., 2010).

Further studying children’s beliefs about the stability of race has important theoretical implications for understanding children’s race-based concepts. When an identity is understood as stable, it may be viewed as more central and may therefore powerfully predict children’s expectations about individual properties (Quintana, 1998; Ruble et al., 2007). Because young children use race to make inferences about social relationships (e.g., that a Black child is more likely to befriend another Black child than a White child) and are less likely to use race to make inferences about individual properties (e.g., that a Black child will enjoy the same activities as another Black child; Shutts et al., 2013), it follows that children may not have yet formed the belief that race is stable (e.g., that a Black child will grow up to be a Black adult). Indeed, Rhodes (2013, 2014) recently proposed that children’s race-based concepts are rooted in beliefs about social obligations and coalitions rather than beliefs about natural kinds (i.e., that they are inherited, stable, and inductively potent). Thus, examining this issue has the potential to clarify the ways in which children do and do not conceptualize race in an adult-like manner and to reveal how children use race to reason about individuals.

We propose that in order to provide a clear test of the stability of race per se, what is needed is a comparison dimension that is salient yet nonstable. Here, we pitted race against the temporary property of emotional expression. Emotional expressions are powerful social cues that provide insight into others’ feelings and internal states, and young children are highly skilled at perceiving and interpreting them (Widen & Russell, 2003). At the same time, even preschool-aged children understand that experiences and environmental input can change someone’s emotions (Flavell, Flavell, & Green, 2001; Lagattuta & Wellman, 2001; Wellman, Harris, Banerjee, & Sinclair, 1995). If children believe that race is stable, they should judge that it is more stable than a feature that is salient but known to be nonstable.

We also addressed some of the other limitations of previous research. First, to the best of our knowledge, only Kinzler and Dautel (2012) have examined how racial majority and racial minority children from the same region make racial stability judgments. Such evidence is critical not only in order to ensure greater generalizability to diverse populations but also to shed light on possible mechanisms to account for how racial stability concepts develop. For example, if racial minority children develop concepts of racial stability earlier than White children, this would imply that these concepts are informed by particular life experiences and not simply age per se. For instance, racial
minority children may be more likely to experience racial discrimination or may be more likely to receive race-related messages from their parents, which could ultimately facilitate earlier sensitivity to race concepts. We therefore examined the performance of both White and racial minority children. Second, as noted by Kinzler and Dautel (2012), differences between White and racial minority children may be related to experiences with parental racial socialization, such that parents of racial minority children may discuss race-based concepts and experiences with their children more frequently than parents of White children (Hughes, 2003; Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012). However, no studies have empirically tested how parental racial socialization relates to children’s racial stability concepts. We therefore included a measure of parental racial socialization. Third, we did not rely on children’s verbalized reasoning, which in Pauker et al. (2010) could have underestimated young children’s concepts. Fourth, images consisted of real-world faces instead of line drawings (Hirschfeld, 1995), thereby presenting children with real-world variability in faces and making our findings more generalizable to real-world people. Fifth, all test images remained present during each trial, thereby giving children visual access to all potential race- and emotion-based matches.

When examining children’s reasoning about the stability of emotion and race, two competing predictions are implied by previous research. Specifically, young White children may not reason that race is stable (as implied by the prior research comparing race and language) and may therefore reason that emotions are at least as stable as race. Alternatively, young White children may in fact reason that race is stable when the competing feature is clearly nonstable (i.e., emotion). Furthermore, racial minority children, like older White children and adults, may reason that race is more stable than emotion due to their experiences as racial minorities or with parental racial socialization, which highlight race as an important and informative category (see Kinzler & Dautel, 2012, for a discussion).

Following the method developed by Kinzler and Dautel (2012), participants were shown a target child who was Black or White and happy or angry. Then, they were shown two adults: one who matched the target’s race but not emotion and one who matched the target’s emotion but not race. On eight trials, participants were asked to identify which adult the target child would grow up to be. Participants who conceptualize race as stable across the life span and Study 1 assessed U.S. White children and adults, and Study 2 assessed U.S. racial minority children.

Study 1

Method

Participants. This study included three groups of White U.S. participants: 5- to 6-year-olds (N = 26, 58% female; mean age = 5.46, range = 5.10–6.99), 9- to 10-year-olds (N = 24, 66% female; mean age = 9.46, range = 9.07–10.87), and adults (N = 28, 54% female; mean age = 32, range = 18–70). The sample size was based on that of Kinzler and Dautel (2012). An additional 127 adults and forty-four 5- to 6-year-olds (mean age = 6.01, range = 5.11–6.99) participated in pretesting of the materials. Children were recruited in the Midwestern United States at a museum affiliated with a university lab. Adults were recruited online via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. Children’s race was provided by their parents, and adults provided their own race.

Materials. The stimuli consisted of eight child faces and 16 adult faces (50% male or female; 50% Black or White; 50% angry or happy). Adult images were drawn from the NimStim set (Tottenham et al., 2009), and child images were drawn from the Child Affective Facial Expression Set (Lobue & Thrasher, 2014); these are fully available at databrary.org. On each of the eight trials, one child and two adult faces of the same gender were displayed on a computer using PowerPoint. For each trial, participants saw one child and two adults: one who matched the child in emotion but not race and another who matched the child in race but not emotion (e.g., a happy Black child paired with an angry Black adult and a happy White adult). All possible pairings of emotion and race were presented; gender was always kept constant within a set. Each target was randomly assigned one of two pairs of same-gender adult faces (i.e., one angry White adult and one happy Black adult; one angry Black adult and one happy White adult), counterbalanced across participants. The lateral position of the adult faces was counterbalanced within and across participants. Trials were presented in random order.

Pretesting. To ensure that all images were judged to depict Black or White or happy or angry people, they were pretested with a sample of 127 adults. For each image, adults were asked either What is the racial background of this person? (response options: Black, White, Black and White, or other) or What emotion is this person expressing? (response options: happy, angry, other, or unclear). The selected images were categorized as intended (Black or White, happy or angry) at least 90% of the time. In order to ensure that matches could not be made on hair or eye color alone, all selected images had dark hair and dark eyes. To further validate the images for use in this paradigm (e.g., that participants would treat the adult images as plausible adult versions of the child images), we pretested emotion (N = 23) and race (N = 21) separately with 44 White 5- to 6-year-olds. On each trial, participants viewed a child and were asked to select which of two adults the child would grow up to be. Triads varied along a single dimension—either emotion (e.g., a happy child with a happy vs. an angry adult, all the same race) or race (e.g., a Black child with a Black vs. a White adult, all the same emotion). One-sample t tests revealed that when emotion and race were tested separately, children attended to emotion (M = 6.39 out of 8, SE = .33), t(22) = 7.36, p < .001, and race (M = 7.38 out of 8, SE = .19), t(20) = 17.92, p < .001, at above-chance rates (i.e., 4).

Procedure. In order to familiarize participants with the categorization task and to ensure that they could engage in growth-based reasoning, they first participated in two practice trials depicting cartoon characters with differently shaped schematic bodies (i.e., square person, circle person). For each practice trial, children were shown a cartoon child and two cartoon adults (e.g., circle child, circle adult, triangle adult) and were asked to identify which adult the child would grow up to be. All characters in the practice trials were uniformly red in color and had no facial features (thereby preventing color-based or emotion-based reasoning). Feedback was provided only for children who made an error in the practice trials (N = 5), and the experimenter only proceeded to the test trials after successful completion of the practice trials. On the eight test trials, the experimenter revealed a target child, pointed to the screen, and said, “Here is a child (pointing). When this child grows up, which grown-up will it be?” The experi-
menter then revealed two adults and said (while pointing), “Will this child grow up to be this grown-up or this grown-up?” All three images (i.e., target picture and response options) remained visible when participants made their decision.

**Parental racial socialization.** Following the task, parents were given a follow-up survey adapted from previous research (O’Connor et al., 2008) that asked how often they discussed race-related issues with their child (e.g., how often do you identify and discuss people by race: 0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, 4 = very often; α = .83; see the Appendix for all items).

**Results**

All results are depicted in Figure 1. There were no effects for the target’s emotion, target’s race, target’s gender, or participant gender, so the data were collapsed over these variables. A one-way analysis of variance with age group (three: White 5- to 6-year-olds, White 9- to 10-year-olds, and White adults) and the number of same-race matches as the dependent variable yielded a significant effect, $F(2, 75) = 15.48, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .29$. Pairwise comparisons indicated that White 5- to 6-year-olds ($M = 4.42, SE = .44$) were significantly less likely than White 9- to 10-year-olds ($M = 6.75, SE = .46$) and adults ($M = 7.75, SE = .42$) to make same-race matches ($p < .001$). Responses for White 9- to 10-year-olds and adults were not significantly different from one another ($p = .34$). One-sample $t$ tests indicated further that White 5- to 6-year-olds made same-race matches at chance levels (i.e., 4), $t(25) = .72, p = .48$, unlike White 9- to 10-year-olds, $t(23) = 5.99, p < .001$, and adults, $t(30) = 19.04, p < .001$, both of which were significantly above chance. A series of nonparametric Wilcoxon signed-rank tests confirmed these tests further. In the group of White 5- to 6-year-olds, 15 children made more same-emotion matches, nine children made more same-race matches, and two children made same-emotion and same-race matches at equal rates ($Z = -.56, p = .57$). For White 9- to 10-year-olds, 19 children made more same-race matches, four children made more same-emotion matches, and one child made same-emotion and same-race matches at equal rates ($Z = -4.01, p < .001$). For adults, 27 made more same-race matches and one made more same-emotion matches ($Z = -5.11, p < .001$).

**Parental racial socialization.** On average, White 5- to 6-year-olds ($M = 2.47, SD = .68$) received fewer parental racial socialization messages than 9- to 10-year-olds ($M = 2.91, SD = .43; p = .014$). For White 5- to 6-year-olds (but not 9- to 10-year-olds), higher rates of racial socialization messages were marginally correlated with fewer race-based matches, $r = -.32, p = .061$.

**Discussion**

When each variable was tested in isolation, children attended to both emotion and race. However, when emotion and race were in conflict, White 5- to 6-year-olds did not treat race as more (or less) stable than emotion. In contrast, White 9- to 10-year-olds and adults chose the race match. These data demonstrate that racial stability judgments develop with age (see the General Discussion for thoughts on the parental socialization data).

**Study 2**

Study 2 extends the study of racial stability judgments to a sample of racial minority children. Prior research found that, unlike White 5- to 6-year-olds, same-aged Black children reasoned that race was more stable than language (Kinzler & Dautel, 2012). We therefore hypothesized that racial minority 5- to 6-year-olds might reason that race is more stable than emotion. We did not attempt to collect data from racial minority 9- to 10-year-olds, given our prediction that younger racial minority 5- to 6-year-olds would already conceptualize race as stable. We assessed both Black and non-Black racial minorities because previous work indicates that racial minority children, by virtue of their minority status, think about racial categories sooner than White children (e.g., Bigler & Liben, 2006; Quintana, 1994, 1998).

**Method**

**Participants.** This study included 24 racial minority 5- to 6-year-olds (50% female; mean age = 6.01, range = 5.00–6.92; 18 Black, three Asian, two Latino/a, one multiracial) who were recruited from the same sources as those in Study 1. The children’s race was provided by their parents.

**Procedure.** The materials, design, and procedure paralleled those in Study 1.

**Results**

There were no effects for the target’s emotion, target’s race, target’s gender, or participant gender, so the data were collapsed over these variables. A one-sample $t$ test revealed that racial minority 5- to 6-year-olds made same-race matches at above-chance levels (i.e., 4), $t(23) = 4.71, p < .001$ ($M = 6.08, SE = .44$). A nonparametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated that 18 children made more same-race matches, three children made more same-emotion matches, and three children made same-race and same-emotion matches at equal rates ($Z = -3.39, p = .001$).

**Parental racial socialization.** On average, parents reported speaking to their children about race sometimes ($M = 2.67, SD = .92$), but experiences with parental racial socialization did not correlate with children’s responses, $r = - .06, p = .41$.

**Cross-study comparison.** We combined the 5- to 6-year-old data from both studies and conducted an independent samples $t$ test with the number of same-race matches as the dependent variable comparing the White 5- to 6-year-olds from Study 1 to the racial minority 5- to 6-year-olds from Study 2. Racial minority 5- to 6-year-olds were more likely to
make same-race matches than White 5- to 6-year-olds, t(48) = −2.23, p = .03. Experiences with parental racial socialization did not differ significantly between racial minority and White 5- to 6-year-olds. All results held when looking at only Black children.

Discussion

Racial minority 5- to 6-year-olds reasoned that race was more stable than emotion, thus showing a pattern of results that differed from the results of White 5- to 6-year-olds in Study 1. This pattern demonstrates that racial minority children believe that race is stable at an earlier age than White children and is consistent with the findings of Kinzler and Dautel (2012), who found that Black 5- to 6-year-olds, but not same-aged White children, reasoned that race was more stable than language.

General Discussion

In two studies, we presented participants—both White and racial minority—with a categorization task in which they predicted whether a child would grow up to have the same emotion or the same race. In Study 1, we focused on White participants and found developmental change: Adults and 9- to 10-year-olds reasoned that a person’s race was more stable than their emotion, whereas 5- to 6-year-olds did not reason that a person’s race was more (or less) stable than their emotion. Study 2 revealed that 5- to 6-year-old racial minority children, like White adults and 9- to 10-year-olds, reasoned that race was more stable. These studies provide new evidence demonstrating that beliefs concerning the stability of race develop throughout early childhood at different rates across social groups.

These findings align with previous research showing that between the ages of 7 and 10, children often reason that racial categories are not only above superficial features such as skin tone (Dunham et al., 2015) but are also indicative of characteristics that are permanent and constant (Hirschfeld, 1995; Quintana, 1998). Moreover, these data contribute to a growing body of research demonstrating that in the presence of competing information (e.g., gender, attractiveness, accent, coalitions), younger White children often do not privilege race (e.g., Rennels & Langlois, 2014; Rhodes, 2013). Critically, these data suggest that even when the competing feature is highly salient but understood to be nonstable, young White children do not conceptualize race as stable.

Unexpectedly, White 5- to 6-year-olds’ increased experiences with parental racial socialization showed a tendency to correlate with fewer race matches. Although counterintuitive to the idea that increased experiences with race would promote the belief that race is stable, this finding may reflect the content of the socialization messages that White 5- to 6-year-olds received. Within White families, racial socialization messages often de-emphasize race and emphasize color blindness (Pahlke et al., 2012), which could encourage the belief that race is not stable. Yet, because we did not explore the content of the messages and because the relation was marginally significant, we encourage additional research and a cautious read of these data.

Racial minority 5- to 6-year-olds, recruited from the same region as the White 5- to 6-year-olds in Study 1, reasoned that race was more stable than emotion. These findings highlight the role that group membership plays in children’s reasoning about race and contribute to the literature showing that racial minority children think about race differently than racial majority children (Aboud, 2003; Bar-Haim, Ziv, Lamy, & Hodes, 2006). Kinzler and Dautel (2012) speculated that experiences with parental racial socialization may facilitate racial minority children’s stability judgments, though we found no evidence for this in the present data. What else, then, fostered in racial minority children the belief that race was more stable than emotion? We speculate that a variety of experiential factors (e.g., experiences with discrimination, minority status) may have played an important role (see Quintana, 1994, 1998), and we look forward to additional work to examine these questions.

Future research should explore how responses vary by emotion type. Although we did not find an interaction between target race and emotion, participants who are aware of negative stereotypes about Black people may show increased race-based reasoning when they see a face of an angry Black person. Future research should also include multiracial children (e.g., children with one Black parent and one White parent), who have been shown to reason about race differently than monoracial children (Gaither, 2015; Roberts & Gelman, 2016). One prediction is that relatively early in development, multiracial children may reason that race is stable because of their exposure to diverse people. However, an alternative prediction is that because of their exposure to diverse people, multiracial children may reason that they could grow up to be like either or both of their parents and therefore conceptualize race as nonstable. More research is certainly needed in order to understand more fully how these concepts emerge in development.

Nonetheless, the present studies document variation in children’s racial stability judgments as a function of age and group membership and add to the literature on cultural and contextual influences on concepts of race (e.g., Astuti, Solomon, & Carey, 2004; Diesendruck, Goldfein-Elbaz, Rhodes, Gelman, & Neumark, 2013; Rhodes & Gelman, 2009). The present findings also have important theoretical implications for understanding the development of children’s beliefs about race and racial essentialism. On the one hand, previous research suggests that young children, like adults, are aware of race and use race-based information to make social inferences (e.g., Baron & Banaji, 2006; Hirschfeld, 1995; Shutts et al., 2013). Yet other data, including those presented here, suggest that the meaning of race to children—including, for example, the belief that race is stable across the life span—develops with experience and that racial essentialism may not be consistently present during the early years (in contrast to essentialism of natural kinds; e.g., Astuti et al., 2004; Gelman, 2003; Rhodes & Gelman, 2009). In other words, although young children in the United States often use racial categories to make inferences about social groups, racial majority children lack strong intuitions regarding how those categories are structured and do not yet use those categories to constrain how they think about an individual’s growth across the life span.

References


### Appendix

#### Parental Racial Socialization Measure

People differ regarding how often they talk about race with their child. Please indicate how often the following occurs in your home.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>We discuss racial issues or incidents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>We discuss racism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>We discuss differences between racial groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>We identify and discuss people by race.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>We include our child in discussions of racial issues or incidents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>We include our child in discussions of racism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>We avoid discussing racial issues or incidents in front of our child (reverse coded).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>We avoid discussing racism in front of our child (reverse coded).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $\alpha = .83$.
Racial Inequality in Psychological Research: Trends of the Past and Recommendations for the Future

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Abstract
Race plays an important role in how people think, develop, and behave. In the current article, we queried more than 26,000 empirical articles published between 1974 and 2018 in top-tier cognitive, developmental, and social psychology journals to document how often psychological research acknowledges this reality and to examine whether people who edit, write, and participate in the research are systematically connected. We note several findings. First, across the past five decades, psychological publications that highlight race have been rare, and although they have increased in developmental and social psychology, they have remained virtually nonexistent in cognitive psychology. Second, most publications have been edited by White editors, under which there have been significantly fewer publications that highlight race. Third, many of the publications that highlight race have been written by White authors who employed significantly fewer participants of color. In many cases, we document variation as a function of area and decade. We argue that systemic inequality exists within psychological research and that systemic changes are needed to ensure that psychological research benefits from diversity in editing, writing, and participation. To this end, and in the spirit of the field’s recent emphasis on metascience, we offer recommendations for journals and authors.

Keywords
metascience, systemic inequality, race, review

It is well documented that race plays a critical role in how people think, develop, and navigate the social world (Roberts & Rizzo, in press). Given that race is a social construct, racialized experiences that differ both between and within groups can give rise to racial differences in psychology (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Goodman, 2000; Kendi, 2017; Pauker, Carpinella, Meyers, Young, & Sanchez, 2018). For example, at birth, infants can differentiate among individuals of various races. By 3 months, however, those raised in racially homogeneous contexts become less able to differentiate among members of unfamiliar races, perceiving that they all look and sound alike (Perrachione, Chiao, & Wong, 2010; Quinn, Lee, & Pascalis, 2019). As another example, individuals raised in relatively collectivist contexts often focus on others, whereas those raised in relatively individualistic contexts often focus on themselves, which can give rise to racial differences in memory construction and recall (Wang, 2019; Wang, Song, & Koh, 2017). During and after a lifetime of such racialized experiences, including those involving access to social resources, experiences with discrimination, interpersonal contact, social norms, social segregation, and socioeconomic status, it is no surprise that race plays a critical role in psychological phenomena, including but not limited to those involving activism, auditory and visual processing, conformity, emotions, executive functioning, interpersonal relationships, memory, and religious cognition (see Anyiwo, Bañales, Rowley, Watkins, & Richards-Schuster, 2018; Brown, Mistry, & Yip, 2019; Lewis, Goto, & Kong, 2008; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Mattis & Jagers, 2001; Mays, Cochran,
Thus, one might expect psychological science to frequently publish research that highlights the important role of race in human psychology and for psychological scientists to work with racially diverse populations. Yet decades of critiques advocating for this seem to have gone unnoticed (see Arnett, 2008; Bell & Hertz, 1976; Betancourt & López, 1993; Dunham & Olson, 2016; Graham, 1992; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010; Kline, Shansudhenn, & Broesch, 2018; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; McLoyd, 1990; McLoyd & Randolph, 1984; Medin, Ojalehto, Marin, & Bang, 2017; Nielsen & Haun, 2016; Nielsen, Haun, Kärtner, & Legare, 2017; Rowley & Camacho, 2015; Syed, 2017; Zuckerman, 1990). In fact, Defejesus, Callanan, Solis, and Gelman (2019) found that across 1,149 articles published in 2015 and 2016 in 11 psychology journals, 73% of them never even mentioned the race of their participants.

It is also well documented that race plays a critical role in the extent to which people even care about race. Evidence for this emerges early in development. For example, in the United States, White children experience racial diversity and discrimination less often than do children of color, and White parents speak with their children about race less often than do parents of color, which results in White children being less focused on race and less sensitive to racial issues than are children of color (Hughes, 2003; Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012; Perry, Skinner, & Abaied, 2019; Quinn et al., 2019; Roberts & Gelman, 2016, 2017). By adulthood, White persons are more likely than persons of color (POCs) to avoid conversations about race, potentially because they feel inexperienced in the subject or because they are motivated, either consciously or unconsciously, to maintain an illusion of postracialism (Apfelbaum, Pauker, Ambady, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Cole, 2015; DiAngelo, 2012; Nzinga et al., 2018; Rowley & Camacho, 2015; Salter, Adams, & Perez, 2018).

Consequently, one might expect White journal editors—whose gatekeeping function positions them to govern what is worthy of publication—to be less likely than journal editors of color to publish research that highlights the role of race in human psychology. And one might expect White psychological scientists—whose position allows them to determine what is worthy of study and who is worthy of participation—to be less likely than psychological scientists of color to include research participants of color in their research. This would be especially concerning given that most psychological scientists, even those who study race, are White (Hartmann et al., 2013; Medin, 2017). That is, a scarcity of research participants of color may be symptomatic of a scarcity of scholarship of color, which may itself be symptomatic of a scarcity of editors of color. Thus, an important question is whether a lack of racial diversity among psychology’s editors and authors has systemic implications for what and who is included in the permanent scientific record.

From our perspective, a strong psychological science must examine and understand racialized experiences in psychological phenomena and include editors, authors, and participants of diverse racial identities in the research process. These are not equivalent issues, but they are connected. Hypothetically, a White editor could accept a manuscript written by a White author that focuses on White participants’ concepts of race, and this manuscript would contribute to psychological science’s understanding of race yet exclude diverse perspectives from evaluating, writing, and participating in that science. In addition, a Native American editor could reject a publication by a Native American author that focuses on Native Americans participants’ concepts of race, and this manuscript would not contribute to psychological science’s understanding of race yet include underrepresented perspectives in that science. Of course, the likelihood of either of these scenarios depends on who is even included in the scientific process (e.g., editors determine what and who gets published, authors determine what and who gets studied; Medin & Bang, 2014). Thus, psychological science must include diverse editors, writers, and participants in the research process precisely because underrepresented psychological scientists might be most willing to examine the experiences of underrepresented groups.

We asked four specific questions:

1. How often does psychology publish research that highlights race?
2. Who edits the psychological research that highlights race, and does their race predict how much of that research is published?
3. Who writes the psychological research that highlights race?
4. Who participates in the psychological research that highlights race, and is the participants’ race predicted by the race of the lead author?

To answer these and other questions, we surveyed five decades of publications across three major areas of psychology: cognitive, developmental, and social. We focused on these three areas to get a broad snapshot and because they represent three major areas of
psychology. Additional research is certainly needed to answer these questions elsewhere, both within psychology (e.g., clinical and counseling psychology, school psychology) and beyond (e.g., political science, sociology).

Note that concepts of race vary across generations, disciplines, individuals, and contexts (Glasgow, 2009; Hobbs, 2014; Morning, 2011). Some scholars conceptualize race as being rooted in ancestry and phenotype and others conceptualize it as being rooted in culture and experiences. Some scholars conceptualize both “African American” and “Black” as races, and others conceptualize one as an ethnicity and the other as a race. Simply put, what makes a race depends on whom you ask, which highlights the socially constructed nature of the concept. We make no metaphysical claims as to what race in fact is. Rather, we use the term as a way to refer to groups that are generally conceptualized and characterized as ancestrally, phenotypically, culturally, and/or socially distinct (e.g., African American, American Indian, Arab, Asian, Biracial, Black, Caucasian, Chinese, European American, Hispanic, Indigenous, Latinx, Multiracial, Native American, White). We question the extent to which psychology publishes research that highlights such group membership and the extent to which it includes in the research process individuals who identify with those groups.

**Article Selection**

We queried every article published in *Cognition* (n = 2,862), *Cognitive Psychology* (n = 827), *Child Development* (n = 5,961), *Developmental Psychology* (n = 5,162), the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (n = 7,432), and *Personality and Social Psychological Bulletin* (n = 4,136) between the years of 1974 and 2018, which yielded data from 26,380 publications. We queried two journals within each area to permit generalizations across areas (cognitive, developmental, social), and we selected these journals because they have been in continual publication over the past five decades and are among the most prestigious in their subfields.

First, authors C. Bareket-Shavit and F. A. Dollins independently queried 20% of the journal issues to reliably determine which empirical publications with human participants explicitly highlighted race in the title, abstract, or both (e.g., Asian, Black, White, racial categories, racial identity, racial segregation, racial stereotyping, racial inequality; Fleiss’s κ = .96); disagreements were resolved by discussion. These included a variety of publication types, including those with all-White samples that focused on race-related outcomes (e.g., the origins of symbolic racism; Sears & Henry, 2003) or did not focus on race-related outcomes (e.g., personality and drug use; Brook, Whiteman, Gordon, & Brook, 1986), those with racially diverse samples that focused on race-related outcomes (e.g., cooperation in interracial groups; Blanchard, Adelman, & Cook, 1975) and did not focus on race-related outcomes (e.g., detecting and recognizing geometric figures; Stein & Mandler, 1975), and those with samples composed completely of persons of color that did focus on race-related outcomes (e.g., ethnic socialization; Hu, Zhou, & Lee, 2017) or did not focus on race-related outcomes (e.g., pretend play; McLoyd, 1980). S. O. Roberts and C. Bareket-Shavit then queried the remaining 80% of the journal issues and downloaded the publications for which at least one study had been performed in the United States and that highlighted race in the title or abstract, resulting in 1,511 articles.1

Third, authors F. A. Dollins and P. D. Goldie independently coded 20% of the downloaded publications to reliably code participant information, including the total sample size (Fleiss’s κ = .80) and the number of White participants (Fleiss’s κ = .85), participants of color (Fleiss’s κ = .84), and unspecified participants (Fleiss’s κ = .65); disagreements were resolved by discussion. Participant information was coded after data exclusions unless data exclusions were not specified. In cases in which there were multiple studies with only a subset focusing on race, only those subsets were coded. F. A. Dollins and P. D. Goldie then coded the remaining 80% of the publications. For each publication, they also recorded the journal name, article title, publication year, and the name, contact information, and affiliation of the first author.

Fourth, authors C. Bareket-Shavit, F. A. Dollins, and P. D. Goldie coded the perceived race (−1 = White, 1 = POCs) of the editors in chief, editorial board members, and authors. Specifically, C. Bareket-Shavit and F. A. Dollins coded the perceived race of 20% of unique editors in chief (Cohen’s κ = .77), C. Bareket-Shavit and P. D. Goldie coded the perceived race of 20% of the editorial board members (Cohen’s κ = .80), and consult editors.
C. Bareket-Shavit and F. A. Dollins coded the perceived race of 20% of the first authors (Cohen’s $\kappa = .91$); disagreements were resolved by discussion. Each pair of researchers then split and coded the perceived race of the remaining persons. To do so, we searched and categorized the online images of the editors and authors (e.g., via a faculty page; for a similar methodology, see Berry, 2006). We also contacted via e-mail all living editors and authors for whom we had contact information ($n = 2,824$), asking them to provide their self-identified racial identity (25% response rate). We compared those self-report data with our own categorizations and confirmed that our categorizations had high predictive validity (Cohen’s $\kappa = .85$). We updated all inaccurate categorizations in response to the self-report data. We did not code the race of seven editors in chief, 238 editorial board members, and 152 authors who were unidentifiable because they (a) were deceased or had retired, (b) had no images online, (c) did not respond to our survey, (d) refused to complete the survey, or (e) had identities that were ambiguous and therefore not easily classifiable.

In line with guidelines from the institutional review board, editors and authors were promised that their disclosed identities would not be made public. In addition, some editors and authors explicitly requested that their responses remain private, and the editors and authors we were unable to contact were not able, of course, to consent to us making their racial identities public. For these reasons, only an anonymized version of the data set has been made available online (https://osf.io/ykjrd/files/). Researchers interested in the complete data set should contact S. O. Roberts.

**How Often Does Psychology Publish Research That Highlights Race?**

From the 1970s to the 2010s, only 5% of publications highlighted race (1,511 of 26,380). In cognitive psychology, fewer than 1% of publications highlighted race (14 of 3,689), compared with 8% in developmental psychology (878 of 11,123) and 5% in social psychology (619 of 11,568). We ran a linear regression model with area (cognitive, developmental, social), decade (standardized), and the interaction between these two variables as predictors and the proportion of publications that highlighted race as the dependent variable (i.e., within each year, the number of publications that highlighted race of all publications).2 Publications that highlighted race were more common in developmental psychology than in social psychology, $\beta = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = 6.11$, $p < .001$, 95% confidence interval (CI) = [0.02, 0.04], more common in developmental psychology than in cognitive psychology, $\beta = 0.08$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = 15.10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.07, 0.09], and more common in social psychology than in cognitive psychology, $\beta = 0.05$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = 11.17$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.04, 0.06].

As shown in Figure 1, publication rates changed over time but only within developmental and social psychology. Since the 1970s, there have been virtually no cognitive psychology publications that highlighted race, from 0% of all publications in the 1970s to 0.002% of all publications in the 2010s, $\beta < 0.01$, $SE < 0.01$, $t = 1.44$, $p = .15$, 95% CI = [−0.01, 0.01]. In contrast, the number of such publications increased in developmental psychology, from 5% in the 1970s to 12% in the 2010s, $\beta = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = 7.97$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.02, 0.04], and increased in social psychology, from 0% in the 1970s to 7% in the 2010s, $\beta = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = 5.52$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.02].

Thus, across the past five decades of psychological research, few publications have highlighted the important role of race in human psychology, and virtually none have done so in cognitive psychology. One might expect psychological science to have increased its focus on race from the 1970s (i.e., at the conclusion of legally mandated racial segregation) to the 2010s (i.e., during the era of Barack Obama). Indeed, this was true for developmental and social psychology but not for cognitive psychology. Why?

One reason might be that cognitive psychologists believe they are pursuing race-neutral, universal phenomena. Yet a handful of studies published in top-tier cognitive journals have revealed that cognitive processes, such as auditory processing, categorization, and memorization, do indeed vary as a function of racialized experiences (e.g., racial diversity, segregation, inequality; Perrachione et al., 2010; Quinn et al., 2019;
Wang, 2019). Another reason might be to avoid the notion that racial differences reflect inherent differences. Yet as mentioned previously, racial differences reflect differences in racialized experiences. To this point, other scholars have argued that any psychological study of race not only must describe racial differences but also must identify the social and cultural processes that explain those differences (Betancourt & López, 1993; McLoyd, 1990; Zuckerman, 1990). Studies that focus only on racial differences can be problematic in that they (a) have historically adopted a deficit-based approach focused on what POCs lack rather than what they have, effectively undermining researchers’ ability to develop theories that acknowledge human strengths stemming from social and cultural variation; (b) license the inference that POCs are abnormal, deficient, and incompetent compared with their White peers; (c) ignore within-group variation, which leaves the reader with little understanding of individual differences within populations of color; and (d) imply that the cause of racial differences is race rather than systemic and situational mechanisms (see McLoyd & Randolph, 1984). Our claim is not that every single psychological phenomenon varies as a function of race or that every single psychological publication needs to highlight the role of race in the topic at hand. Yet the reality is that racialized experiences shape how people think, develop, and behave. To dedicate no attention to this racialized experiences in the face of increasing racial diversity, and inequality.

Who Edits the Research That Highlights Race?

We considered first the editors in chief. In total, there were 60 unique editors in chief between 1974 and 2018, of whom 83% were White, 5% were POCs, and 12% were unidentifiable (publications from editors in chief whose race we were unable to code were excluded from subsequent analyses). Focusing on all of the queried publications for which we coded the race of the editor in chief, 93% of those publications (20,784 of 22,247) were edited by White editors in chief. Focusing within each area, as shown in Figure 2, we found that 100% of all publications in cognitive psychology (3,667 of 3,667), 89% of all publications in developmental psychology (9,184 of 10,300), and 96% of all publications in social psychology (7,933 of 8,280) were edited by White editors in chief. Focusing on the publications that highlighted race, 87% were edited by White editors in chief (1,119 of 1,284). Within each area, 100% of publications in cognitive psychology (14 of 14), 84% of publications in developmental psychology (707 of 837), and 92% of publications in social psychology (387 of 433) were edited by White editors in chief. To examine whether the editors’ race predicted the proportion of publications that highlighted race, we ran a mixed-effects linear regression model with editor-in-chief race (−1 = White, 1 = POC) as the predictor variable, individual editor in chief as a random intercept, and the proportion of publications that highlighted race as the dependent variable. We did not examine variation across decade or area given that there were few editors in chief of color across these variables. When editors in chief were White, 4% of all publications highlighted race, and when editors in chief were POCs, this proportion almost tripled to 11%, $\beta = 0.06$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = 2.45$, $p = .018$, 95% CI $[0.01, 0.10]$.

We next examined racial diversity among the editorial-board members (i.e., associate editors, senior editors, consulting editors), which was important given that there have historically been few editors in chief of color and because editors in chief tend to invite members to the editorial boards. Because practices varied across journals (e.g., some made public only the names of the associate and consulting editors, others only the names of associate editors, and some did not archive this information at all), we focused on the racial diversity among the entire editorial boards, excluding the editor in chief, irrespective of board members’ particular role. We did not examine variation across decade or area given that these data were reported inconsistently, if at all, across the journals and sampled time frame. In total, we coded the race of 1,745 unique editorial board members, of whom 76% were White, 10% were POCs, and 14% were unidentifiable. To examine whether the race of the editor in chief predicted the racial diversity of the editorial board, we ran a mixed-effects linear regression model with editor race ($−1 = White, 1 = POC$) as the predictor variable, individual editor in chief as a random intercept, and the proportion of editorial board members who were POCs (standardized) as the predictor variable. When editors in chief were White, 6% of editorial board members were POCs, and when editors in chief were POCs, this proportion almost tripled to 17%, $\beta = 0.10$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 1.41$, $p = .17$, 95% CI $[−0.04, 0.24]$. Note that this difference was not statistically significant, probably because there were simply too few editors in chief of color and reported editorial boards to make stronger comparisons. To examine our key question of whether the racial diversity of the editorial board predicted the proportion of publications that highlighted race, we ran a linear regression model with the proportion of White editorial board members (standardized) as the predictor variable and the proportion of publications on race as the dependent variable. Indeed, the greater the proportion of White editorial board
members, the lower the proportion of publications that highlighted race, $\beta = -0.27$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = -7.06$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [−0.34, −0.19].

Thus, fewer publications that highlight the role of race in human psychology have been accepted and published by White editors than by editors of color. There may be two straightforward explanations for this: (a) White editors are less concerned or familiar with race, or (b) authors who study race may be more likely to submit their work to editors of color at specialty journals (Nzinga et al., 2018; Rowley & Camacho, 2015). On either account, these data highlight the need for racial diversity among psychology’s editors. Across five decades of research, two prestigious cognitive journals have never been under the auspices of a single editor in chief of color, unlike developmental and social psychology, although these two areas were also mostly edited by White editors.

### Who Writes the Research That Highlights Race?

Among the publications that highlighted race, there were 1,093 unique first authors, of whom 63% were White, 23% were POCs, and 14% were unidentifiable (publications from authors whose races we were unable...
to code were excluded from subsequent analyses). We found that 69% of the publications in cognitive psychology (9 of 13), 71% of the publications in developmental psychology (548 of 773), and 72% of the publications on race in social psychology (398 of 551), were written by White authors. We next ran a logistic regression model with area (−1 = developmental, 1 = social), decade (standardized), and the interaction between these two variables as predictor variables and the race of the first author (−1 = White, 1 = POC) as the dependent variable. We excluded cognitive psychology from this model because of a lack of publications and authors of color in this area (but see Fig. 3), and we included the total number of publications within each decade as a covariate given that a higher proportion of authors of color in later years might simply reflect a higher number of publications. The proportion of authors of color increased (and the proportion of White authors decreased) over the past five decades, $\beta = 0.79, SE = 0.31, z = 2.55, p = .01, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.20, 1.41]$; developmental psychology showed greater change than social psychology, $\beta = -0.16, SE = 0.08, z = -2.05, p = .04, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.32, -0.01]$ (see Fig. 3).

Thus, across five decades of research, the majority of publications on race have been written by White authors, although less so over time. Why? One possibility is that research conducted by authors of color is simply of lower quality than research conducted by White authors and therefore less publishable in prestigious journals. If true, one would expect publications written by White authors to be cited more often than those written by authors of color. To test this post hoc explanation, we used Google Scholar to record the citation count for each downloaded publication as of March 2020 and found no significant difference between the citation counts of publications written by authors of color compared with those written by White authors.3 Another possibility is that there are simply too few authors of color. If true, one might also expect authors of color to also be underrepresented in specialty journals. To test this post hoc explanation, we queried every publication in Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology between the years of 1995 and 2018 (the entire span of the journal’s publication history), which yielded data from 843 articles and 701 unique first authors, the majority of whom (53%) were authors of color (32% were White, and 15% were unidentifiable). Thus, the quality of the research and the quantity of the researchers do not explain why many of the most prestigious psychological publications on race have been published by White psychologists. We propose that another explanation for this is that the psychological publication process is no less reflective of racial inequality than most of society.

Who Participates in the Research That Highlights Race?

Among the publications that highlighted race, 42% of participants were White, 48% were POCs, and 10% were unspecified (participants whose race we were unable to code were excluded from subsequent analyses). In cognitive psychology, 48% of participants were White, and 53% were POCs. In developmental psychology, 35% of participants were White, and 62% were POCs. In social psychology, 66% of participants were White, and
34% were POCs. We ran linear regression models with author race (−1 = White, 1 = POC), area (−1 = developmental, 1 = social), decade (standardized), and the interactions among these three variables as predictor variables and the proportion of White participants or participants of color as the dependent variables. We excluded cognitive psychology from these analyses given the dearth of publications on race in this area (but see Fig. 4). White participants were more common in publications written by White authors (52% of participants) and less common in publications written by authors of color (35% of participants), β = −0.08, SE = 0.01, t = −6.28, p < .001, 95% CI = [−0.11, −0.06], and were more common in social psychology (66% of participants) and less common in developmental psychology (35% of participants), β = 0.16, SE = 0.01, t = 12.57, p < .001, 95% [0.13, 0.18]. Conversely, participants of color were more common in publications written by authors of color (65% of participants) and less common in publications written by White authors (48% of participants), β = 0.08, SE = 0.01, t = 6.12, p < .001, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.11], and more common in developmental psychology (65% of participants) and less common in social psychology (34% of participants), β = −0.15, SE = 0.01, t = −11.79, p < .001, 95% CI = [−0.18, −0.13].

Critically, the race of the participants was predicted by the race and area of the author. White participants were most common in publications written by White social psychologists (69% of participants) and social psychologists of color (60% of participants), followed by White developmentalists (40% of participants) and developmentalists of color (19% of participants). Mean comparisons are as follows: White social psychologists compared with social psychologists of color, β = −0.01, SE = 0.02, t = −0.04, p = .97, 95% CI = [−0.04, 0.03]; White social psychologists compared with White developmentalists, β = 0.06, SE = 0.01, t = 5.09, p < .001, 95% CI = [0.04, 0.09]; White social psychologists compared with developmentalists of color, β = −0.17, SE = 0.02, t = −8.90, p < .001, 95% CI = [−0.21, −0.13]; social psychologists of color compared with White developmentalists, β = 0.06, SE = 0.02, t = 3.55, p < .001, 95% CI = [0.03, 0.10]; social psychologists of color compared with developmentalists of color, β = 0.18, SE = 0.02, t = 10.22, p < .001, 95% CI = [0.14, 0.21]; and White developmentalists compared with developmentalists of color (81% of participants), followed by White developmentalists (60% of participants), social psychologists of color (40% of participants), and White social psychologists (31% of participants; all mean comparisons, p's < .001).

We reason that this variation by author race occurs because authors of color are more invested in communities of color, more cognizant of the importance of racial diversity in participant recruitment, and less likely to rely on predominantly White convenience samples (see Nzinga et al., 2018), but why the area difference? One reason might be that developmental psychologists, compared with social psychologists, may be less likely to recruit participants via online platforms (e.g., Amazon’s Mechanical Turk), which have become increasingly popular over time and consist of mostly White samples (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosline, 2011). If true, a simple solution would be to recruit diverse samples via those platforms (see, e.g., Roberts et al., 2011).
et al., 2020). Another reason might be that developmental psychologists have been more vocal about the importance of collaborating with racially diverse samples. Here are three examples:

In 1990, Vonnie McLoyd edited a special issue of Child Development that encouraged developmentalists to think more critically about minority samples. In 2018, Dawn Witherspoon and Gabriela Livas Stein cochaired a preconference on diversity for the Society for Research on Child Development (SRCD) in which they did the same.

In 2020, under Cynthia García Coll’s editorial leadership and Deborah Rivas-Drake’s chairpersonship of the Publications Committee, SRCD enacted a policy on the disclosure of sociocultural information of participant samples, including information regarding participants’ race.

Our data and these examples highlight the need for racial diversity in psychology’s leadership (see Fig. 2). Note that in developmental psychology but not in social psychology, publications on race included more participants of color, and the proportion of participants of color increased over time. This increase is in many ways positive because it likely reflects (a) a greater attention to marginalized and hard-to-reach communities, (b) a greater willingness of those communities to participate in university research, (c) a greater investment in those communities by authors of color, and (d) an increasingly diverse society (Rowley & Camacho, 2015). Yet developmental psychology has limited knowledge about race-related issues among White participants (e.g., how White children learn about race and think about racial diversity). In recent years, U.S. society has seen an increase in race-related hate crimes, perpetrated mostly by White men (Eligon, 2018). Research in social psychology has revealed that this is often caused by fear of increasing racial diversity (Craig, Rucker, & Richeson, 2018), and by studying race with White children, developmental psychologists stand to reveal how this fear takes root across development. Simply put, race is not relevant only to children of color.

Moving Forward

We examined five decades of publications in cognitive, developmental, and social psychology to document the extent to which publications in these fields have highlighted the role of race in how humans think, develop, and behave, as well as when, where, by which authors and editors, and with which participants race has been given formal consideration. Our research suggests that the psychological publication process is, understandably, subject to the same structural inequities that stratify the rest of society. Psychological research is mostly edited by White editors, under whom there have been fewer publications that highlight the important role of race in psychology. The few studies that did highlight race were written mostly by White authors, under whom there have been fewer participants of color. Thus, we document that the racial identities of individuals curating psychological research have clear implications for what and who is included in that research. Below, we contextualize our findings and propose concrete recommendations for how to meet the field’s stated goal of generating representative knowledge (Medin, 2017; Rad, Martingano, & Ginges, 2018).

Any experienced psychologist has surely noticed that psychologists of color are rarely in leadership positions. To give one historical example, the American Psychological Association (APA) was founded in 1892, but the first APA president who was a POC, Kenneth B. Clark, was not elected until 1971. It is known that diverse leadership transforms organizations by changing norms, creating initiatives, establishing new knowledge, and modeling potential career paths to underrepresented group members (Crisp & Turner, 2011; Jeanquart-Barone, 2004; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Milner & Howard, 2004; Rowley & Camacho, 2015). This is especially important given that the perspectives people hold, the ways in which they evaluate phenomena, and the questions that they ask are influenced by their social identities (Bourke, 2014; Cole, 2015; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; McGlothlin & Killen, 2010). If psychological science is to tackle diverse questions from diverse perspectives, it must diversify. This is not to presuppose that POCs necessarily hold worldviews that privilege POCs. Rather, in addition to benefiting from increased racial diversity, psychological science would also benefit from norms and communal agreements that center around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Our view is that the lack of racial diversity in the psychological publication process is both biased and impractical. Regarding bias, we offer a thought experiment: A researcher of color is invested in dismantling racial inequality and therefore conducts research on race with samples of color. The researcher submits a manuscript for publication to a White editor at a top-tier journal. The manuscript is rejected by the editor, who feels unable or ill-equipped to handle it, perceives the researcher of color as less objective and credible than a White researcher, devalues or misunderstands the research, or criticizes the research for not including a White comparison sample. Subsequently, the researcher of color submits the work to an editor of color at a specialty journal who may be
more invested in issues of race and more likely to publish the research. Ultimately, the research is published in a specialty journal that might be devalued by the author of color's institution, peers, students, and tenure committees, leaving mainstream psychology with theories, methods, and findings that do not reflect a diversity of perspectives (for similar arguments, see Hall & Maramba, 2001; Nzinga et al., 2018; Rowley & Camacho, 2015).

Regarding practicality, the lack of racial diversity in psychology stands to leave the field unprepared for an increasingly diverse society. In 2015, most U.S. newborns were of color, and it was projected that by 2060, POCs will make up the majority of the U.S. population (Colby & Ortman, 2015). How are these persons to see themselves as future psychological scientists if they are not represented as editors, authors, or even participants? Three decades ago, Markus and Nurius (1986) demonstrated that individuals who do not see themselves represented in certain positions are less motivated to pursue similar roles for themselves. If psychological science is to be welcoming to future generations, it must diversify.

Extending the field's recent emphasis on metascience, including decreasing false-positive findings and increasing replication efforts and open-science practices (John, Loewenstein, & Prelec, 2012; Makel, Plucker, & Hegarty, 2012; Pritschet, Powell, & Horne, 2016; Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2011), we propose that reforms aimed at ensuring diversity, equity, and inclusion need to be embedded within our research. More formally stated, the informativeness and generalizability of psychological research depends on the values of the people who conduct that research. Just as data and methods need to be transparent, the people behind those data and methods need to be transparent. We propose five recommendations for journals and four for authors.

**Recommendations for journals**

1. **Communicate a top-down commitment to diversity.** This means explicitly stating whether the journal publishes research that is sensitive to diversity and whether it values the editing, writing, and participation of diverse scientists. This recommendation can be achieved by adding a diversity statement to the journal’s web page and editorial letters and is meant to signal whether the journal is explicitly interested in issues of diversity (see Nehblett, 2019).

2. **Include diverse individuals across all levels of the publication process.** This means that journals should consist of diverse editors, reviewers, authors, and participants—ideally at rates that mirror diversity at the national level or within psychology. This is not to be achieved only through special issues, which only reinforce the idea that diversity is not mainstream. Rather, diversity must become the norm, and this must be reflected in standard journal issues (see Medin, 2017).

3. **Merit participant diversity in the review process.** Just as manuscripts are evaluated by their theoretical novelty, methodological rigor, and clarity of writing, they should be evaluated by the diversity of their samples. If journals can distinguish publications with preregistered studies and publicly accessible data sets and materials, they can be reasonably expected to distinguish publications with samples that do not consist mostly of White people (e.g., badges for publications that do not concern Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic [WEIRD] samples). Alternatively, journals could mark publications that consist mostly of White people (e.g., WEIRD badges). Either could incentivize researchers to diversify their samples.

4. **Release public diversity reports annually.** We suggest this practice will reveal whether journals are fulfilling their commitment to diversity. If the report reveals that the journal is homogeneous in a given area (e.g., the editors, reviewers, authors, or participants are mostly White men), the journal should produce a report detailing plans for change.

5. **Establish a diversity task force.** This ensures that the recommendations are monitored and enacted. Each diversity task force could consist of individuals from diverse backgrounds but should not consist purely of underrepresented minorities, who are commonly overloaded with service requests, especially in the domain of diversity (see Rodriguez, Campbell, & Adelson, 2015).

**Recommendations for authors**

1. **Detail the racial demographics of samples.** The majority of psychology publications fail to report the racial demographics of their samples (DeJesus et al., 2019) or report simplified dichotomies (e.g., White vs. non-White). Moving forward, authors could report the breakdown of the full racial demographics of their samples (e.g., 70% White, 20% Asian, 8% Black, 2% Multiracial). Doing so makes transparent who is included in psychological science and allows for comparisons across studies, which may be especially important for meta-analyses. Given that race is a social construct, we recommend that participants are given the opportunity to provide their own open-ended identity (e.g., What is your racial/ethnic identity?) as opposed to forcing them to “check” one or more predetermined categories. Of
course, we did not examine variation within POCs in the present research (e.g., whether the inclusion of Asian participants has changed over time). This decision was born out of necessity; racial categories have changed over time, and publications inconsistently report the demographics of their samples. Moving forward, we hope to see journals and authors follow this recommendation, which would enable future researchers to conduct more nuanced investigations.

2. Justify the racial demographics of samples. This recommendation prevents researchers from relying only on easy-to-access populations (e.g., White college students), motivates them to consider the generality of their research questions and theoretical assumptions, and encourages them to include diverse humans in the scientific process. Just as researchers could justify their sample sizes, they could justify their sample demographics (see Rowley & Camacho, 2015).

3. Include constraints on generality statements. Proposed by Simons, Shoda, and Lindsay (2017), this recommendation makes clear the extent to which authors’ conclusions generalize across samples. If the study sample is homogeneous and such reporting is not possible (but the sample homogeneity has been justified; see previous recommendation), researchers could discuss the generalizability of their findings. Note that authors must be both outcome-oriented and process-oriented. Documenting how outcomes vary across groups is important because it reveals the extent to which conclusions generalize across groups, although it is also important to identify (or at least discuss) the processes that explain such variation (see Mcloyd & Randolph, 1984).

4. Include positionality statements. This recommendation makes transparent how the identities of the authors relate to the research topic and to the identity of the participants and the extent to which those identities are represented in the permanent scientific record. Just as authors release statements of author contributions, they can release positionality statements that afford contributors the opportunity to clarify how they are positioned regarding the research and the researched. If, for instance, scholars are drawing conclusions about Asian Americans, yet the author list consists exclusively of White Americans, that could be made clear. Indeed, if authors detail their samples’ racial identities, they could just as well detail their own racial identities. This recommendation may encourage researchers to conduct their research collaboratively with diverse scientists and engage in multi-lab collaborations (see Bourke, 2014; Medin & Bang, 2014; Nzinga et al., 2018). (For an example, see the Acknowledgments section of this article.)

None of these recommendations needs to be limited to the study of race. Although race was the focus in this research, intersectionality is also vital to a healthy and representative science (e.g., persons representing a wide range of gender, political, religious, and sexual identities). For example, it could be made clear in the positionality statement that the research question concerns gender yet the research team consists only of individuals who identify as male, or that the research participants are members of the LGBTQ community yet the research team consists only of individuals who identify as heterosexual and cisgender. If the researchers are making claims about any social identity, their relationship with that identity could be stated. However, authors should not be mandated to disclose any aspect of their identities unless they themselves consent to doing so.

Concluding Thoughts

Our analysis was broad but limited. First, we examined publications from two top-tier journals within each area, although these journals are not representative of all journals. Future research is needed with other journals, both general (e.g., Psychological Science) and area specific (e.g., Journal of Cognition and Development). Second, we focused our analysis on psychology journals, but future research could consider diversity among funding agencies. To truly diversify psychological science, it is important for funding agencies to consist of diverse review panels, to support researchers of color, and to fund projects with diverse samples. Third, our interest was in psychological research that highlighted the important role of race in thinking, development, and behavior, although many of the core issues tackled here extend to other social groups as well, including but not limited to those based on gender, sexual orientation, religion, class, and political orientation (see also Duarte et al., 2015; Petty, Fleming, & Fabrigar, 1999).

Notwithstanding these limitations, the present research makes a clear contribution to psychological science. Racial diversity, segregation, and inequality have increased in recent years, particularly in the United States, and this reality has important implications for how people think, develop, and behave. Here, we have documented the extent to which some of the most prestigious journals in psychological science do not reflect this reality but do indeed reflect structural inequality. The few psychology publications that have highlighted race have been edited mostly by White editors who have published fewer articles that highlight race, and they have been written mostly by White authors who have employed fewer participants of color. Simply put, the research, researchers, and researched
are all systematically interconnected (Medin et al., 2017). These patterns, of course, vary across decade and area, but overall, they make clear that psychological science has a long way to go if it is to be a truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive enterprise. We advocate for a set of recommendations that takes more seriously the role that racialized experiences have in human psychology, for both White people and POCs, and makes more transparent who regulates, narrates, and participates in psychological science.

Finally, the present work is not an indictment of psychological scientists, although it is an indictment of psychological science. Our field has for decades revealed the pitfalls of psychological biases (e.g., explicit and implicit attitudes, motivated cognition, beliefs in a just world) and structural inequality (e.g., racially homogeneous institutions, hierarchy-enhancing policies, color-blind leadership) and how the dynamic interplay between the two maintain and reinforce racial inequality (see Roberts & Rizzo, in press; Salter et al., 2018). Yet we have neglected the fact that our own perspectives confine our view of reality. If we are to have a genuinely sound and equitable science, we must acknowledge the role of our finite perspectives and develop practices that ensure our science is not limited or dominated by a single one. As the world becomes increasingly diverse, it will become necessary for our science to become diverse as well. We hope that this truth becomes self-evident as we progress further into the 21st century.

Transparency

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Notes

1. We focused on publications situated within the U.S. context for four reasons. First, most psychological publications stem from the United States (Arnett, 2008), which left us with relatively few publications from other contexts. Second, concepts of race vary across countries (Diesendruck, Goldfein-Elbaz, Rhodes, Gelman, & Neumark, 2013), thereby making cross-cultural comparisons, which was not the purpose of this research, difficult. Third, race plays a particularly important role in how Americans think, develop, and behave (Roberts & Rizzo, in press), and the United States therefore stood as a unique case study. Fourth, the researchers were situated within the U.S. context and therefore had limited insight into other contexts (see Bourke, 2014). Undeniably, research that examines racial inequality in other contexts is needed.

2. Across all models, we examined variation as a function of decade rather than year given that there were often no publications on race in a specific year and therefore no data from authors or participants to analyze.

3. We conducted a mixed-effects linear regression model with author race (−1 = White, 1 = POC) as a predictor variable, decade of publication and area as covariates, individual author as a random intercept, and the citation count as of March 2020 as the dependent variable. There was no significant effect of author race, \( \beta = -5.86, SE = 23.12, t = -0.25, p = .80, 95\% CI = [-51.11, 39.43] \).

References


At this point in my career, code-switching feels natural. I am not even cognizant that I do it anymore. —30-year-old black male researcher

In 2012, a video of President Barack Obama entering the locker room of the U.S. men’s Olympic basketball team went viral. In the clip, viewers can see that there’s a clear difference between how Obama greets a white assistant coach and how he greets the black NBA player Kevin Durant. This moment inspired a sketch on Key & Peele in 2014 that played off the idea that Obama “switches” how he greets people, depending on whether they’re white or black.
This kind of behavioral adjustment is casually referred to as “code-switching,” which has long been a strategy for black people to successfully navigate interracial interactions and has large implications for their well-being, economic advancement, and even physical survival.

Broadly, code-switching involves adjusting one’s style of speech, appearance, behavior, and expression in ways that will optimize the comfort of others in exchange for fair treatment, quality service, and employment opportunities. Research suggests that code-switching often occurs in spaces where negative stereotypes of black people run counter to what are considered “appropriate” behaviors and norms for a specific environment. For example, research conducted in schools suggests that black students selectively code-switch between standard English in the classroom and African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) with their peers, which elevates their social standing with each intended audience. We also see examples of guidelines encouraging black people to code-switch to survive police interactions, such as “acting polite and respectful when stopped” and “avoiding running even if you are afraid.”

Based on our research and the work of others, we argue that code-switching is one of the key dilemmas that black employees face around race at work. While it is frequently seen as crucial for professional advancement, code-switching often comes at a great psychological cost. If leaders are truly seeking to
promote inclusion and address social inequality, they must begin by understanding why a segment of their workforce believes that they cannot truly be themselves in the office. Then they should address what everyone at the company needs to do to change this.

THE UPSIDES AND DOWNSIDES OF CODE-SWITCHING

Workplace research suggests that code-switching can generate both positive and negative outcomes for black employees. In our review of the existing literature, we identified three main reasons people code-switch in the workplace:

1. For black people and other racial minorities, downplaying membership in a stigmatized racial group helps increase perceptions of professionalism and the likelihood of being hired.
2. Avoiding negative stereotypes associated with black racial identity (e.g., incompetence, laziness) helps black employees be seen as leaders.
3. Expressing shared interests with members of dominant groups promotes similarity with powerful organizational members, which raises the chance of promotions because individuals tend to affiliate with people they perceive as similar.

At the same time, we know that code-switching comes with social and psychological repercussions. Downplaying one’s racial group can generate hostility from in-group members, increasing the likelihood that those who code-switch will be accused of “acting white.” Seeking to avoid stereotypes is hard work, and can deplete cognitive resources and hinder performance. Feigning commonality with coworkers also reduces authentic self-expression and contributes to burnout.

For our latest working paper, we investigated how and when these positive and negative outcomes occurred in our sample, how those outcomes affected black employees, and how code-switching was evaluated by others. The goal of this research was to examine how code-switching as an impression-management strategy informs black people’s work experiences. We also wanted to examine the pros and cons of this behavior for their professional and psychological well-being.

Our findings, while largely self-reported, add to the ongoing work of understanding how black professionals navigate mostly white American organizations. Creating workplaces that are inclusive of black people will enable companies to retain a diverse workforce and bolster innovation. However, black employees who feel pressure to code-switch may perceive that they are being devalued, which in turn may reduce their commitment to the company and desire to contribute their unique insights. Our work provides an in-depth review of black employees’ working lives that will allow companies to create better strategies for recruiting and retaining these workers.
THE COMPLEXITIES AND NUANCES OF CODE-SWITCHING

To begin our research, we developed a “code-switching at work” scale to assess the extent to which black people downplayed their race (e.g., “I try not to act like other members of my racial group”), avoided stereotypes (e.g., “I avoid behaviors that would make people at work think that I am lazy”), and promoted shared interests with majority-group members (e.g., “I try to talk about topics that other people would find interesting”) through adjusting their behavior and appearance. We sent an online survey to black individuals from alumni pools of two large public universities in the U.S. and a Qualtrics survey panel to assess when and how they code-switched at work. Our sample, which consisted of approximately 300 black college-educated employees in the United States, indicated the extent to which they code-switch on a 7-point scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). On average, across all three dimensions, participants responded at a 4, which indicates that code-switching is neither overly present nor overly absent from these employees’ work lives. Clearly, there is some complexity in when and how code-switching occurs.

Through our survey, participants largely acknowledged the benefits of engaging in the three kinds of code-switching listed above. They also articulated how they view and experience these benefits, and how different situations can influence the extent to which they code-switch. We list four of these situations below.

**Leadership aspiration.** We found that black employees with high career aspirations for leadership and promotion opportunities actively avoided conforming to black stereotypes to a higher degree than those with low career aspirations. “I operate under the assumption that most people expect less of me because of my race,” said a 31-year-old black male anesthesiologist. “Under that assumption, I find it easy to modify my behavior slightly to consistently outpace expectations of my abilities.” Respondents also named specific stereotypical behaviors that they regularly avoid. “I go out of my way to make sure I don’t appear lazy, because I know the stereotypes,” said a 23-year-old black female program manager. “People talk, and if you look a certain way, you really have to work twice as hard.” A woman in her 30s who works as a senior research program coordinator told us, “In my actions and verbal communications, I try to avoid any opportunity for someone to label me as the ‘angry black woman.’ I also carry myself in a professional manner that may seem to be a step above the somewhat casual professional environment of the office.”

**“Fit” beyond race.** Black employees who perceived that they “fit” in their organization also reported downplaying their race and promoting shared interests with dominant-group members. “I like to laugh, have fun, talk about sports, movies, and music,” said a 53-year-old black female professor. “I do these things with anyone.” Those who fell into this category perceived more career success than those who did not. Crucially, however, they also were more likely to burn out. We suspect this is because the process of trying to fit in can be exhausting and dispiriting. “I rarely engage in social gatherings with coworkers
because there are few things that we have in common, and I don’t feel that they are interested in learning about things that interest me, because they are the majority. Thus, I keep limited relationships with coworkers,” said a 29-year-old black female financial professional. “I also feel as though I am in a constant battle of censoring/watering down my views, thoughts, and personality for the possibility of being looked at differently than a nonblack man or woman in the workplace if they exhibited the same behavior. It’s exhausting navigating an all-white workplace.”

**Vigilance.** High levels of vigilant behaviors — that is, always preparing for potential discrimination and mistreatment — were also positively associated with all three dimensions of code-switching at work. One black man described his vigilance about race as “constantly being under a magnifying glass.” “Due to the questions asked by coworkers, it is clear that they view my presence as a ‘sneak peek’ into black culture,” he said. “I find myself constantly trying to be aware of my mannerisms, to ensure that I don’t portray myself or the people I represent in a negative light.” Another man, a 31-year-old financial analyst, noted that he’s more vigilant at work because the stakes are so high. “If you’re being judged by some random person, it is easier to dismiss it, because they probably had no effect in your life,” he said. “But when you’re being judged by coworkers in a place that you want to build a career in, it’s not an easy dismissal. Those perspectives hold weight because it can make or break your career here in America.” Finally, a 32-year-old black woman described vigilance as a day-to-day coping mechanism: “It has been my specific experience that it is simply easier to anticipate the complaints, jokes, and negative comments from white people and just adapt to their discomfort and ignorance in order to maintain workplace peace.”

**Diversity environment.** We found that the racial composition of the workplace, as well as whether respondents perceived that their organization had an environment that promoted diversity, influenced the extent to which black employees code-switched.

While we know that black employees code-switch when they aren’t well represented in companies, we also uncovered evidence that they downplay their racial identity and promote shared interests with others even when they are equally represented. Why and when is this the case? We have a few theories. It is possible that the stigma associated with black racial identity affects how larger groups are perceived, especially if they are seen as (or actually are) low performing. In these situations, black employees may downplay their race and try to reduce the stigma attached to it in the presence of others. Another theory is that nonblack coworkers may be more likely to promote shared interests with others outside of their own racial group when black employees are equally represented. This may increase the likelihood of black employees code-switching in return.
We were also surprised to find that black employees avoided stereotypes about black racial identity when they perceived that their organization either did not embrace diversity (also known as a color-blind ideology) or strongly embraced differences (also known as a multicultural ideology). In other words, a failure to acknowledge differences reduces the ability to recognize discrimination. Black employees might therefore seek to avoid stereotypes in color-blind organizations to avoid differential treatment. In contrast, companies that actively promote a diversity-friendly work environment can make the differences between groups more visible. Conforming to stereotypes in these multicultural environments may encourage the belief that black people have innate and fixed behaviors. Thus, in order to be seen as an individual, a black employee may code-switch.

All of this is, of course, complex and nuanced; indeed, it seems that no diversity environment perfectly eliminates code-switching. But that may be the point. It can be challenging for a black employee to navigate any organization’s racial composition and diversity climate, especially over the span of an entire career. One 32-year-old digital marketing assistant noted that the worst job he had had was at an organization where the culture was not diverse: “The strain I endured as a person of color just trying to fit in was so taxing,” he said, “that it negatively affected every other part of my life.” But even though he’s at an organization now that’s more focused on diversity, he still struggles to find coworkers to bond with because of his previous experience.

Our survey revealed the various ways and reasons black employees code-switch, as well as some of the effects. But it was unclear whether code-switching enables black employees to be accepted as “professionals” in the workplace. To answer this question, we designed an online experimental study for almost 350 black and white participants recruited on CloudResearch and living in the U.S. to determine how they evaluated code-switching behaviors.

The participants were instructed to imagine themselves as recently hired employees at a law firm in a large city. They each read an email from a colleague named either Lamar Matthew Jackson or La’Keisha Renee Jackson, both third-year associates at the firm. In the email, Lamar or La’Keisha shared advice on the “unspoken” ways to succeed at the company: whether you should “be yourself” or try to fit in; use standard English or slang; or wear your hair “naturally” or conform to more traditionally “Eurocentric” hairstyles. Participants were randomly assigned into two conditions in which Lamar/La’Keisha code-switched by altering their preferred name (e.g., “My name is Lamar/La’Keisha, but you can call me Matt/Renee at work”), speech patterns, or preferred hairstyle depending on workplace expectations.

Participants then evaluated whether Lamar/La’Keisha’s behavior was appropriate for the workplace and level of professionalism. On average, white participants evaluated code-switching behaviors positively and perceived those who engaged in these behaviors as more professional — particularly when black employees adjusted their hairstyle to better fit the norms of the dominant group. “You should be allowed to keep your name, but slang and nappy hair are unprofessional for the workplace,” said one respondent. Another noted, “Looking and behaving professionally are necessary when working at a place like that. Appearances matter. Her name La’Keisha sounds obviously ‘black’ and some may even think ‘ghetto,’ but Renee is more conservative.”

In contrast, black participants disparaged the fictitious black lawyers who intentionally engaged in code-switching to fit in at work, and evaluated them as less professional. “Nothing is wrong with ‘ethnic’ names. That is a stereotype that I don't agree with either,” said one respondent. “My name is my name. If they can pronounce every other name they can pronounce mine…. Use of the English language is understandable, especially in her profession. But to pretty much change her whole identity for a job isn't right.” Another espoused the belief that “when a person is able to be themselves in a professional setting, they are more productive because they are able to focus on work instead of being distracted by keeping up a specific professional façade.”

Ultimately, our research clearly shows that minorities who code-switch are likely to face a professional dilemma: Should they suppress their cultural identity for the sake of career success? Or should they sacrifice potential career advancement for the sake of bringing their whole selves to work?
This dilemma not only poses career and psychological risks for individuals, it also damages organizations, which may miss out on the distinct perspectives and contributions from racial minorities who are uncomfortable being themselves in the workplace.

**WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?**

In light of our research, we offer the following recommendations for companies and racial-minority professionals about the complexities of code-switching at work. The suggestions aren’t comprehensive, but will give everyone in your organization a way forward in beginning to tackle this behavior.

**Organizations**

**Evaluate company culture.** Organizations must examine how their workplace culture may create pressure for minorities to code-switch. For example, even when a company encourages employees to bring their authentic selves to work, racial-minority professionals may still perceive that doing so risks appearing unprofessional. Companies should consider if they are asking their black employees to do something that they will then be punished for. Specifically, are you asking black employees to bring their whole selves to work only if they also assimilate with dominant cultural norms?

**Tackle underrepresentation at all levels.** Part of the reason black employees feel pressure to adjust their cultural-identity expression within the workplace is the chronic problem of minority underrepresentation in these environments. This makes even the slightest cultural “difference” more noticeable. Ensuring that people of color are represented at all levels of the organization will make their cultural identities — including hairstyles, interests, and speech patterns — normative and acceptable.

That said, we believe that company diversity efforts that solely seek to increase the number of black employees, without questioning the inclusivity of the environment, are bound to fail. As found in our data, code-switching also occurs when there are roughly equal numbers of black and nonblack employees, which suggests that diversifying organizations is only part of the solution.

**Consider inclusion separately from diversity.** Research shows that valuing diversity is not enough to reduce discrimination toward minorities. In addition to focusing on diversity, organizations need to create inclusive environments for employees to feel comfortable bringing their authentic selves to work. This includes collecting information on employees who are segmented by their social identities and collecting qualitative data for underrepresented group members whose experiences may not register in a quantitative survey.
Creating inclusive environments that work for everyone is challenging, however. Our research finds that black employees demonstrate less effort to code-switch when organizations deny or overemphasize cultural differences. One way to strike this balance is for company leaders to address issues outside of their companies that affect black employees' work experiences. Inviting these conversations demonstrates that the company values black employees beyond their individual contributions to the bottom line.

Additionally, employers can ensure that all of their employees feel included by addressing the presence of differences and need for inclusion while simultaneously valuing fairness and meritocracy. Companies can explicitly state a desire to foster an inclusive workplace that both values differences and also seeks the most qualified individuals to join the company. Taking it a step further, organizations can also create policies and rules that reflect these values, such as criteria for interviewing and hiring candidates that promote differences and meritocracy.

Leaders and coworkers

**Practice inclusive behaviors.** Inclusiveness is not just a broader organizational imperative; it’s also a daily practice. Leaders can be curious and learn about cultural differences and intentionally invite black employees into their networks and actively listen to their input.

**Start with yourself.** Is there an identity that is important to you that you may be hiding or downplaying in the workplace? By bringing more of yourself to the table, you may encourage others to do the same. Recognizing your own differences can reveal which parts of you are not welcome at work, deepening your understanding of the professional dilemmas that black employees encounter when they bring their whole selves to the workplace.

**Check your biases.** It is important to both recognize difference at work and also be wary of pointing it out when it isn’t warranted. If you catch yourself thinking that your black employee or coworker is not “like” other black people, engage in self-inquiry. Where do those thoughts come from? For example, you might like your black coworkers’ hair when it is straightened compared to when it is in a natural style, but why do you feel that way? Engaging in this line of questioning promotes being curious about your biases rather than asking black people to explain their differences.

Black employees

**Strategic code-switching.** Given that black participants evaluated code-switching negatively compared to white participants in our research, it is important for black employees to strategically code-switch, if necessary, in a way that maximizes professional gains and minimizes psychological and social distress. For
example, previous research found that same-race mentoring provides more social and psychological support than cross-race mentoring. Black employees who strive to suppress their racial identity may miss out on these invaluable relationships.

On the other hand, high-profile careers are typically obtained through networking with and being referred by powerful organizational members, who are typically white and male. In this case, code-switching may increase access to important career opportunities. Several participants shared how they code-switch strategically at work. A 29-year-old assistant director positioning herself for advancement said, “I wear my hair naturally and also maintain my accent, but I do not use a lot of slang or do things that are not professional, regardless of race. It has been a journey to find that balance in being my true self as a black woman in a predominately white, elite space.” Another women, a 30-year-old research nurse, emphasized the specific way she thinks about and enacts professionalism. “At work my goal is to be professional — not to assimilate,” she said. “I dress, talk, and behave in a way that I feel instills confidence in my patients and coworkers. I don’t go out of my way to make my white coworkers [more] comfortable with my presence because it’s not my job to make them comfortable.”

Given the range of career experiences racial minorities have, we recommend that they consider the following when deciding whether or not to code-switch:

**Assess your environment.** During interviews, onboarding, or joining a new team, it is important to assess when and how others are expressing themselves, and whether they believe you will fit their environment. Are employees behaving differently when senior leaders are present compared to their normal behavior? Are you encouraged to adjust your behavior and appearance depending on the context? For example, are you being asked to meet with black clients but are less visible on projects that involve nonblack clients? Use these environmental cues to make strategic code-switching decisions.

**Assess your values.** Because code-switching can be exhausting, it is important to evaluate your workplace goals and values. Are you ambitious? Do you seek advancement no matter the cost? Or is it more important for you to be your authentic self regardless of the work environment? Are you more willing to code-switch for short-term gains but unwilling to sacrifice your authenticity for an extended time? Knowing what you value for yourself and your career is imperative for deciding if and how to code-switch.

It is important to note that we are *not* suggesting that racial minorities should necessarily code-switch at work. We are highlighting the dilemmas that code-switching poses for their professional and personal lives — dilemmas that they shouldn’t have to solve on their own. Organizations can and should play a pivotal role in creating environments where code-switching is not necessary for success, particularly by
cultivating spaces that value inclusion and differences. We believe that further research could capture evaluations of observable code-switching behaviors in realistic settings, which will continue this conversation. | **THE BIG IDEA**

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