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Ethnic Racial Identity and the Perpetrators Race and Status: Black Emerging Adults' Discriminatory Attributions to Racial Microaggressions

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

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In

Psychology

by

Brittany Danielle Young

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This Dissertation of Brittany
Danielle Young is approved:

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Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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Abstract

The present study analyzed the effect of individual and contextual differences on Black emerging adults' (EAs') attributions of discriminations to three racial microaggressions (RMA) themes. A number of past studies have proposed that ethnic/racial identity (ERI) associates with perceptions of discrimination in Black EAs. Most of this work uses composite discriminatory scale scores, or a single behavioral manipulation of a confederate. These methods do not allow for a nuanced understanding of the role between particular RMAs and Black EAs perceptions of discrimination at the university. Thus, the present study focused on Black EAs attributions of discrimination to RMAs posited to cause Black EAs' distress and isolation in university classrooms.

This study assessed the correlation between multiple dimensions of ERI and Black EAs' class standing (frosh/sophomore vs. junior/senior) to determine their relationships to discriminatory attributions, and psychological well-being. Secondly, the current study employed an experimental design to systematically explore how differences in race (Black or White) and role/status (peer or professor) influenced Black EAs' discriminatory attributions. Results revealed that attributions of discrimination were linked to varying dimensions of ERI; however, the dimensions varied based on the RMA theme. Moreover, there is evidence that juniors and seniors differed from frosh and sophomores in how race and role impacted their discriminatory attributions. Also, White perpetrators were reported as significantly more discriminatory than Black perpetrators in two of the three RMA themes. In contrast, the current results suggest that Black professors may be viewed more

discriminatory if they perpetuate RMAs that express negative attitudes regarding the intelligence of their Black students. Finally, results show that Black EAs may be especially susceptible to RMAs from Black peers, given that Black EAs reported the lowest psychological well-being in this condition.

In conclusion these findings provide a more nuanced understanding of the links between Black ERI, class standing, and the influence of perpetrators role and race on discriminatory attributions and psychological well-being. Moreover, these findings may offer promising evidence of Black EAs' resilience when experiencing RMAs in cross racial interactions and point to a greater need to explore Black EAs' experiences with RMAs within their ethnic/racial groups.

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Ethnic-Racial Identity and the Perpetrator's Race and Status:

Black Emerging Adults' Discriminatory Attributions to Racial

Microaggressions

College provides a space for students to redefine themselves and explore

their identities. This opportunity arises from increased autonomy from family,

immersion in heterogeneous social spaces, academic coursework, and

involvement in organizations and clubs (Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Syed & Azmitia

2009). In the U.S. and other developed nations, college-going emerging adults

(EAs)—youth age 18 to 25—can develop the skills they will need for professional

employment and personal relationships. They are also able to explore the cultural

values, practices, and relationships that they will need to become competent

adults in their communities (Arnett, 2000).

Attending college also grants EAs opportunities to determine what social

identities—memberships in groups—they value and how these fit into their

overall sense of self (Azmitia, Syed & Radmacher, 2008). For EAs who are

members of marginalized groups, particularly African American-identified EAs,

this process of group identification is highly important due to feelings of isolation

(Bernard, Hoggard & Neblett, 2017; Sedlacek, 1999) and perceived ethnic fit

(Chavous, Harris, Rivas, Helaire & Green 2004; Covarrubias, Gallimore &

Okagaki, 2018) when attending Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). This

dissertation focused on African American/Black EAs[1] because they are

underrepresented in college admissions and overrepresented in college dropouts.

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[1] I will use African American and Black interchangeably because researchers and
EAs vary in how they identify.

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Research has documented the difficulties African American undergraduates face when attending PWIs. Specifically, they report fewer positive interactions with faculty and peers than those attending historically Black colleges and universities (Allen 1992; Booker, 2007). Racial microaggressions are often posited to be responsible for the deterioration of interracial interactions and relationships; however, little is known regarding their effects in intra-racial interactions. Racial microaggressions (RMAs) are the subtle, often ambiguous verbal and nonverbal slights and indignities that degrade and devalue marginalized group members' race or ethnic heritage (Sue et al., 2007). Experiences with RMAs undermine African American students' sense of belonging and psychological well-being in college (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000, Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald & Bylsma, 2003). Given the negative outcomes associated with African American undergraduates experiences with RMAs, there is a growing body of research aimed at investigating the individual and environmental factors influencing African American college-going EAs' susceptibility and resilience to RMAs experiences. This dissertation contributes to this body of research by investigating the role of the perpetrators' race (Black or White) and role (professor or peer) in Black students' RMA experiences in the classroom and whether Ethnic Racial Identity (ERI) buffers the negative consequences of RMAs.

Ethnic-racial identity (ERI) involves the multidimensional construct of both ethnic and racial identity. ERI is an individual difference correlated with both the risks and resilience to RMAs. Traditionally, ethnic identity has been defined as the norms, values, and cultural practices of a particular ethnic group,

while racial identity is often used to describe individuals and groups that are racialized through social and political practices, often on the bases of phenotypic characteristics. Researchers have argued that it is not possible to disentangle the psychosocial outcomes associated with either ethnic or racial identity (Markus, 2008; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014) and thus, when studying psychological outcomes associated with ethnicity and race, it is best to use the term ERI. When immersed in college spaces with their other race peers, African American EAs' ERI acts as both a protective mechanism and, in Black-oriented groups, a safe space to discuss and interpret negative interactions with campus community members (Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall & Lewis, 2012; McCabe 2009; Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). In this dissertation, I investigated the association between ERI, discriminatory attributions to racial microaggressions (RMAs), and their immediate mental health outcomes as measured by positive and negative affective reactions to RMAs (cf., Broudy, Brondolo, et al., 2007)

Research has yielded mixed results on whether ERI is a protective or risk factor for the negative effects of discrimination. Concerning negative correlates of ERI and perceptions and effects of discrimination, some studies have revealed a positive correlation between ERI and perceptions of discrimination to RMAs (Seller & Shelton, 2003) and a negative correlation between perception of RMAs and sense of belonging in college (Operario & Fiske, 2001; Solorzano Ceja & Yosso, 2000). In contrast, in other studies ERI has been positively linked to well-being and posited to buffer against discriminatory experiences (Lee & Ahn, 2003)

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One of the goals of this study was to gather empirical evidence address this controversy.

RMAs are everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group (Pierce, 1974; Sue et al. 2007) and are posited to be psychologically harmful to racial minorities. Research suggest stereotypes that perpetuate messages that Black people are dangerous and unmotivated make Black EAs more susceptible to experiencing RMAs that isolate them from the university space (Harwood, Hunt & Medenhall, 2012; Smith, Allen, Danley & 2007). Their frequent nature, the stress they create, and the psychological work and coping strategies needed to manage them may be even more damaging than overt racist acts. It is posited that perpetrators are often unaware that their behavior is racist or, when confronted about RMAs, they deny that it was intentional (Sue, 2009). In turn, this increases the recipients' stress and their feelings of being in an unsafe space or relationship. Recurrent experiences with RMAs are associated with "diminished mortality, augmented morbidity and flattened confidence" (Pierce, 1995, p. 281). In support of these proposals, Torres-Harding and Turner (2015) found that when exposed to RMAs that communicated the message that students were isolated and alone in their social context, African American participants reported significantly more psychological distress than their Asian and Latino peers. Concerning the themes of the RMAs, African American EAs reported a greater frequency of experiencing RMAs that sent messages that they are criminals and not as intelligent than their peers than Asian and Latino college students (Torres-Harding, Andrade & Diaz, 2012).

While these results underscore the damaging effects of RMAs on African American EAs, in the current sociopolitical context there has been significant increase in the belief that racial discrimination is no longer a major problem amongst college student populations (Pryor, DeAngelo, Palucki-Blake, Hurtado & Tran, 2011). There has also been increased endorsement of color-blind policies that propose that talking about race and discrimination is divisive and, thus, race should be de-emphasized in decisions and discussions (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). For example, in a recent study, Hoggard, Jones and Sellers (2017) found that undergraduates disagreed with the idea that blatant racism is still prevalent in today's society and subsequently did not rate examples of overt racism as discriminatory. These changes in beliefs may create a false perception that race relations, and in particular, discrimination against African American college students, has not only declined, but that educational policies against discrimination and investment in the creation of safe spaces and educational interventions to reduce overt and indirect racism are no longer necessary.

To address the continued lived experiences of discrimination of Black college students, this dissertation investigated Black EAs attributions of discrimination to RMA experiences and their association with ERI and mental health. I addressed two research questions: (1) How do various dimensions of ERI relate to RMA's discriminatory attributions and associated mental health outcomes (i.e., mood)? (2) Do Black EAs' discriminatory attributions and associated mental health outcomes differ based on the race of the perpetrator (i.e.

White or Black)? The results of this dissertation will inform the literature and university organizations aimed at supporting Black EAs at PWIs.

The Relationship between ERI and EA's Perceptions of Discrimination

The construction of ERI is a major developmental challenge for adolescents and EAs (Erikson, 1968; Phinney, 1989) The possibilities afforded for the exploration of possible selves in industrialized societies has extended the period of ERI development from adolescence to EA (Arnett 2006). More specifically, while ERI exploration and commitment begin in adolescence, college-going EAs may have increased opportunities to be influenced by diverse perspectives on race and ethnicity, leading them to revisit their ERI (Eccles, Barber, Stone & Hunt, 2003).

In developmental psychology, ERI development has generally been investigated from an Eriksonian perspective. Erikson (1968) posited that identity development involves two interrelated processes, *exploration* and *commitment*, a construct further elaborated upon by Marcia (1966, 1980). Erikson (1968) posited that youth with a history of discrimination, and in particular African Americans and Native Americans, face greater challenges in creating a positive sense of ethnic identity than other ethnic groups because of the negative stereotypes and racism they experience in their everyday lives. While initially research on Erikson and Marcia's identity model focused on other domains of identity, such as careers, values, and relationships, Phinney (1989) and Quintana's (1999) landmark theories and research sparked considerable literature on ERI development. This research, however, largely focused on empirically-documenting the processes of

development (i.e., exploration and commitment) and cultural beliefs and practices. Up until recently, the content of ERI for members of marginalized groups as they related to their daily experiences was largely unexplored (Syed & Azmitia, 2008; 2010).

Tafjel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory (SIT) has been credited with furthering our understanding of the importance and content of ERI for marginalized group members. Social identity theory posits that individuals work to have a favorable conception of their social group membership. According to SIT, strong social group memberships result in more positive perception of EAs' in-groups and themselves than of their perceived outgroups, such as members of other ethnic/racial groups. To achieve this positive sense of identity, people engage in social comparisons in which they identify the salient factors that differentiate them from outgroup members and view them more favorably, such as viewing their rich history and greater challenges as promoting a deeper sense of morality and character than the more privileged experiences of their White counterparts. In this way, within SIT, individuals classify their world in terms of "us" versus "them." When marginalized group members experience discrimination, they engage in psychological work to reframe the experience in ways that protects their self-esteem and to maintain a favorable social identity (Hurtado & Silva, 2008; Tafjel & Turner, 1986). For example, a Black EA who is the recipient of a racial slur may reframe the experience as reflecting the perpetrator's ignorance or poor social skills.

Empirical support for SIT has been found in research with African Americans and other ethnic-minority groups. For example, Hugues, Kiecolt Keith and Demo (2015) found that African American adults who strongly identified with their group had more positive psychological well-being, self-esteem, and mastery-orientation when they viewed their group positively. However, they also showed that strong group identification could be detrimental. Poorer psychological well-being and lower mastery was found in African Americans who viewed their ethnic/racial group negatively, which was consistent with negative stereotypes. Therefore, it is vital that social group members of stigmatized groups engage in psychological work to view their group membership positively and protect themselves against negative psychological outcomes. Hughes, Rivas, et al. (2008) have shown that from childhood, African American parents socialize their children to prepare for discrimination and engage in the psychological work necessary to maintain a positive sense of self; however, how peers, schools, and other societal institutions promote or hinder African American adolescents and EAs' psychological work and self-esteem protective coping strategies remains understudied.

The Multidimensional Measure of Ethnic Identity development. Informed by both Erikson's and Tafjel and Turner's theoretical models, Phinney (1992) proposed the Multidimensional Model of Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), which has been widely used to assess adolescents and EAs' *exploration* and *commitment* to their ERI. The most mature identity status for a person who has both explored and committed to a particular ERI is an achieved identity status.

Consistent with the proposal that ERI begins to develop during adolescence research using the MEIM has shown that 10th graders report greater levels of *exploration* than 8th graders (Phinney, 1989). Phinney and Chavira (1992) surveyed the same 10th graders three years later and found that most exhibited progression toward an achieved identity status, a finding also consistent with Erikson's identity development model. Moreover, Phinney (1992) showed that college students reported greater levels of *commitment* to their ethnic identity, thus supporting the proposal that ERI continues to develop in emerging adulthood. Numerous studies have supported this developmental pattern, making the MEIM one of the most widely used measures of ERI development (Herrington, Smith, Feinauer, & Griner, 2016; Quintana, 2007; Zhou, Lee, & Syed, 2019).

The MEIM aimed to provide a measure that allowed the opportunity for comparisons between ethnic/racial groups with different ethnic practices and experiences. For example, while generally African Americans rate their ERI as more important to their sense of self than any other ethnic groups, European Americans usually obtain the lowest ERI ratings (Azmitia, Syed & Radmacher, 2013; Phinney & Alipuria, 1992). Given the MEIM's focus on the universality of ERI exploration and commitment, the measure does not include an assessment of the salience or centrality of EAs' ERI or their attitudes towards other ethnic groups. For those of African descent in the United States, the salience and attitudes towards their group membership are crucial facets of their self-concept (Phinney, 1989; Phinney & Alipuria, 1992; Roberts et al. 1999, Sellers, Rowley,

Chavous, Shelton & Smith, 1997). To assess the importance of attitudes and salience of ERI, measures that are specific to an ethnic/racial group are necessary.

The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI). This measure, developed by Sellers and his colleagues (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998) incorporates the historical context of the intergroup relations of African Americans in the U.S. to a survey assessing ERI. The MIBI is comprised of multiple subscales including *centrality*, the salience of racial group membership to sense of self, *private regard*, the internal positive attitudes regarding an individual's racial group membership, and *public regard*, individuals' beliefs about how society views their racial group. The MEIM and the MIBI both posit that individuals' exploration of their ERI is crucial for positive psychological well-being and mental health. However, in contrast to the MEIM, the MIBI addresses Black individuals' experiences with prejudice and discrimination, their attitudes towards other ethnic groups, and how they create a positive ERI in the context of prejudice and discrimination. While the MIBI contains scales that assess numerous dimensions of ERI, in my dissertation I only used the centrality and public and private regard subscales because they aligned best with my research questions and hypotheses.

While most research using the MEIM or the MIBI has employed only one of these measures of ERI, Yip, Seaton and Sellers (2006) used the MEIM and MIBI to investigate how they related to psychological well-being in Black adolescents, EAs, and older adults. They found that nearly half of their sample of Black undergraduate students had an "achieved" identity status, while the other

half showed varying levels of ERI *exploration* and *commitment*. Moreover, an achieved identity status, as measured by the MEIM, was significantly correlated with two of the MIBI subscales, *centrality* and *private regard*. Finally, their results also showed that Black undergraduates low on *exploration* and *commitment* had the poorest psychological well-being, thus providing empirical support for Erikson (1968) and Tafjel and Turner's (1986) theory (but see Lee & Ahn, 2003). Subsequently, Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin and Lewis (2006) demonstrated that Black adolescents with lower public regard reported more frequent instances of discrimination than Black adolescents high in public regard. Moreover, Black EAs high in public regard had lower depressive symptoms, lower perceived stress, and increased psychological well-being. Especially relevant to my dissertation, Outten, Giguere, Schmitt and Lalonde, (2010) found that Black individuals with lower public regard reported greater racial appraisals in ambiguous events; while they were not studying RMAs, this research documented the role of ambiguity in Black EAs' perceptions of discrimination. To assess the generalizability of this body of research to the current socio-political context, I administered the MEIM and the *centrality*, *private* and p*ublic regards* scales of the MIBI to our Black EA participants. I aimed to assess the association between these dimensions of ERI and EAs' attribution of discrimination to RMAs and their mental health, as measured by positive and negative mood immediately following the RMAs.

Research suggests two links between ERI and discrimination: (1) ERI moderates individuals' perceptions of ambiguous discrimination (Baber, 2012;

Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, 1999; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone & Zimmerman, 2003, Sellers & Shelton 2003). (2) Also, ERI acts as buffer against racism and discrimination for African Americans (Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, 1999; Laio, Wing & West, 2006; Lee & Ahn, 2003). In support these two possibilities, Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey (1999) found that increased attributions of racial prejudice to ambiguous situations increased minority group members' ERI, which was related to more positive psychological well-being. Their findings suggest that attributions of racial discrimination to an ambiguous event may activate ERI and the protective mechanisms associated with increased psychological well-being in minority samples.

Additionally, research has shown that ERI can influence minority undergraduates' perceptions of ambiguous behaviors perpetrated by their White peers. For example, Operario and Fiske (2001) manipulated ambiguity by introducing minority undergraduate students to a White confederate in two conditions: (1) In the high-ambiguity condition, the White confederate behaved in ways that were contradictory to an essay he/she had written regarding his/her beliefs in equality. (2) In the low-ambiguity condition the confederate behaved in a way that was congruent with the essay, which expressed negative attitudes toward diversity and equality. Operario and Fiske's (2001) findings showed that ethnic-minority EAs with higher ERI were more likely than ethnic-minority EAs with lower ERI to perceive the highly ambiguous condition as racially discriminatory; the two groups did not differ in their perceptions of discrimination in the low ambiguity condition.

In sum, previous research supports the proposals that individual differences in exploration and commitment to ERI, in centrality and private and public regard, and adolescents and EAs' overall ERI are associated with their perceptions of racial discrimination and their psychological well-being. Moreover, variations in the level of ERI can impact the perceptions of and attributions to more ambiguous forms of racial discrimination. It also appears that adolescents and EAs report greater levels of exploration than children (Phinney, 1989; Phinney, 1992). This trend appears to be consistent over the lifespan with older African Americans reporting greater levels of ethnic identity achievement than African American EAs (Yip, Sellers & Shelton, 2006). Given that one study found that more than 50% of Black college students do not have an achieved ERI status (Yip, Sellers & Shelton, 2006), it is plausible that there may be age differences in college students' perceptions of ambiguous racial discrimination and the associations between these perceptions and their psychological well-being. Moreover, the college context provides multiple opportunities for ERI development such as interactions with peers, the college classroom (Azmitia, Syed & Radmacher, 2008), and ERI-conscious spaces like ethnic organizations (Sidanius, Van Laar, Levin & Sinclair, 2004).

Therefore, in this dissertation I investigated whether Black frosh and sophomores differed in their ERI from juniors and seniors. Given the opportunities to explore one's ERI in college and their lived experiences with prejudice and discrimination, it is plausible to hypothesize that juniors and seniors will exhibit greater levels of commitment, centrality, and private regard than frosh

and sophomores. I also hypothesized that juniors and seniors would have lower levels of public and private regard than frosh and sophomores. In contrast, younger (frosh and sophomore) students should exhibit greater levels of exploration than older students (juniors and seniors).[2]

The Relationship between RMAs and Black EAs' Experiences in College

Negative interactions with faculty and peers have been linked to a reduced sense of belonging and engagement in the classroom and campus organizations for African American students attending PWIs (Booker, 2007). Because faculty are more likely to come into contact with Black EAs in the classroom than other university spaces, this dissertation focused on the classroom context of RMA experiences.

Sue and colleagues argued that most interracial interactions are prone to racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007). Due to RMAs' ambiguity, frequent nature, and transgressor's' ignorance about indirect racism, "The cumulative nature of these innocuous expressions is detrimental to racial minorities because they sap the energy of recipients, which impairs their performance in a multitude of settings" (Wong, Derthick, David, Saw & Okazaki, 2014, p. 3). African American EAs report greater depressive symptomology associated with the frequency of RMAs than their other their peers from other ethnic minority groups (Laio, Wing & West, 2016). Moreover, for African American college students,

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[2]Given gender differences in stereotypes and prejudice and discrimination towards Black EAs, it is also possible that there will be gender differences in the perception of discrimination in ambiguous situations, i.e., RMAs. Unfortunately, because relative to Black women, Black men are underrepresented in the university in which we gathered our data, we did not anticipate that we would have the power to test for both age and gender differences

RMAs have been associated with an increase in psychological stress relative to non-race related stressors (Mouzon, Taylor, Woodward & Chatters, 2017). Because stress also negatively affects physical health, EAs who experience high levels of RMAs are at risk of becoming hypertensive and developing other illnesses associated with chronic stress, such as becoming overweight by using food to cope with negative emotions or using drugs and alcohol to self-medicate; chronic stress due to discrimination has also been linked to decrease longevity (Lee, Kim, & Neblette, 2017; Wallace, Boynton, & Lytle, 2017). Indeed, as a group, on average, African Americans live five years less than White Americans (Spivey, 2005).

Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, and Rivera (2009) conducted focus groups to investigate the psychological distress and negative emotionality associated with experiencing RMAs in multicultural college classrooms. These discussions allowed the researchers to identify the types of events that led to students having "difficult dialogues" in the classroom. Students shared their experiences with various RMAs and the burdens of trying to interpret the perpetrator's intentions while simultaneously managing their emotional reactions to the RMA. In particular, students often experienced *ascription of intelligence* RMAs, which transmit the message that each ethnic/racial group has a finite amount of intelligence based on social stereotypes about their ethnic and racial groups. An example of this RMA might involve a White student saying to an Asian student, "Math is probably so easy for you." Because Asian students are often subjected to the stereotype that they are good at math and science, even though the Asian

student may not have strong math skills and be frustrated by this assumption, he/she may still interpret this as a compliment. In comparison, an African American student may perceive this same comment as sarcastic or as an insult to his/her/their intelligence because, in the academic context, African American students are often stereotyped as less intelligent and inferior to other ethnic/racial groups. Therefore, ascription of intelligence, although often framed as a compliment, has a strong undertone that perpetuates the ideology that most African Americans are not intelligent. This RMA may be particularly harmful because academic achievement has been postulated as an important facet of ERI in African American adolescents and EAs (Oyserman, Harrison & Bybee,2002; Nasir, McLaughlin & Jones, 2009). Specifically, Oyserman, Harrison and Bybee (2002) argued that valuing academic achievement allows African American adolescents and EAs to navigate and cope with negative public attitudes regarding their ethnic/racial group and to work towards social mobility.

The second RMA posited as having a negative effect on African American EAs achievement and mental health is the *assumption of criminality*. This RMA sends the message through interpersonal experiences, the curriculum, or the media that African American individuals are criminals and not to be trusted. This RMA was evident in students, staff, and faculty behaviors such as accusing African American students of stealing, being dishonest, cheating on an exam, or assuming they were in some way physically aggressive or violent (Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2013; McCabe 2009; Smith Allen & Danley., 2007; Smith, Hung & Franklin, 2011; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo & Rivera, 2009). Research has

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shown that African American undergraduates experience the assumption of criminality RMA more frequently than White, Latino, and Asian undergraduates (Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff & Sriken, 2014). Numerous studies have described Black EA undergraduate students' distressing experiences of being criminalized while on campus and the community (Harwood, Hunt & Medenhall, 2012; McCabe, 2009, Sue, Nadal, Capodulipo, Lin, Torino & Rivera, 2008). Research with White undergraduates suggests they may hold implicit beliefs regarding the criminal intent of African Americans. For example, White male undergraduates associate Black faces with criminal objects at higher rates than they do White faces (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie & Davies, 2004). Being the target of the assumption of criminality RMA resulted in students questioning their sense of belonging at their university, stress, and negative emotionality for African Americans and other students of color (Sue et al., 2009).

Finally, students reported multiple RMA experiences with individuals *denying their racial reality*. This was evidenced when White students did not want to acknowledge or validate, African American students' experiences by making statements such as, "you know, not everything is about race," rolling their eyes when race was brought up in the classroom or accusing them of "playing the race card." These offenses belittle or directly dismiss students' experience and knowledge gained by living life as an ethnic/racial minority. These experiences also work to silence African American EAs and deny that their ethnic/racial group membership influences their everyday experiences with prejudice and discrimination (Sue et al., 2009). Research has shown that college-going EAs are

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more likely to believe that traditional and explicit forms of racism no longer exist, and that this may contribute to their denial of others' racial reality and endorsement of color-blind policies. While White undergraduates do not explicitly endorse overt racial discrimination, they are more likely endorse structural and institutional forms of racial discrimination like affirmative action (Bonilla & Silva, 2001). Therefore, Black EAs attending PWI's are often times immersed in a context where most individuals endorse beliefs that dismiss Black EA experiences with racial discrimination. As Black EAs move through college, they may be more likely to become aware of others' denial of their racial reality. Possibly, frosh and sophomore Black EAs may believe that professors are less likely to commit RMAs because they uphold the university's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Indeed, in their interview study, Young and Azmitia (in preparation) found that when they started college, Black EAs reported that they were initially shocked by their experiences with faculty-perpetrated RMAs because they had expected college to be an equitable, inclusive space, and also found peer RMA perpetrators puzzling given the social justice focus of their universities. Research exploring the relationships between *color-blind ideologies*, which discount the importance of ethnicity and race in peoples' everyday experiences, and their psychosocial correlates has found that their peers' denial or their racial reality decreased Black adolescents' sense of belonging and lowered competence in school (Byrd, 2015). However, few studies have systematically addressed whether the same effect occurs for RMAs perpetrated by professors in campuses with strong ethos about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

This dissertation further investigated Black college-going EAs experiences with ascription of intelligence, assumption of criminality, and denial of racial reality RMAs. While the relationship between denial of racial reality RMA and ERI is less clear, it is possible that experiences with denial of racial reality may be associated with negative mental health outcomes because the Black EAs are not provided with the opportunity to interpret the situation through the lens of their ERI; and, thus, they do not have the protective benefits of ERI. Moreover, denial of racial reality implicitly conveys the message that an important part of Black EAs lived experience and overall identity is not valued.

The Role of the Perpetrator's Identity When Perceiving RMAs

Thus far I have presented evidence that ERI plays a significant role in African American EAs' attributions of discrimination to RMAs and psychological well-being. I also argued that varying dimensions of ERI may influence both perceptions of discrimination and the mental health correlates associated with RMA experiences. This final section presents the experimental design of my dissertation, in which I manipulated the race and role of the RMA perpetrator to systematically investigate their association with ERI, attributions of discrimination to the three RMAs and Black EAs' mental health.

In Sue et al.'s (2007) original taxonomy of RMAs, they discussed the utility of the RMA construct for better understanding these ambiguous cross-racial interactions. Overwhelmingly, the literature on RMAs and African American EAs has shown that White individuals were the most frequent perpetrators of RMAs against people of color (Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall &

Lewis, 2012; Sue et al. 2007; Sue et al. 2008; Wong et al. 2014). Researchers from cognitive and social psychology have discussed how social cognitive processes help people determine the motives for ambiguous experiences by attending to salient physical characteristics of perpetrators such as skin color or status. For example, *prototype theory* posits that people have salient mental representations of what and who belongs to particular categories, and these mental representations allow them to categorize objects and people more easily (Rosch, 1999). Fiske and Taylor (1991) proposed that these prototypes are particularly informative when people find themselves in ambiguous social interactions because they can rely on their prototypes to make attributions about others' behaviors.

In support of this theoretical framework, Marino, Neggy, Hammmons, McKinney, and Ashberg (2007) analyzed undergraduate college students' attributions to a "mildly unpleasant" ambiguously racist interaction between a customer and retailer. They experimentally manipulated the customer and the perpetrators' race (i.e., White retailer and Hispanic customer vs. Hispanic retailer and White customer) and repeated this manipulation for African American and White perpetrator and customer dyads. Their results showed that participants viewed the White retailer as more racist towards an African American and Hispanic customer than the Hispanic and African American retailer to a White customer. Moreover, individuals who perceived their ethnic group membership as more salient were also more likely to attribute the ambiguous interaction to racism in the interracial ambiguous interaction between customer and retailer. Because

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sample in this study was predominately White and Hispanic, it is important to investigate whether African Americans will exhibit a similar pattern of results.

Corning and Bucchianeri (2010) provide further insight into how the race of the perpetrator affects African American participants' ratings of discrimination in ambiguous events. The results of their 2 (race of participant: White vs. Black) x 2 (race of perpetrator: White vs. Black) experiment showed that White participants were more likely than Black participants to view White perpetrators as more discriminatory than Black perpetrators. In contrast, while Black respondents perceived more discrimination in both Black and White perpetrator conditions, the difference between conditions was not significant. Given the aforementioned findings, when attributing discrimination, African American EAs may rely on multiple cues, including the context, role, and race of the perpetrator. Concerning the role of the perpetrator, Iman, Heurta and Oh (1998) found that individuals' prototypes regarding who holds power in particular context also influences attributions of discrimination. In their study, they found that the White perpetrators in a CEO context and a Landlord context were viewed as more discriminatory than non-White perpetrators in the same context. Inman Heurta and Oh (1998) findings support the conclusion that in a hierarchical context, the perceived power of the perpetrator also influences respondents' perception of discrimination. However, because the participants in these studies were not African American, the question of how the perceived power of the perpetrator influences African American college students' attributions to RMAs has not been addressed. The importance of considering the perpetrators power or status is

highlighted in an unpublished dissertation (Fernandez, 2014) that showed that Black EAs who experienced RMAs from their instructors felt less supported inside and outside their college classrooms. Thus, it is possible that RMAs perpetrated by professors are more detrimental for Black EAs' sense of belonging and mental health than those perpetrated by individuals that occupy a similar social status--their peers. This dissertation tested this possibility.

Taken together, the literature is inconclusive about the potentially moderating effects of race and role of perpetrator on attributional appraisals to RMAs and their mental health correlates. To my knowledge, there is no published work that experimentally examines the interaction between race and status of the perpetrator and African American EAs' interpretation of RMAs. Therefore, the present experimental study systematically explored the association between race and status of the perpetrator and the attributional and mental health correlates.

In the present study mental health was measured using the positive and negative affect schedule (PANAS). This measure provided a immediate measure of psychological well-being regarding positive *affect*, which is associated with positive emotions like energy and enthusiasm, and *negative affect*, which is related to negative emotions like hostility and fear. Unlike other measures of mental health that are often retrospective, the PANAS allows participants to respond to emotions regarding how they feel "at the present moment". In contrast, retrospective measures like the Center for Epidemiological Studies Scale, asks people to rate "how often they experienced" symptoms related to depression in the past week (Radloff, 1977) , or the Kessler Distress Scale which

asks people to report symptoms related to distress in the past 30 days (Andrews & Slade, 2001). Also, because RMA's are posited to be harmful after their accumulation (Smith, 2007) little research has explored the immediate mental health effects of RMA' s(Wong, 2014). The positive and negative affect schedule allowed the current study to explore this question. I also investigated further whether ERI is linked to these discriminatory attributions.

The Present Study

This study investigated the relationship between African American students' ERI, class standing (frosh/sophomores vs. juniors/seniors), their attributions to three RMAs that are frequently experienced by Black college students, and their mental health. I assessed African American students' discriminatory attributions of RMAs committed within the college classroom context and investigated the role of the perpetrator—professor or peer—and the perpetrator's race—Black or White—in African American EAs' attributions of discrimination to RMAs. I also tested the association between African American's ERI, perceptions of RMAs as a function of the role and race of the perpetrator, and immediate mental health, operationalized as positive or negative mood. I focused on mood to assess EAs immediate emotional reactions to RMAs; past research has typically focused on retrospective accounts of their reactions to and coping with RMAs as they relate to their mental health.

Five hypotheses were tested:

H1. Black EAs with greater ERI centrality, private regard and commitment will have greater discriminatory attributions to RMAs then Black

EAs with lower centrality, private regard and commitment. Black EAs with lower public regard will have greater discriminatory attributions to RMAs than Black EAs with higher public regard.

H2.1. Black EAs in older class standings (i.e., juniors and seniors) will have higher centrality, private regard, and commitment ERI scores than Black EAs in younger class standings (i.e., frosh and sophomores).

H2.2 Black EAs in older class standings (i.e., Juniors and Seniors) will make greater discriminatory attributions to RMAs than Black EA's in lower class standings (i.e., Frosh and Sophomores).

H2.3. Black EAs who are frosh and sophomore will differ from juniors and seniors in their psychological well-being (i.e., mood/emotionality) based on the race and role of the perpetrator. Specifically, in the White Professor perpetrator condition, juniors and seniors will report lower psychological well-being (i.e., low positive affect and high negative affect) than frosh and sophomores.

H3. The role of the perpetrator (professor or peer) and the race of the perpetrator (Black or White) will influence Black EA's discriminatory attributions to RMAs such that RMAs perpetrated by White professors will be viewed as the most discriminatory in comparison to all other race x role/status conditions.

Method

Participants

One hundred and sixty-one self-identified Black participants (122 female, 39 men, M_{age} = 19.98, age range: 18 – 29) were recruited from a public university

campus in northern California. There was a total of 29 frosh, 43, sophomores, 39 juniors, and 45 seniors in the study. Participants were compensated with a $10 Amazon gift card for their participation.

Three trained undergraduate research assistants and I recruited participants from African American and Black-identified student organizations at the university. Participants were also recruited through flyers posted at libraries, dormitories, and bus stops on campus.

Prior to data collection, I recruited 20 ethnically diverse undergraduate participants were recruited by to participate in a pilot survey to test and validate the photos used in the RMA vignettes. A total of 4 from each class standing (frosh, sophomore, junior and senior) rated the photos used as race x role stimulus in the survey.

Pilot Study

The goal of the pilot study was to ensure that there were no significant differences in the attractiveness of the photos stimuli. The photo stimuli were selected from Google images using "White professor, Black professor, White peer, and Black peer" as search criteria. All stimuli selected were men. A total of 20 ethnically-diverse college students rated the photos in an online survey. Participants viewed a total of 7 pictures from each condition (Black professor, Black peer, White professor, White peer) and rated their level of attractiveness, likeability and trust to avoid confounding attractiveness with role and race. To avoid confounding attractiveness with role and race, I selected the three pictures in each category that received medium range ratings.

Design

The research design was a 2 x 2 experimental design with role (professor vs. peer) and race (Black vs. White) manipulated between-subjects factors. The randomizing function in *R* allowed me to randomly assign all recruited participants to one of the four conditions.

Measures

ethnic/racial identity. The Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R) (Phinney & Ong 2007) is a short version of the MEIM (Phinney, 1992). Participants responded to the six items, three exploration subscale items ($M = 3.23$, $SD = .81$, $\alpha = .89$) and three commitment subscale items ($M = 3.53$, $SD = .72$, $\alpha = .82$) using a 4-point likert scale ranging from (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*). Before rating the items, Respondents were asked to indicate their ethnic identity. A sample item from the exploration subscale is "I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group such as its history, traditions, and customs." A sample item from the commitment scale is "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group."

Centrality of ethnic/racial identity. The centrality subscale ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .62$, $\alpha = .82$) from the Multidimensional Model of Black Identity (MMBI; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997) measured the extent to which being Black is important to respondents' sense of self. Participants rated their responses to each of the eight items on a 4 point likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include "Overall, being Black has little to do

with how I feel about myself" and "In general being Black is an important part of my self-image."

Private regard. The private regard subscale ($M = 3.82$, $SD = .26$, α=.58)[3] from the MMBI (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton & Smith, 1997) measured participants internal attitudes toward Black people. Participants rated their responses to each of the six items on a 4 point likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include "I feel good about Black people" and "I am happy that I am Black."

Public regard. The public regard subscale ($M = 2.14$, $SD = .45$, $α = .49$) from the MMBI (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton & Smith, 1997) measured participants perceptions of societal attitudes toward Black people. Participants rated their responses to each of the eight items on a 4 point likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include "Overall, Blacks are considered good by others" and "In general others respect Black People."

Perception of discrimination. Participants were instructed to read and respond to three vignettes of events that depicted a fictional Black student at the university. Each vignette focused on an RMA that has been frequently reported by Black college students, ascription of intelligence, assumption of criminality, and denial of racial reality. After each vignette participants indicated on a sliding scale from 0% to 100% how much they believed the event was due to the perpetrator racially discriminating against the Black student. The RMA about *ascription of*

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[3] Although the alpha coefficients of reliability obtained for private regard and public regard were low, they are comparable to those obtained in previous research with African American EAs (e.g., Sellers et al. 97, Simmons et al., 2008).

intelligence ($M = 83.28$, $SD = 23.47$) received the highest rating of discrimination, followed by the *denial of racial reality* ($M = 67.53$, $SD = 28.41$) RMA and lastly, the *assumption of criminality* ($M = 50.37$, $SD = 32.48$).

Mental health. Mental health was assessed with the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988). This 20-item measure is rated on a 5-point likert scale ($1 =$ *slightly or not at all* to $5 =$ *extremely*) and assesses individuals' moods scores (range from 10 to 50). The scale includes ten items for positive emotional mood states (e.g., excitement; $M = 22.15$, $SD = 8.83$), and ten items for negative moods states (e.g., distressed; $M = 18.71$, $SD = 7.65$). The scale asks participants to "Indicate how much you feel this way right now, that is, at this present moment." This scale showed high reliability with an $\alpha = 89$ and .87 for positive and negative affect, respectively.

Procedure

Participants were first randomly assigned to one of four conditions using the randomize function in *R*. These conditions manipulated the race (Black vs. White) and role (peer vs. professors) of the RMA perpetrator. Participants were then sent a link to their assigned condition through surveymonkey.com. Therefore, participants had the option to complete the survey anywhere they could access an internet connection. The survey began by requesting participants' informed consent and verifying the participants were 18 years of age or older. Those who did not consent to participate or minors were directed to a page in the survey thanking them for their participation; in addition, for minors, it was explained that due to IRB regulations that they were not eligible to participate.

The first question of the survey was an open-ended question to stimulate their thoughts on the college context: "Can you tell us why you're in college and how it fits into your future plans?" Because participants were allowed to access the survey anywhere, I wanted to ensure that they would be thinking of who they are within the university context prior to answering questions regarding their identity, perceptions of RMA classroom experiences, and mood.

After providing their responses to this open-ended question, participants responded to Phinney and Ong's (2007) revised Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure and to Sellers et al. (1997) centrality, private, and public regard subscales of the Multidimensional Model of Black Identity Measure.

Participants then responded to the three RMA vignettes. They first viewed a picture of the RMA target that was held constant across all conditions. The RMA target was a Black EA male. They then read one assumption of criminality vignette, one ascription of intelligence vignette, and one denial of individual racism vignette. Each vignette was accompanied by a picture of the supposed perpetrator of the RMA.

Each RMA vignette (assumption of criminality, ascription of intelligence, and denial of individual racism) was followed by a question asking participants to appraise the perpetrator's actions. This appraisal was measured on a sliding scale of 0% (based on factors other than racial discrimination) to 100% (based completely on racial discrimination). This measure was adapted from Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey's (1999) study in which Black participants scored their attributions to perceived discriminatory events from 0% due to

factors other than racial prejudice to 100% due completely to racial prejudice. The word prejudice was changed to discrimination based on the present study's focus on racial discrimination and not prejudice.

Following the vignettes, which appear in Appendix A participants were asked to respond to the Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) which measured participants' present mental health (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Participants then answered one final open-ended question "What could we do during your remaining time at UCSC to improve your college experience?" The order of the survey measures was invariant because ERI needed to be collected first. Also, because the study sought to test the impact of the RMA vignette on mental health, participants' immediate mood state (PANAS) was always collected last.

Results

The data were analyzed using between sample t-tests for assessing age differences in responses and 2 x 2 ANOVAs on RMA appraisals and affective (positive or negative affect measured by the PANAS) scores. Additionally, I analyzed how variations in the rates of centrality, private regard, public regard, exploration and commitment related to appraisals of discrimination and psychological well-being. I performed median split to create high and low ERI groups for each dimension of ERI, a procedure consistent with Hoggard, Jones and Sellers (2017).

The Relationship of ERI to Discriminatory Attributions to RMAs

Tables 1 to 5 provide means and standard deviations for the relationship between low and high ERI and the attribution of discrimination to the three types of RMA vignettes. Independent sample *t*-test provided support for the hypothesis that Black EA's with greater ERI centrality, private regard, and commitment would have greater discriminatory attributions to RMAs than Black EAs with lower centrality, private regard and commitment. Additionally, the results of an independent sample t-test confirmed that Black EAs with low public regard would have greater discriminatory attributions than Black EAs with high public regard. Although not all the dimensions of ERI significantly differentiated RMA ratings of discrimination, all the significant *t*-tests supported the hypothesis that Black EAs with higher ERIs would give higher ratings of discrimination to the three types of RMAs than Black EAs with low ERI.

Ascription of intelligence RMA vignette. Independent sample *t*-tests revealed a significant difference in private regard between high ($M = 88.60$, $SD = 18.22$) and low ($M = 46.59$, $SD = 26.88$), $t(132)= -2.862= p < .05$. Consistent with the hypothesis, participants with High ERI were more likely to rate this RMA as racist than participants with low ERI.

The independent *t*-tests revealed no statistically significant differences between high and low commitment on discriminatory attributions to the three types of RMAs.

Assumption of criminality RMA vignette. The independent sample *t*-tests revealed significant differences in discriminatory attributions to this RMA

related to centrality and public regard. First, with regards to centrality, those scoring high ($M = 56.79$, $SD = 33.102$) were more likely to attribute discrimination than those scoring low ($M = 42.21$, $SD = 29.97$), $t(148)= 2.79$, p < .01. Second, regarding public regard, higher discriminatory attributions were made between those low ($M = 57.45$, $SD = 33.31$) than high ($M = 45.88$, $SD = 29.253$), $t(126) = 1.99$, $p < .05$. Both patterns supported the hypotheses that participants with high ERI would be more likely to attribute racism to this RAM than participants with low ERI.

Denial of racial reality RMA. This RMA yielded a significant difference with those low in public regard ($M = 73.43$, $SD = 26.55$) attributing more discrimination than those high in public regard ($M = 45.88$, $SD = 29.25$) public regard $t(124) = 2.148$, $p < . 05$. The result supported the hypothesis that participants with high ERI would be more likely than participants with low ERI to attribute racism to this RMA.

An independent sample *t*-test also revealed a significant difference with those high in exploration ($M = 71.47$, $SD = 25.72$) making more discriminatory attributions to this RMA than did those low in exploration ($M = 61.85$, $SD = 28.56$), $t(142) = -1.05$, p< .05.

Age-related Differences in ERI and Discriminatory Attributions to RMAs

A series of independent sample *t*-test assessed whether Black EAs with older class standings (i.e., juniors and seniors) would make greater discriminatory attributions to RMAs than Black EAs in lower class standings (i.e., frosh and sophomore). The means and standard deviations for the various dimensions of

ERI as a function of age (frosh/sophomores vs. juniors/seniors) appear in Table 6.

No significant differences were observed between younger and older Black EAs

in exploration, $t(154) = -.11$, $p = .913$, commitment, $t(154) = .163$, $p = .871$,

centrality, $t(151) = -1.04$, $p = .302$, private regard, $t(131) = -1.01$, $p = .312$ and

public regard, $t(131) = 1.32$, $p < .19$.

Table 7 includes all the means and standard deviation for each of the

independent sample *t*-tests as a function of age and vignette. The results of the

independent sample *t*-tests indicated that there were no significant age differences

between frosh/sophomores and juniors/seniors participants and their ratings of

discriminatory attributions to any of the RMA vignettes, ascription of intelligence,

$t(149) = -.043$, $p = .965$, assumptions of criminality, $t(143) = -.078$, $p = .938$, and

denial of racial reality, $t(139) = 1.251$, $p = .213$.

Class Standing, Perpetrator Characteristics, and Attributions of

Discrimination to RMAs.

Next, 2 (class standing) x 2 (race of perpetrator) x 2 (role of perpetrator)

ANOVAs were used to assess the if class standing, race, and role of perpetrator

influenced Black EA's RMA's discriminatory attributions and psychological

well-being.

Ascription of intelligence RMA vignette. *A* 2 (class standing) x 2 (race

of perpetrator) x 2 (role of perpetrator) ANOVA yielded a main effect for race

and supported the hypothesis that White perpetrators ($M = 91.028$, $SD = 15.411$)

were perceived as more discriminatory than Black perpetrators ($M = 73.743$, $SD =$

27.135), $F(1,137) = 23.475$, $p < .00$, $\eta^2 = .14$. There was also a significant Role x

Race interaction, $F(1,143) = 4.045$, $p < .05$. Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction revealed that Black peers received the lowest discriminatory attributions ($M = 67.77$, $SD = 31.344$) when compared to White peers ($M = 92.43$, $SD = 13.441$), White professors ($M = 90.235$, $SD = 17.76$) and Black professors ($M = 80.98$, $SD = 21.65$) , $F(1,143) = 24.417$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$.

Assumption of criminality RMA vignette. A 2 (class standing) x 2 (race) x 2 (role) ANOVA yielded a main effect of race which was consistent with the hypothesis that participants would perceive the White perpetrators ($M = 61.394$, $SD = 28.314$) as more discriminatory than the Black perpetrators ($M = 36.982$, $SD = 32.247$), $F(1,137) = 23.39$, $p < .00$, $\eta^2 = .15$. This main effect was qualified by a marginally significant interaction between class standing (frosh and sophomore vs. juniors and seniors) and race (White vs. Black), $F(1,137) = 3.769$, $p = .054$. Post-hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction revealed that juniors/seniors ($M = 32.402$, $SD = 30.497$) perceived that Black perpetrators were significantly less discriminatory than White perpetrators ($M = 66.615$, $SD = 28.4999$), $F(1,137) = p < .00$, $\eta^2 = .03$, but frosh/sophomores perceived Black and White perpetrators equally discriminatory.

Denial of racial reality RMA vignette. A 2 (class standing) x 2 (race) x 2 (role) ANOVA also yielded a main effect of race of perpetrator that supported the hypothesis: White ($M = 78.594$, $SD = 23.585$) perpetrators received higher discriminatory attributions than Black perpetrators ($M = 54.22$, $SD = 27.552$), $F(1,141) = 31.692$, $p < .00$ $\eta^2 = .19$. There was also a marginally significant interaction between role and class standing $F(1,141) = 3.107$, $p = .08$. Post-hoc

comparisons using the Bonferroni correction revealed a marginally significant interaction, $F(1,141) = 2.986$, p = .09, such that frosh/sophomores rated professors as less discriminatory ($M = 62.655$, $SD = 25.772$) than peers ($M = 75.26$, $SD = 30.290$), $\eta^2 = .02$.

Class Standing, Perpetrator Characteristics, and Mental Health.

      Positive Affect. *PANAS Positive.* 2 (Class Standing: younger or older) x 2 (Race: Black or White) x 2(role: Peer vs. Professor). There was a significant race x role interaction, $F(1,142) = 7.530$, p < .05. Post-hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction revealed that respondents had the lowest positive affect in the Black Peer condition (M=19.147, SD = 7.162) in comparison to Black professors' condition (M = 24.495,), F1(151) = 8.668, p < .05.

      Negative Affect. *PANAS Negative.* This hypothesis was not supported. 2 (Class Standing: younger or older) x 2 (Race: Black or White) x 2(role: Peer vs. Professor). There was no main effect of race $F(1,142) = 1.678$, p = .197, neither for role, $F(1,142) = 1.521$, p = .219, nor class standing $F(1,150) = .998$, p = .319. There were no significant interaction effects for class standing x role, $F(1,142) = .643$, p = .424, neither class standing x race, $F(1, 142) = .054$, p = .816, nor role x race, $F(1,142) = 2.295$, p = .132 nor class standing x role x race, $F(1,142) = .010$, p = .132.

Discussion

      This study employed an experimental design to systematically examine the importance of the perpetrator's race and role/status in Black college-going emerging adults' (EAs') attributions of discrimination to three racial

microaggression (RMA) vignettes that are frequently experienced by Black adolescents and EAs, ascription of intelligence, assumption of criminality, and denial of racial reality. I will first address the findings concerning the association between ethnic-racial identity (ERI) and discriminatory attributions to RMAs, then discuss the role of class standing, and finally interpret the interaction of role and race on Black EAs' discriminatory attributions and psychological well-being. Although I had hypothesized age-related differences in Black college students' attributions to RMAs, only one statistically significant age differences obtained, with frosh/sophomores rating professors as less discriminatory than peers in the denial of racial reality vignette.

The Relationship Between ERI and Discriminatory Attributions

As hypothesized (H1), Black EAs with high exploration, centrality, and private regard reported greater discriminatory attributions to RMAs in comparison to those who scored low on these dimensions of ERI. Consistent with my hypothesis, African American EAs with low public regard reported greater discriminatory attributions to RMAs than those high public regard. Inconsistent with my hypothesis, Black EA's with high commitment scores did not differ from those with low commitment scores on their discriminatory attributions. Interestingly, the results revealed that the dimensions of ERI functioned differently for each RMA theme. Below, I will discuss these differential effects.

Consistent with previous literature (Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone & Zimmerman; Sellers & Shelton, 2003), the present study revealed that high centrality, the salience of one's ethnic racial group membership to one's sense of

self, was linked to greater discriminatory attributions. However, this pattern was only found in the assumption of criminality vignette. Contrary to the hypothesis and prior research regarding the association between centrality and perceived discrimination, Black EAs who scored highly in centrality did not differ in their discriminatory attributions to ascription of intelligence and the denial of racial reali*ty* vignettes. In addition, similar to Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone and Zimmerman (2003) and Sellers and Shelton, (2003), low public regard, resistance to the beliefs that others hold about one's ethnic racial group membership, determined greater attributions of discrimination in Black EAs.

Black EAs who scored highly on private regard reported greater discriminatory attributions to the ascription of intelligence vignette. Interestingly, no other dimension of ERI predicted greater discriminatory attributions to the ascription of intelligence vignette. While this result was inconsistent with prior work by Sellers and his colleagues (2003, 2006), it is consistent with the proposal that ERI serves as a lens through which college-going Black EAs view their experiences. Because they often are underrepresented at PWIs, Black EAs may be more prone to perceive this RMA as a back-handed compliment that attacks their intelligence and erodes their sense of belonging on campus. As established in prior work (Nasir et al. 2009; Oyserman and Harris 1999) academic identity is viewed as an integral facet of high achieving African Americans ERI. Because the ascription of intelligence RMA challenges the positive attitudes Black EAs hold about their group memberships' academic ability, this RMA may require that they

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engage in psychological work to restore their academic self-efficacy and sense of belonging at the university.

Finally, the denial of racial reality vignette was the only RMA associated with identity exploration. Specifically, Black EA's high in exploration attributed more discrimination to this RMA than Black EAs low in exploration. Black EAs reporting higher levels of exploration are actively engaging in experiences and meaning-making of their ERI and thus may be more hyper-vigilant of denial of racial reality RMAs because they devalue their lived experiences. When they encounter this RMA, Black EAs may resist these comments by peers and professors because they are inconsistent with the university ethos that underscores diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Age-related Patterns in Attributions of Discrimination to RMAs

Contrary to the second hypothesis, juniors/seniors did not rate the RMAs as more discriminatory than frosh/sophomores. While one must interpret null findings with caution, it is possible that this null finding is evidence that time in college alone does not lead to increased attributions of discrimination to RMAs. Possibly, by the time they enter college Black EAs have experienced a wealth of overt discrimination and RMAs and have also received ample racial socialization and preparation for discrimination from their families and to an extent, peers, and schools. This socialization and experiences of discrimination may prime them to detect RMAs when they arrive in college. Given that many Black EAs drop out of college, it will be important to find a more nuanced way of systematically investigating the role of RMAs in their adjustment to and drop out from the

university. It is possible, for example, that my vignettes did not elicit sufficient negative emotions because the participants were removed from the character in the vignettes, and may react differently when they personally experience RMAs in the classroom and other university spaces. Still, however, some age differences did emerge with juniors/seniors, but not frosh and sophomores, perceiving Black assumption of criminality RMA perpetrators as less discriminatory than White perpetrators. It is possible that because there are such few Black professors in PWI, older students may be willing to give them the benefit of the doubt when they engage in RMAs so they can obtain mentorship and support from them in other contexts. In contrast, for the denial of racial reality RMA frosh/sophomores perceived peers as more discriminatory than professors. Perhaps because frosh and sophomores are focused on developing connections with peers and friends, they may be especially sensitive to RMAs committed by peers.

The Effects of Race and Role of Perpetrator

Consistent with the hypotheses, in all three RMA vignettes Black EAs rated White perpetrators as significantly more racially discriminatory than Black perpetrators. These results are consistent prototype theory and research which has found that White individuals who perpetrate more ambiguously rude behavior are often perceived as more racially discriminatory than a non-white perpetrator who performs the same behavior (Corning & Bucchianeri, 2009). Moreover, these results provide additional empirical support for the proposal that in cross-race interactions, White RMA perpetrators are perceived as the most racially discriminatory ethnic group (cf., Sue et al., 2007).

Consistent with the work of Inman et al, (1998) the race and role of the perpetrator significantly related to discriminatory attributions in the *ascription of intelligence* vignette. Like Inman, Huerta and Oh (1998) found in their White and Hispanic sample of EAs, the Black EAs in the current study also rated more powerful perpetrators, i.e., professors, as more discriminatory than peers. In particular, in the ascription of intelligence vignette, participants rated the Black professors, White professors, and White peers as more discriminatory than the Black peers. Professors have more power than students, particularly when it concerns evaluating student's intelligence, and because of this, they may be viewed as more similar to White professors than Black student peers.

Researchers have underscored the distress students of color face when they feel unsupported by instructors when they experience RMAs in the classroom (Sue et al, 2007, 2008, 2009). The results of present study suggest that Black EAs may be more sensitive to professors that express RMAs which devalue their intelligence than other RMAs in the classroom. This finding is particularly important because the classroom is the space in which students are most likely to revisit their academic self-efficacy and consider professors' evaluations of their intelligence as diagnostic about whether they belong in college.

The Association Between Age and Black EAs' Mental Health

Finally, this study investigated the association RMAs and mental health in younger (frosh/sophomore) and older (junior/senior) college students. To my knowledge, this is the first study that has explored this question in a Black EA college-going population. Results showed that for both age groups,

frosh/sophomores and juniors/seniors, positive affect, which is an individual's ability to feel positive emotions and interact and respond to the world in a positive way was lowest in the Black peer condition. Black EAs may have been especially distressed in this situation because they anticipated that their Black peers, i.e., the members of their ingroup, would not discriminate against them. The perceived betrayal from a member of one's in-group may disrupt the social comparison processes that allow marginalized group members to protect their self-esteem by comparing themselves more favorably to their in-group than their outgroup. RMAs committed by their Black peers may also result in Black EAs wondering whether they are 'Black enough' and reduce their sense of belonging at the university even further.

Another explanation for these results may be that Black EAs may not experience an immediate psychological outcome related to such a minimal exposure to RMAs. This would be consistent with the racial battle fatigue framework, which posits that it is the accumulation of multiple RMA offenses that result in poorer psychological well-being, not just a once in a lifetime experience (Smith, 2007). It is plausible that because RMAs are often ambiguous, the recipients of RMAs need time to reflect about their meaning; retrospective interviews of ethnic minority college students have consistently revealed that upon reflection, RMA experiences led to high levels of distress and lowered their sense of belonging and self-efficacy (Sue et al., 2007; 2009). Still, despite the modest findings, this dissertation is one of the few studies that has addressed Black EA college students' immediate reactions to RMAs.

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Limitations of the Current Study

While the results of this experimental study provide a deeper understanding of the importance of the race, role, and class standing (frosh/sophomores vs. juniors/seniors) in EAs' attributions to RMAs, a larger sample would have increased the power of the statistical analyses needed to test the hypotheses. Also, because there were significantly more female than male participants, I was not able to examine gender variations in the patterns. In my prior work, Black males were more likely to experience assumption of criminality RMAs, which may make them especially vigilant to this RMA theme. The final limitation of this study was the cross sectional design that limited my ability to make causal conclusions regarding the relationship between year in college and discriminatory racial attributions. Future studies should employ a longitudinal design to explore the link between year in college and attributions of racial discrimination in Black EAs attending PWIs.

An additional limitation of the experiment was that all RMA perpetrators were male. It is possible that the majority female sample in the present study would have responded differently if the perpetrator's gender identity matched their own. We could not match the gender of the participant to the gender of the perpetrator because this approach would have required us to recruit a larger sample size in a campus where Black EAs are severely underrepresented. However, future research designs should assess the role of perpetrators gender on discriminatory attributions with a proportionate sample size.

Conclusion

The present study highlighted the unique ways that ERI, race, and role of perpetrator influence Black EAs' attributions to RMAs. The findings offer support for the conclusion that all RMAs are not created equal, and can be perceived differently given individual and differences in ERI and the context in which they occur. For example, although it less likely that Black EAs attribute racial discrimination when a Black individual perpetrates an RMA, results from this study suggest that both the status of a Black perpetrator and the context in which an RMA is received can contribute to Black EA's attributions of discrimination. Secondly, this study provided evidence that perceived especially in the first two years of college, intragroup discrimination from Black peers may be more harmful to Black EAs psychological well-being. Given that for all students, but especially Black EAs, dropout rates are highest in the first two years of college, this finding can inform retention efforts by educating students and college professors who teach lower division courses about how their behaviors— even if unintentional—can be perceived by Black students and result in decreased self-efficacy, sense of belonging, positive affect, and more generally, engagement and commitment to graduation.

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Table 1

Comparisons between high and low centrality individuals on their racially discriminatory attributions.

	Groups						t	df
	Low Centrality			*High Centrality*				
Vignette	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*		
Criminality	42.21	29.972	66	56.79	33.102	84	-2.799**	148
Ascription of Intelligence	81.87	24.632	69	84.41	22.568	86	-.668	153
Denial of Racial Reality	64.23	29.819	61	69.95	27.251	83	-1.196	142

Note. **p < .01

Table 2

Comparisons between high and low private regard individuals on their racially discriminatory attributions

	Groups						t	df
	Low Private Regard			*High Private Regard*				
Vignette	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*		
Criminality	46.59	32.495	32	55.28	32.008	96	-1.325	126
Ascription of Intelligence	76.82	26.878	34	88.60	18.223	100	-2.862*	132
Denial of Racial Reality	68.28	29.303	32	69.38	27.203	94	-.192	124

*Note. *p < .05*

Table 3

Comparisons between high and low public regard individuals on their racially discriminatory attributions

Vignette	Groups						*t*	*df*
	Low Public Regard			*High Public Regard*				
	M	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*		
Criminality	57.45	33.306	80	45.88	29.253	48	1.990*	126
Ascription of Intelligence	83.00	22.650	83	87.22	20.369	51	1.115	132
Denial of Racial Reality	73.43	26.545	50	62.52	28.769	76	2.148*	124

Note. *p<.05

Table 4

Comparisons between high and low exploration individuals on their racially discriminatory attributions

	Groups						t	df
	Low Exploration			High Exploration				
Vignette	M	SD	n	M	SD	n		
Criminality	47.49	31.744	61	52.53	32.987	89	-.899	148
Ascription of Intelligence	79.86	25.721	63	85.62	61.85	92	-1.460	153
Denial of Racial Reality	61.85	28.561	59	71.47	27.788	85	2.021*	142

Note. *p < .

Table 5

Comparisons between high and low commitment individuals on their racially discriminatory attributions

	Groups						*t*	*df*
	Low Commitment			*High Commitment*				
Vignette	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*		
Criminality	52.22	32.121	88	47.76	33.067	62	.823	148
Ascription of Intelligence	83.19	23.356	93	83.40	23.819	62	-.054	153
Denial of Racial Reality	65.58	30.215	88	70.59	25.267	56	-1.047	142

*Note. *p < .05*

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations for ERI in Younger and Older Black EAs

ERI	Class Standing			
	Underclass		Upperclass	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Exploration	3.203	.878	3.218	.775
Commitment	3.342	.751	3.323	.715
Centrality	3.047	.567	3.152	.664
Private Regard	3.793	.255	3.838	.255
Public Regard	2.198	.477	2.096	.414

Table 7

Age-Related differences in Discriminatory Attributions

	Class Standing			
	Underclass		Upperclass	
RMA	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Criminality	49.42	31.238	49.84	33.513
Ascription of Intelligence	83.24	22.811	83.41	23.626
Denial of Racial Reality	70.03	28.900	64.05	27.809

Table 8

Descriptive statistics for Positive Affect given the Race and Role of perpetrator

	Race				
	Black			White	
Role	*M*	*SD*		*M*	*SD*
Peer	19.41	7.16		23.93	9.08
Professor	24.88	9.92		21.18	7.08

Table 9

Descriptive statistics for Negative Affect given the Race and Role of perpetrator

	Race				
	Black			White	
Role	*M*	*SD*		*M*	*SD*
Peer	16.17	6.60		19.69	7.54
Professor	19.77	8.39		19.41	7.43

Survey Measures

PANAS Scale Items.

Interested
Distressed
Excited
Upset
Strong
Guilty
Scared
Hostile
Enthusiastic
Proud
Irritable
Alert
Ashamed
Inspired
Nervous
Deterred
Attentive
Jittery
Active
Afraid

Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure.

I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history traditions and customs.
I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.
I have often done things that will help me understand me ethnic background better.
I have often talked to other people in order to learn more about ethnic group

I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.

Centrality Scale Items.

Overall, being Black has very little do with how I feel about myself.
In general, being Black is an important part of my self-image.
My destiny is tied to the destiny of other people.
Being Black is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am.
I have a strong attachment to other Black people.
Being Black is an important reflection of who I am.
Being Black is not a major factor in my social relationships.

Private Regard Scale Items.

I feel good about Black people.
I am happy that I am Black.
I feel that Blacks have made major accomplishments and advancements.
I often regret that I am Black.
I am proud to be Black.

Public Regard Scale Items.

Overall, Blacks are considered good by others.
In general, others respect Black people.
Blacks are not respected by the broader society.
Most people consider Blacks, on the average, to be more ineffective than other racial groups.
Blacks are not respected by the broader society.

Appendix B

RMA Vignettes

Assumption of Criminality

Peer condition.
Drew attends lecture and always sits in the front row of the class, right in front of
the instructor's desk. One day when lecture was about to start, Ricky, another
student walks in a few minutes late. The only seat open is next to James. Ricky
never sits in the front but has no choice. He sits down and opens his backpack to
take out his pencil and notes and puts his laptop and charger on the desk as well.
During lecture, Ricky gets up and leaves briefly. When he returns, the lecture had
ended and the students had broken into pairs to discuss an upcoming assignment.
Ricky, starts to look around anxiously through his belongings. He then turns to
Drew, looks him in the eye and says "Where'd my laptop charger go?", "Have
you seen my laptop charger?" Ricky doesn't ask any other students. Drew shrugs
his shoulders and says in response "I'm not sure." When James gets up to leave he
notices that Rickys' charger has fallen onto the floor. He taps Ricky and points to
it and leaves the lecture hall.

Professor condition.
Drew attends lecture and always sits in the front row of the class, right in front of
the instructors desk. One day when lecture would usually begin, the professor
walks in a few minutes late. The instructor places his things in a chair sitting in
front of Drew, instead of behind the desk where he always places his belongings.
A student was using the chair he usually placed his bag in. During lecture, the
instructor states, he has to leave briefly. He instructs the students to discuss the
upcoming assignment in pairs. When the instructor returns, he starts to look
around anxiously through his belongings. He then turns to Drew, looks him in the
eye and says "Where'd my laptop charger go?", "Have you seen my laptop
charger?" The instructor doesn't ask any other students. Drew shrugs his
shoulders and says in response "I'm not sure." When Drew gets up to leave he
notices that the instructors charger has fallen onto the floor. He taps the instructor
as he talking to another student and points to the charger, then Drew leaves the
lecture hall.

Ascription of Intelligence

Peer condition.
Drew is in lecture, and the professor has instructed the students to provide arguments in support or in opposition to a theory he has taught the class. The informal debate would give students the opportunity to explain the theory to their peers. The instructor divides the lecture in half and asks each side to choose a team captain. He then tells each group which side of the debate they should argue, and instructs each side to give an opening statement declaring the main thesis of their argument. Drew is chosen by his peers to state their thesis to the class. He quotes an argument from the book that he remembered to support their thesis in his opening statement. After Drew says the opening statement, another student turns to him, wide eyed and states, "Wow, I didn't know you were that articulate."

Professor condition.
Drew is in lecture, and the professor has instructed the students to provide arguments in support or in opposition to a theory he has taught the class. The informal debate would give students the opportunity to explain the theory to their peers. The instructor divides the lecture in half and asks each side to choose a team captain. He then tells each group, which side of the debate they should argue, and instructs each side to give an opening statement declaring the main thesis of their argument. Drew is chosen by his peers to state their thesis to the class. He quotes an argument from the book that he remembered to support their thesis in his opening statement. After Drew says the opening statement, the instructor turns to him, wide eyed and states, "Wow, I didn't know you were that articulate."

Denial of Racial Reality

Peer Condition.
Drew is in lecture for one of his courses. At the beginning of each course, the professor likes to discuss a "hot topic" in the news as an icebreaker. The professor felt that it allowed students to get engaged and each day lecture would not begin until the students participated. One day, the "hot topic" was *Affirmative Action in Higher Education*. The professor projected the image of the headline and stated to the students, "Affirmative Action was designed to diversify higher education. What are your thoughts? Any comments?". As usual, no student was eager to comment. After a long pause, while the professor scanned the lecture hall for hands, Drew raised his hand. When he was called on, Drew states "Don't you think it was wrong to end affirmative action? ." In response to his comment, the

Drews classmate raises his hand and looks at Drew and says, "But don't you think that affirmative action was unfair?"

Professor condition.
Drew is in lecture for one of his courses. At the beginning of each course, the professor likes to discuss a "hot topic" in the news as an icebreaker. The professor felt that it allowed students to get engaged and each day lecture would not begin until the students participated. One day, the "hot topic" was *Affirmative Action in Higher Education*. The professor projected the image of the headline and stated to the students, "Affirmative Action was designed to diversify higher education. What are your thoughts? Any comments?". As usual, no student was eager to comment. After a long pause, while the professor scanned the lecture hall for hands, Drew raised his hand. When he was called on, Drew states "Don't you think it was wrong to end affirmative action? ." In response to his comment, the professor looked at Drew and says, "But don't you think that affirmative action was unfair?"