
Racial Identity, Racial Context, and Ingroup Status: Implications for Attributions to Discrimination Among Black Canadians

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Abstract

Using Self-Categorization Theory as a conceptual framework for understanding attributions to discrimination, the primary aim of this study was to move beyond focusing on the degree to which racial minorities define themselves in terms of their race (i.e., racial centrality). Specifically, the authors examined how multiple dimensions of Black racial identity affected attributions to racial discrimination in two attributionally ambiguous situations. For Black Canadians exposed to intergroup contexts, racial identity beliefs that emphasize the distinctiveness of the Black experience (low public regard and nationalist ideology) were associated with greater perceived discrimination across the two situations, whereas racial identity beliefs that stress the similarities between the Black experience and that of other groups (assimilationist and humanist ideologies) were associated with perceiving less discrimination. Racial identity beliefs did not predict attributions when the target and potential perpetrator were members of the same racial group.

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Implications for studying the relationship between Black racial identity and perceived discrimination are discussed.

Keywords

Blacks, racial identity, discrimination, attributions, self-categorization

Racial discrimination is a pervasive occurrence in the lives of Blacks in North America (Feagin, 1991, 1992; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003). Frequently encountering discrimination leads individuals to experience attributional ambiguity—uncertainty about whether the outcomes they receive result from “social prejudices that others have against one’s social group” (Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002, p. 258). African Americans report that they frequently experience events associated with attributional ambiguity, such as receiving bad service or interpersonal awkwardness (e.g., Swim et al., 2003). Thus, understanding how members of visible minority groups resolve this attributional dilemma is central to understanding the psychological experience of membership in a disadvantaged group.

Existing research suggests that the more racial minorities define themselves in terms of their race, the more likely they are to interpret the outcomes of ambiguous events in terms of racial discrimination (Operario & Fiske, 2001; Shelton & Sellers, 2000). Less attention, however, has been paid to the role of racial identity content—the meaning of a particular racial group identity and perceptions of its place in society (cf. Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). The primary goal of this study was to examine the relationship between multiple dimensions of racial identity, including both the degree to which Black Canadians define themselves in terms of their race (i.e., racial centrality) and content dimensions (i.e., racial regard and racial ideology), when assessing the role that racial group identification can have on perceptions of discrimination. In addition, we investigated how important contextual variables (i.e., the race of the perpetrator and ingroup status) might affect the likelihood that potentially discriminatory events are attributed to discrimination.

Blackness in Canada

Most current psychological research on the experience of Blacks comes from the United States. There are some important differences in the politics of race in the United States and in Canada. For example, slavery did not play a critical role in the economic development of Canada, and it is not as important in

the current national discourse on race relations. The composition of the Black population in Canada is also different than it is in the United States; it is more heterogeneous and generally comprised of first- or second-generation immigrants.¹ Black Canadians comprise about 2.5% of the country's population, 15.5% of its visible minority population, and the third largest visible minority group after South Asian and Chinese Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2006).

There are also important similarities in the experiences of Blacks in both countries. One is that Blacks are often viewed as a racially distinct group. Another is that Blacks are socially disadvantaged relative to Whites in a number of ways. For example, Friendly (2003) reports that Blacks in Canada were subject to racial profiling by the police. Milan and Tran (2004) found that the average salary of Blacks is lower compared with other Canadians who are equally educated Canadians. Black individuals in Canada also more frequently report experiences of discrimination across a wide variety of domains when compared with other visible minority groups (Dion & Kawakami, 1996). Race, therefore, plays an important role in the group identity of Blacks in Canada. Boatswain and Lalonde (2000) report that "Black" was the most preferred label in a sample of Black Canadian students and that the reason for this preference was its explicit reference to race and skin color. In sum, Black Canadians, like African Americans, regularly experience discrimination in major spheres of life (see Winks, 1997). Therefore, it makes sense to examine the psychological processes Black Canadians use to resolve the attributional ambiguity around encounters with discrimination.

Self-Categorization and Attributions to Discrimination

According to Self-Categorization Theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), when individuals are exposed to a group of stimulus, a particular social categorization dominates perception and shapes the interpretation of events. Therefore, when individuals witness a potential instance of racial discrimination, categorizing the parties involved in terms of race should increase the likelihood they will attribute the situational outcome to racial discrimination.

SCT suggests that the type of social categorization that an individual makes is a function of the relative *accessibility* of that categorization for the perceiver and the degree to which the perceived social categories *fit* the context. The degree of fit is dependent on two sources: comparative fit and normative fit. Comparative fit refers to the degree to which a specific categorization makes within-group and between-group distinctions salient. For example, the comparative fit of race in a situation would be high if a basketball team

with all Black players played a basketball team with all White players. Normative fit refers to the degree to which a particular categorization in that context conforms to beliefs and expectations. Using the concepts of accessibility and fit, we address how racial group identification, perpetrator group membership, and ingroup status can affect racial categorization and hence attributions to racial discrimination in attributionally ambiguous contexts.

Racial Centrality

SCT (Turner et al., 1987) proposes that the readiness of a perceiver to use a particular social categorization varies, in part, according to its cognitive accessibility. As identification with a given social group increases, categorizations involving the ingroup and relevant outgroups become more cognitively accessible (Blanz, 1999; McCoy & Major, 2003). Thus, it would be expected that greater racial identification should increase the likelihood that individuals will use race to explain situational outcomes. Indeed, among several racial minority groups, group identification has been found to be positively related to attributing negative outcomes to discrimination (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Operario & Fiske, 2001, Study 2; Shelton & Sellers, 2000, Study 2).

Moving Beyond Centrality: The Role of Racial Identity Beliefs

Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, and Chavous (1998) have conceptualized African American racial identity as a multidimensional construct that, in addition to racial centrality, consists of the qualitative meaning of being African American. According to Sellers et al., *racial regard* refers to a person's affective and evaluative judgments of his or her racial group in terms of positive-negative valence. These judgments consist of private and public components. Private regard is the valence of Black individuals' feelings toward Blacks and about being Black. Public regard is the extent to which individuals feel that the broader society views Blacks positively or negatively. *Racial ideologies* comprise additional dimensions of Black identity and consist of beliefs about the way Blacks should live and interact with the rest of society. Four ideologies are offered and vary in terms of the perceived *distinctiveness* of the Black experience compared with the rest of society: (1) the nationalist ideology, which emphasizes the distinctiveness of the Black experience relative to the rest of society; (2) the oppressed minority ideology, which emphasizes the similarities between the Black experience and that of other minority groups, while stressing the distinctiveness of what minority groups experience compared with mainstream society; (3) the assimilationist ideology, which emphasizes

the similarities between Blacks and mainstream society; and (4) the humanist ideology, which stresses the commonalities of all humans (see Sellers et al., 1998, for more detailed descriptions). We conceptualize public regard, and the four racial ideologies, as beliefs about the distinctiveness of the Black experience within society.

These group-based beliefs are also expected to influence attributions to discrimination. In accordance with normative fit (i.e., the degree of fit between the characteristics of a social context and one's beliefs), greater endorsement of distinctiveness beliefs should increase the likelihood a Black person would attribute negative treatment from others in terms of racial group membership. These beliefs foster normative fit by facilitating a match between characteristics of the social context and one's normative beliefs about his or her own social category. Moreover, racial identity beliefs concerned with the distinctiveness of the Black experience should exert a greater influence on attributions to racial discrimination when witnessing an ingroup member receiving differential treatment from a racial outgroup member (intergroup context) than when the potential perpetrator is a racial ingroup member (intragroup context). This is because racial identity beliefs are intergroup in nature in that they focus on the degree of distinctiveness of the Black experience relative to other groups. Therefore, they should be more relevant to the interpretation of intergroup situations (i.e., high normative fit).

Recent research suggests that stronger endorsement of distinctive beliefs about the Black experience is associated with increased perception of racial discrimination (e.g., Johnson & Lecci, 2003; Johnson, Lecci, & Swim, 2006). For example, there is evidence that the more individuals believe that other groups devalue Blacks (low public regard) the more they report experiencing racial discrimination (Sellers et al., 2006; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Additionally, Sellers and Shelton (2003) found the more that individuals endorsed a nationalist racial ideology, the more racial discrimination they reported experiencing over the span of a year (see also, Lalonde, Jones, & Stroink, 2008). Conversely, the more individuals endorsed a humanist racial ideology the less racial discrimination they reported experiencing over the span of a year.

Perpetrator Group Membership: Intergroup Versus Intragroup Contexts

Along with racial group identity, aspects of the social context can influence the likelihood that people will attribute outcomes to racial discrimination. One important factor is whether or not the potential perpetrator and target of

discrimination share the same group membership. Members of the same social group are assumed to share a similar beliefs and values and are generally more trusted compared to members of outgroups (for reviews, see Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Haslam & Ellemers, 2005). Outgroup members are expected to display ingroup bias (e.g., Duck & Fielding, 2003; Moy & Ng, 1996). Accordingly, people find discrimination as more likely to come from outgroup members than ingroup members (Inman & Baron, 1996).

The increased likelihood of perceiving discrimination in intergroup contexts can be understood in terms of comparative fit (Oakes, 1987). For example, racial categorization should be stronger when witnessing a racial ingroup member being treated unfavorably by a racial outgroup member than it would if the unfavorable treatment came from a fellow ingroup member. In the former case there is covariation between race and favorability of the situational outcome, which should make a witness more likely to use race to explain the unfavorable outcome. Consistent with the idea that comparative fit can make attributions to discrimination more probable, Shelton and Sellers (2000, Study 2) found that African Americans reading a vignette in which a Black student received harsh feedback thought racial discrimination was more likely if the professor was described as White as compared with Black.

Ingroup Status

Difference in the social status of the target's ingroup relative to the perpetrator's ingroup is another important factor to consider in the perception of racial discrimination. By definition, encountering negative treatment based on group membership is more likely for members of lower status groups. Knowledge of the pervasiveness of ingroup discrimination should increase expectations of discrimination because of one's group membership (see Crocker & Major 1989; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002; also see Barrett & Swim, 1998, for a discussion on how social groups can differ in judgments of what constitutes a prototypical instance of prejudicial behavior). Accordingly, members of ethnic minority groups are more likely to report that they have personally been victims of discrimination, as compared with Whites (e.g., Barnes et al., 2004; Wortley, 1996). Similarly, using ambiguous but potentially racist situations, Inman and Baron (1996) found that Black participants were more likely than White participants to label both anti-Black and anti-White actions as racist. Together, these findings suggest that different attributions made by groups differing in status reflect the social reality of their different positions in the social structure.

Overview of the Current Study

The current study investigated how multiple dimensions of racial identity affect Black Canadians' attributions to racial discrimination in attributionally ambiguous contexts. The two scenarios used in this study were designed to mirror instances of racial discrimination that racial minorities often encounter—receiving poor service at a restaurant and experiencing differential treatment from a supervisor in a workplace (Feagin, 1991; Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Swim et al., 2003). We included two scenarios to see if patterns observed in one context would generalize across different situations that differed in some respects. We also manipulated the race of the potential perpetrator to create intergroup and intragroup conditions. We wanted to see if racial identity's relationship with attributions to discrimination was affected by whether the race of the perpetrator matched the race of the target.

Because racial categorizations are more accessible for people whose race is more central to their self-concept, we predict a positive relationship between racial centrality and attributions to racial discrimination (e.g., Operario & Fiske, 2001; Shelton & Sellers, 2000). Furthermore, we predicted that racial identity beliefs that stress the distinctiveness of the Black experience relative to other groups will have a high degree of normative fit with witnessing a member of one's racial ingroup receiving differential treatment. Thus, we expect that people who believe that other groups have relatively negative opinions of Blacks (low public regard) or endorse a nationalist ideology will be more likely to attribute the unfavourable outcomes a fellow racial ingroup member receives to racial discrimination. Conversely, because humanist and assimilationist ideologies stress the similarities between the experiences of Blacks and other groups (i.e., nondistinctive) they should have a low degree of normative fit with witnessing a member of one's racial ingroup experiencing negative treatment. As such, we predict that there will be a negative relationship between humanist and assimilationist ideologies and attributions to discrimination. Because the oppressed minority ideology stresses the similarities between experiences of Blacks and of other minority groups while acknowledging the distinctiveness of these experiences relative to mainstream society, we anticipate weaker relationships than those found between more distinctive and non-distinctive racial identity beliefs and attributions to discrimination. We measured private regard and present results including that variable, but like other researchers (Sellers & Shelton, 2003), we did not have any predictions regarding its relationship to attributions.

In addition, we anticipate stronger relationships between racial identity beliefs that are concerned with the Black experience relative to other groups and participants' attributions to discrimination when they are exposed to intergroup contexts rather than intragroup contexts. Public regard and the racial ideologies are beliefs about the nature of intergroup relations, thus they should be more relevant to interpretation of intergroup situations.

Finally, we also tested hypotheses regarding ingroup status and racial context by including a sample of White Canadians. Stemming from comparative fit processes, we expect that both Black Canadians and White Canadians will be more likely to make attributions to racial discrimination in intergroup contexts than intragroup contexts; and as a reflection of normative fit we expect Blacks, because of their lower status, to make stronger attributions to racial discrimination than their White Canadian counterparts across both attributionally ambiguous contexts. However, because we used Sellers et al.'s (1998) multidimensional measure of Black racial identity, we did not examine White racial identity. A measure of White racial identity would require a different set of items with a different structure.

Method

Participants

A total of 120 participants were recruited by a Black male experimenter; 60 identified themselves as Black (33 females and 27 males) and 60 identified themselves as White (40 females and 20 males). In all, 117 participants were entered into a drawing to win a \$100 cash prize; 3 were recruited through a research participant pool and received course credit.

The mean age for both samples was 21.7 years. Both samples had the same response rate to a self-reported family income measure (75% in each group) and reported similar levels of income (in dollars): more than 100,000 (8 Blacks and 6 Whites), from 50,000 to 99,999 (15 Blacks and 18 Whites), from 34,000 to 49,999 (11 Blacks and 13 Whites), and <34,000 (11 Blacks and 8 Whites). Overall, 115 of the 120 total participants were currently enrolled in undergraduate studies or had completed an undergraduate degree; three were enrolled as graduate students or had completed a graduate degree; and two people did not indicate their education level. Twenty-nine of the Black participants were born in Canada and 29 were born outside of Canada; 2 did not indicate their place of birth.² Of the foreign-born Blacks who indicated where they were born, the majority came from the Caribbean ($n = 11$), East Africa ($n = 6$), West Africa ($n = 5$),

and the Middle-East ($n = 4$). Most of the White participants were born in Canada ($n = 51$).

Procedure and Measures

Participants completed a questionnaire containing the measures outlined below. The order of the discrimination scenarios and racial identity measures was counterbalanced for Black participants. Within each set of measures (scenario or identity), the order of presentation was consistent. All participants were asked for demographic information such as their age, ethnicity, race, and gender at the end of the questionnaire.

Scenarios and the manipulation of racial context. Two scenarios were presented to all participants, in the same order (see appendix). In both scenarios, the protagonist is treated more negatively than others in the situation. In the workplace vignette, a student who has been working at his job for over 6 months notices that his boss and a man who was recently hired are very close and that the "new guy" is getting all of the good shifts. In the restaurant vignette, a student and his girlfriend are seated in a restaurant within the same 5-minute window as a few other customers, but their table is the last to have their order taken. The protagonist's race is always the same as the participant's.

Additionally, participants were randomly assigned to an intergroup condition or an intragroup condition. The potential discriminator in the intergroup condition was White for Black participants and Black for White participants. In the intragroup condition, the race of the potential discriminator and the potential victim was the same. The names of the potential victims of discrimination for White and Black participants were also deliberately manipulated, in order to reinforce that the potential victims were members of their ingroup. White participants read about individuals named Stuart and Matthew, whereas Black participants read about individuals named Jamal and Darnell. The potential victim and potential discriminator were always men, to keep gender constant and avoid making attributions to gender discrimination plausible.

Attributions to racial discrimination. Each scenario was followed by six questions. Two measured attributions to racial discrimination: "To what extent do you think that the boss's recent actions [server's behavior] could be attributable to racial discrimination?" and "How reasonable would it be for Stuart [Jamal] to infer that he has been discriminated against because of his race?". The other four questions dealt with other plausible factors that could have explained the situational outcomes and were added to help disguise the intent of the study (e.g., "To what extent do you think that the boss's recent actions could be attributable to Stuart's performance at work?" and "To what extent

do you think that the server's behavior could be attributable to the fact that Darnell is a student?"). All measures used 11-point scales (endpoints were 0 = *not at all likely/not at all reasonable* and 10 = *very likely/very reasonable*).

The two attribution to racial discrimination questions for the workplace scenario ($r = .70, p < .01$) and the restaurant scenario ($r = .92, p < .01$) were highly correlated. They were averaged to create a single attribution score for each scenario.

Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI). While the MIBI was developed by Sellers et al. (1998) to study African American racial identity, the measure has been successfully adapted to studying Black Canadian racial identity (Lalonde et al., 2008). Seven of its items we slightly modified (e.g., "American" became "Canadian"). The three main components of the MIBI include the racial centrality scale, the racial regard scales, and the racial ideology scales. *Racial centrality*, measured with eight items, is the degree to which Blacks define themselves with regard to race (e.g., "In general, being Black is an important part of my self-image"; $\alpha = .73$). *Private regard* consists of six items and refers to how Blacks feel about their racial group and their membership in that group (e.g., "I feel good about Black people"; $\alpha = .68$). *Public regard* is composed of six items and refers to how an individual feels that others view Blacks in general. (e.g., "Overall, Blacks are considered good by others"; $\alpha = .77$). The racial ideology portion of the MIBI is composed of four subcomponents, each including nine items. An *assimilationist ideology* emphasizes the need for Blacks to fully integrate with the dominant culture (e.g., "Blacks should try to work within the system to achieve their political and economic goals"; $\alpha = .73$). A *humanist ideology* stresses the commonalities that Blacks have with all of humanity (e.g., "Black values should not be inconsistent with human values"; $\alpha = .69$). An *oppressed minority ideology* highlights the shared experiences between Blacks and other minority groups (e.g., "The same forces which have led to the oppression of Blacks have also led to the oppression of other groups"; $\alpha = .78$). A *nationalist ideology* stresses the uniqueness of the Black experience relative to mainstream society. It purports the idea that Blacks should be in control of their own destiny with minimal input from other racial groups (e.g., "It is important for Blacks to surround their children with Black art, music and literature"; $\alpha = .83$). The response options for all MIBI items ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

Results

Preliminary analyses were conducted to explore the potential moderating effects of questionnaire order and participant gender on attributions. The hypotheses

regarding the effects of racial context and participant race on attributions to discrimination were then investigated using a mixed-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA). Finally, the relationships between Black racial identity and attributions to racial discrimination were examined.

Questionnaire Order and Participant Gender

Since the identity and scenario measures had been counterbalanced for Black participants, analyses of the effects of order were conducted for attributions to discrimination. A mixed-model ANOVA with order and racial context (intergroup vs. intragroup) as between-subjects factors and scenario (workplace vs. restaurant) as a within-subjects factor was conducted. No significant effects of order on attributions to discrimination were observed, such that it did not matter whether the identity measures ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 3.08$) or scenarios ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 2.77$) were presented first, $F(1, 56) = .56$, $p =$ nonsignificant (NS), $\eta^2 = .01$. Because order did not interact with racial context to affect attributions ($p = .33$), we excluded it from the remaining analyses.

To test for potential moderating effects of participant gender, we used a mixed-model ANOVA with gender, race of participant (Black vs. White), and racial context (intergroup vs. intragroup) as between-subjects factors and scenario (workplace vs. restaurant) as a within-subjects factor. Women ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 2.63$) made slightly higher attributions to racial discrimination than men ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 2.64$), $F(1, 112) = 4.66$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .04$. More important, however, there were no significant interactions between participant gender and the factors of interest, ($ps > .41$). Thus, we excluded participant gender from the remaining analyses.³

Effects of Participant Racial Context and Participant Race on Attributions

Hypotheses regarding attributions to racial discrimination were examined using a mixed-model ANOVA with racial context (intergroup vs. intragroup) and race of participant (Black vs. White) as between-subjects factors and scenario (workplace vs. restaurant) as a within-subjects factor. Consistent with our prediction, participants were more likely to make an attribution to racial discrimination in the intergroup condition ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 2.10$) than in the intragroup condition ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 2.36$), $F(1, 116) = 62.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .35$. As shown in Figure 1, we also found a significant two-way interaction between racial context and scenario, $F(1, 116) = 17.16$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$. For the workplace scenario, attributions were higher in the intergroup condition ($M = 5.65$, $SD = 1.82$) than in the intragroup condition ($M = 1.97$, $SD = 2.22$),

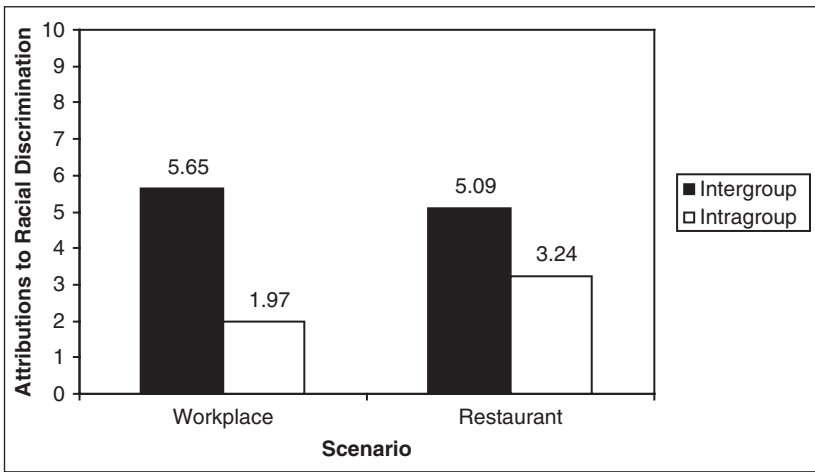


Figure 1. Effect of scenario and racial context on attributions to racial discrimination

$F(1, 118) = 98.40, p < .001, \eta^2 = .46$. Attributions to racism in the restaurant scenario were also significantly higher in the intergroup condition ($M = 5.09, SD = 2.96$) than those in the intragroup condition ($M = 3.55, SD = 3.27$), $F(1, 118) = 10.54, p < .01, \eta^2 = .08$. However, the difference between intragroup and intergroup conditions was smaller than in the workplace scenario. Attributions between the workplace and restaurant scenarios in the intergroup condition differed marginally, with attributions being slightly higher for the workplace scenario, $t(1, 59) = 1.69, p = .10$. Conversely, the attributions made by subjects in the intragroup condition were significantly higher for the restaurant scenario than the workplace scenario, $t(1, 59) = 3.29, p < .01$.

The analysis also revealed a main effect for participant race, $F(1, 116) = 44.91, p < .001, \eta^2 = .28$. Consistent with our prediction, Black Canadians ($M = 5.16, SD = 2.51$) were more likely to attribute outcomes to racial discrimination than their White Canadian counterparts ($M = 2.82, SD = 2.19$). Additionally, as shown in Figure 2, participant race and scenario interacted to affect attributions, $F(1, 116) = 39.50, p < .001, \eta^2 = .25$. As anticipated, Blacks were more likely to attribute the outcome to racism than were Whites in both scenarios. However, the racial group difference was smaller in the workplace scenario, $F(1, 118) = 3.68, p = .06, \eta^2 = .03$, than in the restaurant scenario, $F(1, 118) = 59.22, p < .001, \eta^2 = .33$. Examining the effect of the

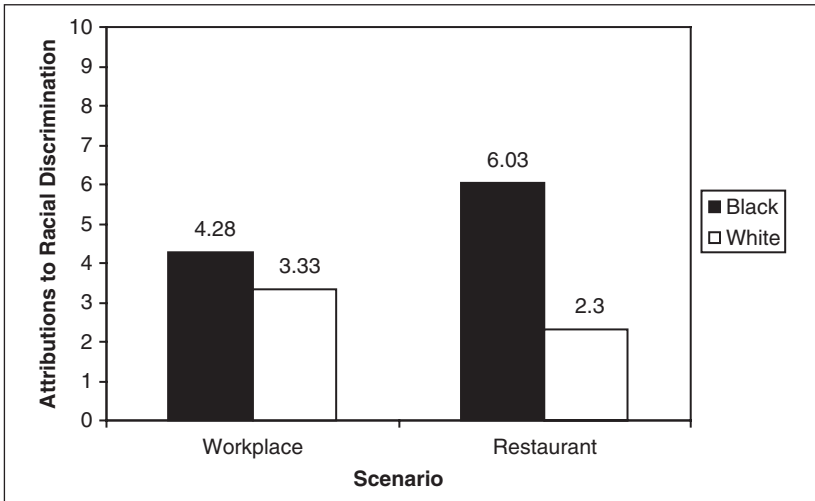


Figure 2. Effect of scenario and participant race on attributions to racial discrimination

scenarios separately for Blacks and Whites, we found that Blacks' attributions were higher for the restaurant scenario ($M = 6.30$, $SD = 3.02$) than in the workplace scenario ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 2.84$), $t(59) = 4.45$, $p < .001$. Conversely, White participants' attributions were higher for the workplace scenario ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 2.56$) than the restaurant scenario ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 2.23$), $t(59) = 4.00$, $p < .001$.

Collapsing across racial context and participant race, attributions did not significantly differ between the two scenarios, $F(1, 116) = 2.62$, $p = .11$, $\eta^2 = .02$. Finally, the three-way interaction between racial context, participant race, and the scenario was not significant, $F(1, 116) = 0.09$, $p = .76$, $\eta^2 = .00$, nor was the interaction between participant race and racial context, $F(1, 116) = 0.06$, $p = .81$, $\eta^2 = .00$.

Racial Centrality, Regard, and Ideology as Predictors of Racism Attributions

Means and standard deviations for the MIBI subscales are presented in Table 1. We examined the correlations between attributions to discrimination and measures of racial group identity separately within each cell of the racial context \times scenario (2×2) design for the Black Canadian sample. For Black

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) Subscales (N = 60)

Identity Measures	Mean	SD
MIBI Centrality	5.19	0.94
MIBI Private Regard	6.34	0.63
MIBI Public Regard	3.29	1.08
MIBI Assimilationist Ideology	4.81	0.92
MIBI Humanist Ideology	5.16	0.92
MIBI Minority Ideology	4.90	0.98
MIBI Nationalist Ideology	4.08	1.09

Table 2. Correlations Between Attributions to Discrimination and Racial Identity Measures for Black Canadians in the Intergroup Condition (N = 30)

MIBI Subscales	Workplace Scenario	Restaurant Scenario	Average
MIBI Centrality	.49**	.11	.33
MIBI Private Regard	.07	-.11	-.04
MIBI Public Regard	-.40*	-.37*	-.45*
MIBI Assimilationist Ideology	-.35	-.40*	-.44*
MIBI Humanist Ideology	-.22	-.42*	-.40*
MIBI Minority Ideology	-.13	-.17	-.17
MIBI Nationalist Ideology	.37*	.36*	.44*

Note: MIBI = Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Canadians in the intragroup condition, the only significant correlation was between attributions to discrimination and the racial centrality scale of the MIBI for the restaurant scenario ($r = .40, p < .05$; all other $ps > .10$). The more central race was to the self-concept of Black participants, the more discrimination they perceived. In contrast, a number of significant correlations were found between identity measures and attributions to discrimination for Black Canadians in the intergroup condition, supporting our prediction that more significant relationships should be found among Black participants exposed to the intergroup contexts. These correlations between the identity measures and attributions for both the workplace and restaurant scenarios are presented in Table 2, along with the correlations with the average discrimination attribution rating across both scenarios for participants in the Black intergroup condition ($r = .53, p < .01$).

Consistent with our predictions based on the idea of normative fit, endorsing distinctive racial identity beliefs was associated with greater attributions to discrimination. Low public regard and a strong nationalist ideology were significantly related to attributions for both the workplace and restaurant scenarios as well as the average discrimination attribution rating. Conversely, nondistinctive racial identity beliefs (assimilationist and humanist ideologies) were negatively related to racial discrimination attributions for both scenarios; they were statistically significant for the restaurant scenario and the average attribution score but not for the workplace scenario. Both the oppressed minority ideology and private regard were not significantly related to attributions for the two scenarios and the average racism attribution rating.

Consistent with the prediction derived from the concept of accessibility, greater racial centrality was positively associated with the likelihood that racially based attributions were made. This relationship was observed for both scenarios, although it was statistically significant only for the workplace scenario. Follow up analyses revealed that the correlation between centrality and attributions significantly differed by scenario, with the correlation being reliably larger for the workplace scenario, $z = 2.13, p < .05$. This was the only relationship between a dimension of Black racial identity and attributions that was found to reliably differ by scenario. The relationship between racial centrality and the average racism attribution was not significant.

Discussion

Findings of the current study contribute to the understanding of the experience of living as a Black person by revealing the influence that multiple dimensions of Black racial identity—in particular, racial identity beliefs—have on attributions to racial discrimination across intergroup and intragroup contexts. The findings suggest that when examining the role of racial identity in attributional processes, greater attention should be paid to the content of racial identity. Consistent with our predictions rooted in SCT (Turner et al., 1987), we found that the more Black Canadians endorsed racial identity beliefs that emphasize the distinctiveness of the Black experience relative to other groups (i.e., low public regard and endorsing the nationalist ideology), the more Blacks attributed outcomes to racial discrimination when presented with attributionally ambiguous intergroup situations. Conversely, the more that Blacks endorsed racial identity beliefs low in distinctiveness (i.e., endorsing assimilationist and humanist ideologies), the less they attributed outcomes to racial discrimination in ambiguous contexts. Moreover, these significant

relationships were only found when Black Canadians were exposed to intergroup contexts, suggesting that racial identity beliefs have their greatest influence in intergroup contexts rather than intragroup ones (for similar ideas, see Sellers et al., 1998).

Racial Identity Beliefs

We found support for our hypothesis that highly distinctive racial identity beliefs would have a high degree of normative fit with observing an ingroup member receiving negative situational outcomes. Specifically, believing that Blacks are viewed negatively by society (low public regard) and endorsing ideological beliefs that emphasize the uniqueness of the Black experience relative to mainstream society (high nationalist ideology) were associated with greater attributions to racial discrimination across both scenarios. These findings parallel recent research that demonstrates that strong expectations of intergroup discrimination as well as the endorsement of racial beliefs that highlight the negative distinctive treatment that Blacks have experienced are predictive of perceived discrimination (see Johnson & Lecci, 2003; Johnson et al., 2006; Lalonde et al., 2008; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Conversely, the more Blacks endorsed assimilationist and humanist ideologies (i.e., beliefs emphasizing similarities between Blacks and other groups) the less they attributed outcomes to racial discrimination. This is similar to Sellers and Shelton's (2003) finding that the more African Americans endorsed a humanist racial ideology, the less they reported experiencing racial discrimination over a 1-year period.

The relationships described above were only found among Blacks who were exposed to intergroup contexts. This pattern was expected because public regard and racial ideologies are intergroup beliefs, making them more relevant to the interpretation of intergroup events as compared with intragroup events. The results offer empirical support for Sellers and colleagues' (1998) contention that regard and ideological beliefs should have a greater influence on Blacks' reactions to events when individuals are more likely to categorize in terms of race (e.g., intergroup contexts). Prior investigations using scenarios that have found significant relationships between endorsing distinctive racial beliefs and perceived discrimination among Blacks have only used scenarios in which the potential perpetrator was White (Johnson & Lecci, 2003; Johnson et al., 2006).

The oppressed minority ideology and private regard were the only two racial identity beliefs that did not significantly predict attributions to racial discrimination in intergroup contexts.² Given that the oppressed minority

ideology highlights the shared experiences of Blacks and other minority groups, perhaps it would be more likely to predict attributions to racial discrimination if Blacks were to witness a member of another minority group (e.g., South Asian) receiving differential treatment at the hands of a White individual, as opposed to a Black individual.

Racial Centrality

Because previous research has shown that high racial centrality is positively associated with reported experiences with racial discrimination (Sellers & Shelton, 2003), we anticipated that the more central race was for Black Canadians the more likely they would be to attribute outcomes to racial discrimination for both scenarios. Results revealed that the direction of the relationship between centrality and attributions to racial discrimination was in the expected direction for both scenarios. However, statistical significance was only observed in the workplace scenario. A potential explanation for the non-statistical significance of the relationship between racial centrality and attributions to discrimination for the restaurant scenario in the intergroup condition has to do with the presentation of the scenarios themselves. Because the workplace scenario and the corresponding racial discrimination measures were presented first, it is possible that it could have activated racial accessibility for Black participants. Due to race being activated by the first scenario and the discrimination measures, racial centrality's relationship with participant's attributions for the second scenario may have been weakened. It may be possible that the effect of centrality on attributions is context dependent. If race is made salient by the social context, then racial centrality should have less of an effect on attributions (for similar ideas, see Major, Quinton, & Schmader, 2003).

Racial Context and Ingroup Status

We received support for our prediction that participants' attributions to discrimination would be higher when exposed to intergroup contexts as compared with intragroup contexts. This was expected because ingroup members are generally more trusted relative to outgroup members and intergroup situations should lend themselves to greater racial categorization due to greater comparative fit relative to intragroup contexts (Ellemers et al., 1999). Furthermore, these findings are in line with research that suggests that being discriminated against by an outgroup member is more consistent with people's expectations than being discriminated against by an ingroup member

(e.g., Inman & Baron, 1996; Vivian & Berkowitz, 1992). We also expected and found that Black Canadians, across racial contexts, made stronger attributions to racial discrimination than their White counterparts. The issue of discrimination should be more accessible and normative for members of historically disadvantaged groups than it is for other individuals (e.g., Barnes et al., 2004; Wortley, 1996).

Racial Context and Racial Group Differences Between Scenarios

Two scenarios were used in this study to see if a similar pattern of results would be found across attributionally ambiguous situations. Despite many parallels in the findings across the two scenarios, there were some interesting differences associated with the scenarios that warrant discussion. First, attributions to discrimination were much higher in the intergroup condition than in the intragroup condition. However, attributions in the intragroup condition were significantly higher for the restaurant scenario as compared with the workplace scenario. One potential explanation for this difference in the intragroup condition rests on the perceived power of the perpetrator. In the restaurant scenario, the server is likely to be perceived as having low power relative to the boss in the workplace scenario. Therefore, one might wonder if the ingroup member is acting in accordance with his or her beliefs or carrying out the wishes of someone with power over him or her.

Second, we found that racial group differences in attributions to discrimination for the workplace scenario were smaller than they were for the restaurant scenario. This interaction might be best understood in terms of racial group differences in the perceived frequency of encountering the two situations (see Barrett & Swim, 1998). Research suggests that the workplace is a context where both Blacks and Whites report experiencing racial discrimination (Deitch, Barsky, Butz, Chan, Brief, & Bradley, 2003; Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000; Plous, 1996). However, the groups' reasons for believing that ingroup members are likely to face discrimination in the workplace probably differ. Blacks' perceptions seem grounded in beliefs that their group frequently experiences negative treatment within the workplace (Deitch et al., 2003), whereas Whites' perceptions seem grounded in beliefs that affirmative action reduces the opportunities for Whites (Plous, 1996). In contrast, receiving poor service at a restaurant due to one's race is a situation that Blacks are more likely to encounter than Whites. Blacks report frequently receiving poor service in the public sphere (see Feagin, 1991; Swim et al., 2003).

There is also the possibility that the excuse given by the waiter in the restaurant scenario was an additional factor that affected attributional processes among the two racial groups.⁴ Research has found that Whites are more likely than Blacks to be accepting of potential external constraints (i.e., the waiter's excuse that he was busy) in situations where discrimination against the ingroup is plausible (Davidson & Friedman, 1998; Johnson, Simmons, Trawalter, Ferguson, & Reed, 2003, Study 3). Furthermore, there is evidence that such external constraints are less likely to be taken at face value when differential treatment is normative (Fleming & Darley, 1993), and not being served promptly in a restaurant is likely more normative for Blacks. These psychological processes might explain the low level of attributions to discrimination among White Canadians in the restaurant scenario relative to the workplace scenario as well as the higher attributions found among Black Canadians.

Future Directions and Limitations

Our racial identity and attribution data were correlational, and we cannot be certain about the direction of causality. We took the perspective that racial group identification determines attributions to racial discrimination. However, attributions to discrimination can also influence racial identification (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999; Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt, & Spears, 2001). In all likelihood, there is a reciprocal relationship between these variables. Racial group identification affects the way individuals perceive their experiences, and life experiences can affect how individuals identify with their race. Future investigations may benefit from collecting data over multiple time points or experimentally manipulating dimensions of Black racial identity in order to better explicate the processes that underlie the relationship between Black racial identity and making attributions to discrimination.

Future studies that examine the relationship between Black racial identity and attributions to discrimination could also benefit from systematically manipulating a single contextual variable across scenarios, while controlling for any other potential differences. In designing our scenarios, we attempted to balance their realism against methodological concerns. In hindsight, the workplace and restaurant scenario differed in some important ways, most notably in terms of the perceived control afforded to the perpetrator as well as the presence of an excuse given by the perpetrator in the restaurant scenario. By experimentally manipulating situational cues such as the amount of perceived control afforded to the perpetrator and the presence of excuses for

situational outcomes, we can gain greater insight into how Black racial identity influences attributions to discrimination (Johnson et al., 2003). Also, we kept gender constant by having the potential victim and potential discriminator in our scenarios be male to avoid making attributions to gender discrimination plausible. Future research could examine more closely the role of gender by manipulating the gender group membership of potential targets and perpetrators of discrimination.

Finally, the design of our study could have been improved on in a couple of ways to give us more certainty with respect to the generalizability of our findings. First, having a larger and more representative Black Canadian sample would help us be more certain of the generalizability of our findings. Furthermore, given the heterogeneity of our Black Canadian sample in terms of ethnic origin and class, a larger sample would have allowed us to examine in greater detail the impact that these sociodemographic factors have on our variables of interest. Second, in hindsight, some of the wording for the restaurant scenario might have introduced a potential confound. The second part of the servers' comment, "...and those customers over there are extremely important," might have unintentionally decreased the degree of attributional ambiguity participants perceived. In other words, having the potential discriminator articulate that they favored other individuals in the restaurant, regardless of the reasoning, might have made participants perceive that this was a more blatant instance of discrimination relative to the workplace scenario. Future research should more carefully manipulate contexts of potentially discriminatory events while keeping constant as many other aspects of the scenarios as possible.

Conclusions

Our results suggest that multiple dimensions of racial identity predict attributions to discrimination, particularly in intergroup contexts. Additionally, the degree to which individuals' racial identity beliefs promote group distinctiveness may play a role in the attribution process. Endorsing racial identity beliefs promoting ingroup distinctiveness was associated with greater likelihood of attributing outcomes to racial discrimination, whereas endorsing racial identity beliefs low in group distinctiveness were associated with lower likelihood of attributing outcomes to discrimination. Overall, the present findings illustrate the importance of considering the relationships between racial identity and contextual factors when studying the attributions that people make in attributionally ambiguous situations.

Appendix

The scenarios as they appeared for Black participants. Note: “White” was replaced with “Black” in the intragroup condition. For White participants, names and the race of other people in the scenario were changed as described in the Method section.

Workplace Scenario

A Black university student named Jamal has been working at his job for over 6 months. A new guy is hired and Jamal is asked to “show him the ropes.” Jamal notices that the new guy and his boss, John, who are both White (Black), get along very well. John praises the new guy’s performance, and they are always chatting amongst themselves. After a couple of months Jamal starts to notice that the new guy gets all the good shifts.

Restaurant Scenario

A Black university student named Darnell and his girlfriend decided to celebrate their 1-year anniversary at an upscale restaurant. They are both promptly seated at their table. A few other customers are seated within the same 5-minute window that they were. Their server who is White (Black) seems to be taking care of all the other customers except for them. Darnell and his girlfriend are the last table to have their order taken. When the server comes over to Darnell’s table he remarks, “Sorry that I have taken so long but I am really busy, and those customers over there are extremely important.”

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Notes

1. The variety of ethnic labels provided by our Black sample reflects the heterogeneity of Black Canadians. In order of frequency, the following ethnic labels were

- reported: Jamaican ($n = 17$), African ($n = 6$), Eritrean ($n = 4$), Somali ($n = 4$), Trinidadian ($n = 4$), Canadian ($n = 3$), Ghanaian ($n = 3$), West Indian ($n = 3$), Bajan ($n = 2$), Caribbean ($n = 2$), Igbo ($n = 2$), Antiguan ($n = 1$), Grenadian ($n = 1$), and Vincentian ($n = 1$).
2. Because recent research conducted in the United States suggests that Black Americans born in the United States might identify with their racial group more than first-generation Blacks (see Hall & Carter, 2006), we decided to examine this possibility in Canada context. We ran a 2 (racial context) \times 2 (place of birth) between-subject ANOVA with racial identity dimensions and attributions to discrimination for both scenarios as our dependent variables. We first examined whether there were main effects for place of birth on dimensions of Black racial identity and attributions to discrimination. Only a marginally significant main effect for place of birth on racial centrality was found, $F(1, 54) = 2.95, p = .09, \eta^2 = .05$, all other $ps > .15$. Supporting research in the United States, Blacks born in Canada ($M = 5.44; SD = .97$) have a stronger Black racial identity than do Blacks born outside of Canada ($M = 4.95; SD = .91$). The analyses failed to reveal a significant interaction between racial context and place of birth ($p = .67$).
 3. Other studies have failed to find a significant relationship between private regard and perceived racial discrimination (Sellers et al., 2006; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). These investigations examined the relationship between private regard and African Americans' self reports of perceived discrimination.
 4. We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this as a possibility.

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