


Summer 8-12-2017

# An Examination of the Relationship Between Ethnic Identity Development, Cognitive Complexity, Differentiation of Self, and Reports of Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions

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# An Examination of the Relationship Between Ethnic Identity Development, Cognitive Complexity, Differentiation of Self, and Reports of Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHNIC IDENTITY  
DEVELOPMENT, COGNITIVE COMPLEXITY, DIFFERENTIATION OF SELF,  
AND REPORTS OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC MICROAGGRESSIONS

By

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN  
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

AUGUST 2017

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## **ABSTRACT**

Although individuals may not engage in racism consciously due to social undesirability, they may have biases that manifest in more subtle and unconscious ways. Research has found that people of color experiencing different racial and ethnic microaggressions in their everyday lives are subject to pervasive and negative impacts on their mental health, though little is known about the influence of one's ethnic identity formation, affective processes, and cognitive processes. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the degree to which ethnic identity development, cognitive complexity, and differentiation of self were associated reported experiences of microaggressions. The analysis indicated that ethnic identity development, cognitive complexity, and differentiation of self was significantly related to reported experiences of microaggressions in African origin ( $F(11,112) = 4.902, R^2 = .325, p = .000$ ) and European Origin ( $F(11,177) = 3.65, R^2 = .170, p = .000$ ) participants. The current study suggests African origin participants who reported more experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions, engaged in less exploration of their ethnic identity, favored cognitive efforts, and were more tolerance of insolubility. European Origin or White participants who reported more racial and ethnic microaggressions, engaged in less exploration of their ethnic identity and reported a stronger ethnic identity.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

A 2016 Pew Research Center survey yielded considerable disparities in views of the current state of race relations and racial equality, and the influence on everyday life in the United States. Sixty-one percent (61%) of Black Americans and fifty-eight percent (58%) of Hispanic Americans polled reported race relations as generally bad, compared to forty-five percent (45%) of White Americans polled. Additionally seventy-one percent (71%) of Black Americans and fifty-two percent (52%) of Hispanic Americans polled reported they had experienced discrimination or had been treated unfairly due to their race or ethnicity compared to thirty percent (30%) of White Americans. The gap between how racism is perceived and how it is experienced is one of the largest sources of intergroup conflict in the United States (Jones, 1997). Therefore, it is important to understand how individuals perceive and experience racism, as defined as an individual's discriminatory behavior and prejudicial attitudes toward people of a certain race or institutional practices (whether motivated by prejudice or not) that subordinate a person of a certain race (Myers, 1993). Racism is defined not only in terms of individual prejudice, but also in terms of a power structure which protects the interests of the dominant culture and actively discriminates against ethnic minorities (Brandt, 1991).

Contemporary research on racism has hypothesized that because the United States has become more politically correct, most individuals are more cognizant of racism and



tend to avoid engaging in racist acts (Sue, 2010). Although individuals may not engage in racism consciously due to social undesirability, their biases and prejudices may manifest in more subtle and unconscious ways. For example, although most people self-report they are not racist and that they uphold egalitarian beliefs and values, they may unconsciously maintain negative feelings toward individuals of racial and ethnic minority groups (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2006). As a result, racism may no longer be as overt as in the past, but may now take on more subtle forms (Sue et al., 2007).

Racial microaggressions are a form of perceived racism that has recently received considerable attention (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). Racial microaggressions have been defined as events that have the effect of insulting someone because of their race or ethnicity and can be communicated in many forms, including a wide variety of verbal or nonverbal behaviors (Sue et al., 2007). Many times perpetrators are unaware of their transgression. Microaggressions are thought to result from stereotypes and implicit bias held by the perpetrator. These biases contribute to their insensitivity to the consequences upon the recipient. The many experiences of racial microaggressions may contribute to psychological distress, diminished trust, and decreased self-esteem (Sue et al., 2007; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008).

Sue and colleagues (2007) presented an original taxonomy of racial microaggressions, citing various themes manifested in everyday life. One theme includes *Alien in One's Own Land* or experiences in which racial and ethnic minorities may feel like perpetual foreigners. For example, telling a Mexican American, "You speak English

well,” could be considered a microaggression because such a statement implies that the Mexican American is foreign-born, although she or he was born in the United States. Another theme is *Assumption of Criminality* or experiences in which racial and ethnic minorities are stereotyped to be deviant or criminals. For example, a store worker who follows an African American around a store, while she or he is shopping, could be considered a microaggression because such behavior insinuates that African Americans are going to steal from them. Other themes included *Second-Class Citizen* (e.g., when racial and ethnic minority are considered substandard, and thus treated second-rate, to Whites), *Ascription of Intelligence* (e.g., when racial and ethnic minorities are assumed to be less intelligent or uneducated), *Assumption of Inferiority* (e.g., when racial and ethnic minorities are assumed to be poor or hold substandard careers), *Colorblindness* (e.g., when someone claims that they “don’t see race”), and *Denial of Racial Reality* (e.g., when someone defensively denies that she or he is racist or engaged in racist behaviors). In an effort to produce quantitative studies to empirically support the presence of microaggressions, Nadal (2011) created- one of the first measures of racial and ethnic microaggressions- the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS) consisting of six subscales that paralleled several of the racial microaggression categories described by Sue and colleagues (2007). The six subscales of the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS) consist of (a) *Assumptions of Inferiority*, b) *Second-Class Citizen and Assumption of Criminality*, (c) *Microinvalidations*, (d) *Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity*, (e) *Environmental Microaggressions*, and (f) *Workplace and School*

*Microaggressions*. The sufficient validity and reliability overall scale and the subscales support Sue and colleagues' taxonomy of racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007) anecdotal reports, and the results of qualitative studies (Hill et al., 2010; Rivera et al., 2010; Sue et al., 2010, 2008; Watkins et al., 2010), which posit that people of color experience microaggressions in their everyday lives and are able to identify such instances as being racially related.

Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007) described racial microaggressions as being more subtle or ambiguous than other forms of perceived discrimination, such as hostile racism. The term *racial microaggression* is used to describe the everyday manifestation of racism on an interpersonal level, as compared to systemic racial oppression manifested through the existence of discriminatory laws, policies, and practices. Researchers have suggested that microaggressions, though seemingly trivial, may provoke considerable distress and cause even more distress than overt racism experiences in racial and ethnic minorities (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2011). Adding to the complexity of microaggressions is verification. Determining whether or not one has been committed and, if so, how to respond during a heightened affective response, pose an immediate challenge. Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder (2008) found that the task of identifying microaggressions may create what is referred to as a "catch-22" or a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" thought process. They asserted that due to the covert nature of microaggressions, a member of a racial or ethnic minority is left to determine if what was perceived, was in fact a racial affront. If decided that a message did contain a racial

connotation, the racial or ethnic minority must then elect to either respond or remain silent. In essence, the recipient of the communication must either risk appearing paranoid and hypersensitive or suffer in silence, denying awareness of the affront; hence, the “catch-22” ensues. Sue (2004) suggested that the energy required in detecting, analyzing, and responding to a microaggression is physiologically, psychologically, and emotionally taxing on the recipient.

Although the experience and/or exposure to microaggressions is well-documented in literature, little is known about the typically un-examined variance in an individual’s identity formation, self-regulatory processes, as well as cognitive processing, that may impact the experience with microaggressions. Although Sue (2004) suggested that the considerable energy required in detecting, analyzing, and responding to a microaggression is quite taxing on the recipient, this process has not been clearly delineated.

In light of a social climate wherein racial/ethnic group majority people and other special populations (e.g., women, people with disabilities, GLBTQ) also report interpersonal slights, and the phenomenon of increasing reports of ‘bullying’ in all social environments, the examination of one’s identity formation, cognitive processes, and self-regulatory processes by which one interprets an experience with microaggressions, becomes even more imperative. This is especially the case, given that such life exposures have been identified as the primary cause of both homicidal and suicidal behaviors (Klien, Connell, & Konold. 2012; Mayes, et. al, 2014). Understanding the etiology of the

variance in populations' responses to interpersonal slights due to group membership, is important to developing interventions that may ease the psychological-emotional impact that has been associated with 'harm' by others' words in day to day communication. The purpose of this study is to specifically examine the following research question: To what degree do ethnic identity development, cognitive complexity, particularly need for cognition and tolerance of ambiguity, and differentiation of self, contribute to the variance in self-reports of experienced racial and ethnic microaggressions. In the following section, a brief overview will be provided of the variables examined with the reasons for their inclusion. Each variable will be described in greater depth in Chapter Two.

### **Ethnic Identity Development**

There has been a plethora of empirical studies of the construct of ethnic identity in recent decades. Most of this research is based on Phinney's theoretical model, which defines ethnic identity as a sense of personal investment and attachment to one's ethnic group (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Jean Phinney (1989) developed a three-stage model of ethnic identity formation to describe the process by which individuals come to understand their ethnicity and make decisions about its role in their lives. The first stage, *unexamined ethnic identity*, is often marked by a lack of interest in exploring one's ethnicity, or diffusion, or views of ethnicity that are based on the opinions of others, known as foreclosure. During stage two, *ethnic identity search*, ethnicity is explored. During stage three, *ethnic identity achievement*, individuals resolve their ethnic identity conflicts,

accept membership in minority culture, and are also open to other cultures. Phinney (1992) concluded that affirmation, belonging, and ethnic identity achievement are the foundational components of ethnic identity theory and ethnic identity development during adolescence.

Overall, ethnic identity has been found to be associated with positive adjustment (Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005; Smith & Silva, 2011; Thompson & Kiang, 2010). While ethnic identity has generally been suggested as a protective factor in relation to mental health outcomes (Kiang, Yip, Gonzales-Backen, Witkow, & Fuligni, 2006; Shelton et al., 2005; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003; Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2008), some research also suggests that individuals who highly affiliate or identify with an in-group may also experience more negative effects of racism (Lee, 2003). In other words, individuals who choose an in-group may become highly sensitive to environmental cues related to that aspect of their in-group (Hornsey, 2008; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). That is, depending on one's racial and ethnic identity attitudes, potentially ambiguous situations that may not be explicitly racist (e.g. racial and ethnic microaggressions) may be interpreted as being discriminatory (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). Therefore, it is possible that depending on its importance to one's identity, racial and ethnic identity development may predict the psychological distress related to the experience of perceived racism. How one perceived themselves may influence how they interpret cues in their environment and their impressions of others.

The empirical examination of the relationship between ethnic identity development and reported experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions is certainly warranted.

### **Cognitive Complexity**

Sue (2004) suggested that considerable energy is required in detecting and analyzing experiences with racial and microaggressions, however research on the cognitive processes associated have not been clearly outlined. Due to the seemingly innocuous nature of microaggressions, perceptual skills may be indicative of its detection and analysis. Cognitive complexity is a psychological characteristic or variable that shows how complex or simple the frame and perceptual skills of a person are (Streufert & Swezey 1986). It is the extent to which a person distinguishes and integrates an event. A significant and positive correlations have been found between this construct and interpersonal sensitivity. For example, individuals with higher scores on a cognitive complexity scale were found to observe subtle differences in interpersonal communication than those with lower scores. Individuals with high cognitive complexity have been found to have greater capacity to analyze a situation, to discern various elements, explore connections, and possible relationships among the elements (Brie, 1955; Suedfeld, Tetlock, & Streufert, 1992).

Need for Cognition is conceptualized to be a construct of cognitive complexity (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982), which is defined as the tendency to engage in and enjoy cognitive efforts. The nature of racial and ethnic microaggressions is considered to be subtle and overt; need for cognition may be indicative of one's inclination to detect and

analyze these experiences beyond face-value. An individual with a high Need for Cognition finds satisfaction in thinking whereas an individual with a low Need for Cognition perceives thinking as a chore, in which he or she engages only when some incentive is present (Cacioppo et al., 1996).

Individuals with a high Need for Cognition are more likely to engage in information seeking activities than individuals with a low Need for Cognition (Cacioppo et al., 1996). An individual with a high Need for Cognition will also seek more information, evaluate more thoroughly the quality of the information found, be more likely to rely on all of the pertinent information (as opposed to relying on simple cues) and use a wider variety of information sources, including sources that were previously unknown (Cacioppo et al., 1996; Petty et al., 2009). Thus, it is of importance to examine the role of need for cognition in one's detection and analysis of their reported experience with racial and ethnic microaggressions.

Tolerance for ambiguity has also been conceptualized as a construct of cognitive complexity and is used primarily in cognitive studies on decision-making, memory, and perception. Frenkel-Brunswik's (1948) definition of tolerance for ambiguity generalizes the various aspects of the emotional and cognitive functioning of an individual into those who are intolerant of ambiguity and those who are tolerant of ambiguity. Intolerance of ambiguity is described as having a tendency to resort to black-and-white solutions, and characterized by rapid and overconfident judgment, often at the neglect of reality. In an effort to construct a valid, self-report, measure, Budner (1962) extended the Frenkel-



Brunswik definition of tolerance of ambiguity as “the tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as threatening or desirable.” Due to the subtle, ambiguous nature of racial and ethnic microaggressions, perception of these experiences as either threatening, or desirable warrants further investigation. In addition to extended Frenkel-Brunswik’s definition, Budner conceptualized three types of ambiguous situations: *novelty*, *complexity*, and *insolubility*. *Novelty* situations are the extent to which one is tolerant of new, unfamiliar information or situations. *Complexity* situations are the extent to which one is tolerant of multiple, distinctive, or unrelated information. In the third type, *Insolubility*, encompasses the extent to which one is tolerant of problems that are difficult to solve because alternative solutions are not evident. For those with low tolerance of ambiguity, there is an aversive reaction to ambiguous situations because the lack of information makes it difficult to assess risks and correctly make a decision. These situations are perceived as a threat and source of discomfort. Reactions to the perceived threat include stress, avoidance, delay, suppression, or denial (Budner, 1962). Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007) described microaggressions as being more subtle or ambiguous than other forms of perceived discrimination. Due to the ambiguous nature of racial and ethnic microaggressions, the intent of the perpetrator may be hard to discern. Thus, it is of importance to examine the role of tolerance of ambiguity in one’s reported experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions.

## **Differentiation of Self**

Sue (2004) suggested that the energy required in detecting, analyzing, and responding to a microaggression is physiologically, psychologically, and emotionally taxing on the recipient. However, research on the affective processes associated with the experience of microaggressions have not been clearly outlined. Differentiation of self has been conceptualized as a means to determine affective responses (Bowen, 1978). Differentiation of self is thought to operate on both an intrapersonal and interpersonal level (Skowron, Van Epps, & Cipriano). Differentiation of self includes a capacity for self-regulation, that is, an ability to distinguish between thinking and feeling systems, have comfort with one's feelings and the capacity to access them freely, and the ability to achieve a solid sense of self in expressing one's personal thoughts and perspectives (Bowen, 1976). Four factors are indicators of a person's level of differentiation of self: emotional reactivity, the ability to take an I-position, emotional cut-off, and fusion with others (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998).

*Emotional Reactivity* is conceptualized to encompass how individuals direct their energy toward experience, expression, and intensity of their feelings. Individuals who tend to be emotionally reactive are said to be poorly differentiated (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Such individuals find it difficult to remain calm in response to strong emotional conditions. Further, they are unable to separate thinking from feeling and, thus, tend to make decisions based on what "feels right" (Bowen, 1976, 1978). Conversely, highly differentiated individuals experience strong emotions, but do not allow themselves to be

consumed by them. They are able to clearly discern between thinking and feeling, are able to experience strong affect without disregarding logical reasoning and rational thinking (Bowen, 1976, 1978). The *I Position* is the ability of an individual to take independent positions in relationships and maintain personal convictions when pressured by others to do otherwise. Less differentiated individuals tend to rarely think, act, or feel for themselves. Thus, it can be argued that an inability to take an I-position is equivalent to a lack of an integrated concept of self and of others. *Emotional Cutoff* represents the person that finds intimacy and emotionality profoundly threatening. When internal experiences or interpersonal interactions are too intense, poorly differentiated individuals isolate themselves from others, as well as from their emotions. Differentiated individuals do not feel this need to cut themselves off emotionally. They are not afraid that they will lose their identity, having resolved emotional attachments from their family of origin. *Fusion with Others* represents the extent to which a person is overly involved or fused with individuals that they have an emotional relationship with. Highly differentiated individuals do not feel the need to be fused with others because they maintain a clearly defined sense of self and remain true to themselves, their beliefs, and their convictions. The inclusion of differentiation of self will serve to examine the extent of one's affective processing as it relates to their reported experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the social significance of understanding individual differences in how one perceives insults, denigration, and negative judgment, little empirical research has directly addressed this issue. Research on acts of prejudice and discrimination, including racial and ethnic microaggressions, have been linked to a variety of poor health and mental health outcomes (e.g., Sue, 2010), but little research has been conducted to examine the extent to which one's ethnic identity formation, affective processes, and cognitive processes contributes to one's interpretation of an experience with racial and ethnic microaggressions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the present research is to enhance understanding of the relationship between individuals' experiences of the everyday manifestation of racism at the interpersonal level, by examining one's sense of personal investment and attachment to one's ethnic group and the cognitive mechanisms used to detect, analyze, and respond to the everyday manifestation of racism. This study will examine the relationship between reported experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions, ethnic identity development, cognitive complexity, and differentiation of self.

### **Research Questions**

1. To what degree do affirmation, belonging, and commitment to ethnic identity, ethnic identity search, need for cognition, tolerance of novel ambiguous situations, tolerance of complex ambiguous situations, tolerance of insoluble

ambiguous situations, emotional reactivity, a clearly defined sense of self, emotional cutoff, and fusion with others, predict reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions in participants who identified their ethnicity as African origin/Black and European origin/White ?

2. Are there significant differences amongst the ethnic identity development, need for cognition, tolerance of ambiguity, differentiation of self, and reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions between participants who identified their ethnicity as African origin/Black and European origin/White?

### **Hypotheses**

1. It is hypothesized that participants' ethnicity, ethnic identity development, differentiation of self, need for cognition, and tolerance of ambiguity will explain, to a significant degree, the variance in the reports of experienced racial and ethnic microaggressions.
2. It is hypothesized that the Affirmation, Belonging, Commitment subscale of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure will be related to increased reports of experienced racial and ethnic microaggressions.
  - a. Ethnic Identity Search subscale of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure is hypothesized to relate to decreased reports of experienced racial and ethnic microaggressions.

- b. The Novelty, Complexity, and Insolubility subscales of Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale are hypothesized to be related to increased reports of experienced racial and ethnic microaggressions
  - c. Emotional Reactivity, Fusion with Others, and I position subscales of the Differentiation of Self Inventory are hypothesized to relate to increased reports of experienced racial and ethnic microaggressions.
  - d. Emotional Cutoff subscale of the Differentiation of Self Inventory is hypothesized to relate to decreased reports of experienced racial and ethnic microaggressions.
3. It is hypothesized that there will be significant differences amongst the ethnic identity development, need for cognition, tolerance of ambiguity, differentiation of self, and reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions between participants who identified their ethnicity as African origin/Black and European origin/White.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Racial and ethnic microaggressions- brief behavioral, verbal, or environmental indignities, which commonly occur in daily interactions, can be intentional or unintentional, and convey derogatory and hostile insults towards an oppressed or minority group. (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007).

Ethnic identity development- the process by which individuals come to understand their ethnicity and make decisions about its role in their lives (Phinney, 1989).

Need for cognition- the tendency to engage in and enjoy cognitive efforts (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982).

Tolerance of ambiguity- the tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as desirable (Budner, 1962).

Differentiation of self- the capacity for self-regulation, that is, an ability to distinguish between thinking and feeling systems, and manage emotional reactivity act thoughtfully under stress (Bowen, 1978).

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

#### Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions

##### *Evidence of Racism beyond Interpersonal Interactions*

Contemporary research on racism has hypothesized that because the United States has become more politically correct, most individuals are much more cognizant of racism and tend to avoid engaging in racist acts (Sue, 2010). As a consequence, racism in its most blatant or overt form is prohibited by law, to the extent that at the present time, many argue that racism does not exist and is not a problem in the United States. However, racism's presence in today's society is evident in the inequity in mediums such as access to resources, compensation, wealth, and criminal convictions (Costello, Keeler, & Angold, 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007; Simms, 2009; Hartney & Vuong, 2009). For instance, disparities can be found within the gap in wages and compensation between racial and ethnic minorities and Whites. Although these gaps have narrowed in some cases over the years, among full- and part-time workers in the U.S., Black Americans and Hispanic Americans earned just 75% as much as White Americans in median hourly earnings in 2015 (Pew Research Center, 2016). Some of these wage gaps can be attributed to the fact that lower shares of Black and Hispanic Americans are college educated, however, even with considering just individuals with a bachelor's degree or more education, wage gaps by race and ethnicity persist. For instance, college-educated Black and Hispanic men earn roughly 80% of the hourly wages of similarly



educated White men (\$25 and \$26 vs. \$32, respectively). Black and Hispanic women with a college degree earned about 90% of the hourly wages of similarly educated White women (\$23 and \$22 vs \$25, respectively). Additionally, Black and Hispanic women with a college degree earn only about 70% of the hourly wages of similarly educated White men (\$23 and \$22, vs. \$32 respectively) (2016). Not only does it appear to be persistent wage gaps by race and ethnicity, but also by gender. Although the majority of each of these gaps can be explained by differences in education, labor force experience, occupation or industry, and other measurable factors, the remaining gaps that are not explained by these concrete factors are often attributed, at least in part, to prejudice and discrimination.

In regards to racial discrimination in the workplace, opinions vary considerably across racial and ethnic groups about equal treatment (Pew Research, 2016). About 21% of Black American adults and 16% of Hispanic American adults report that in the past year, they have been treated unfairly in hiring, pay, or promotion because of their race or ethnicity; just 4% of White American adults say the same. Further, while 40% of Black Americans and 20% of Hispanic Americans report their race or ethnicity has made it harder for them to succeed in life, just 5% of White Americans say this. Intriguingly, 31% of White Americans report their race or ethnicity has aided them in becoming successful (2016).

Furthermore, discrimination and marginalization are sometimes barriers for racial and ethnic minorities seeking to escape poverty (Corcoran & Nichols-Casebolt, 2004).

Owning a home remains one of the most common ways for American families to build wealth. Bayer, Ferreira, and Ross (2016) found that racial and ethnic minority individuals are more likely to receive high-cost mortgages than Whites Americans. Even after controlling for general risk considerations, such as credit score, loan-to-value ratio, subordinate liens, and debt-to-income ratios, Hispanic Americans are 78% more likely to be given a high-cost mortgage, and Black Americans are 105% more likely. Financial literacy may serve as an explanation that racial and ethnic minority borrowers, particularly those living in lower socio-economic communities, were not financially sophisticated enough to know these loans were wrong for them. However, for this financial literacy argument to really work, we also have to conclude that wealthy Black and Hispanic Americans are less financially savvy-which is not true. Although individuals may not engage in racism consciously due to social undesirability, racism is embedded in social institutions, structures, and social relations within our society, as evidenced in the aforementioned paragraphs. Both subtle and overt forms of racism manifest within systemic and interpersonal expressions; occurring so often that such has been normalized. Consequently, it is imperative to examine the variables that are associated with personal influences that predict discernment in the intent of others' expressions of these subtle and overt forms of racism.

### *Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions*

Racial microaggressions represent a form of perceived racism that has recently received considerable attention (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). Sue, Capodilupo, et al.

(2007) described racial microaggressions as being more subtle or ambiguous than other forms of perceived discrimination, such as hostile racism. The term *microaggressions* is used to describe the everyday manifestation of racism on an interpersonal level, as compared to systemic racial oppression manifested through the existence of discriminatory laws and policies.

Racial microaggressions was first identified by Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, and Wills (1977). They defined the term racial microaggressions as daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental actions that may indicate negative racial insults perceived by the targeted person or group. Racial and ethnic microaggressions have been conceptualized as broadly affecting people from racial and ethnic minorities due to their inherently subordinate status in U.S. society. These experiences have also been termed *everyday discrimination* by some researchers (i.e., Stucky et al., 2011), which refers to chronic, every day, and routine minor experiences with discrimination. Although there is considerable overlap between everyday discrimination and racial microaggressions, Sue and colleagues (2007) use the term to specifically include microassaults, which involve hostile name calling and racial slurs; microinsults, which are communications that are perceived as rude, offensive, or insulting; and microinvalidations, which include communications that marginalize, exclude, or nullify the thoughts, ideas, values, experiences, or perspectives of people of color. Thus, microaggressions do not include incidents such as racial violence or racial discrimination in the workplace or the housing market. Rather, they are interpersonal or environmental situations where the prejudicial

beliefs of the perpetrator are manifested consciously and/or unconsciously in their communication styles or behaviors toward a racial and ethnic minority.

*Microaggressions on University Campuses*

There are several studies that have evaluated microaggressions on university campuses, in the counseling process, and among faculty in university environments. A study conducted by Sue and colleagues (2007) not only discusses what microaggressions are, but their clinical implications as well. The researchers analyzed literature in social and counseling psychology, as well as personal narratives provided by White psychologists and psychologists of color that described examples of microaggressions in everyday life. The authors defined microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group (p.273).” Sue’s definition of racial microaggressions is different from that posited by Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, and Willis (1978). Sue’s definition extends the rationale further than just subtle nonverbal exchanges that are “put downs” to the recipient. Sue’s definition includes verbal exchanges and recognizes that racial microaggressions can be intentional or unintentional. This collection of personal narratives helped Sue et. al (2007) to code the information and classify it into nine different categories of microaggressions with distinct themes.

*Taxonomy of Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions.*

Sue and colleagues (2007) presented an original taxonomy of racial and ethnic microaggressions, citing various themes that racial and ethnic microaggressions may manifest in everyday life. One theme includes *Alien in One's Own Land* or experiences in which racial and ethnic minorities may feel like perpetual foreigners. For example, telling a Mexican American, "You speak English well" could be considered a microaggression because such a statement implies that the Mexican American is foreign-born, although she or he was born in the United States. Another theme is *Assumption of Criminality* or experiences in which racial and ethnic minorities are stereotyped to be deviant or criminals. For example, a store worker who follows an African American around a store while she or he is shopping could be considered a microaggression because such behavior insinuates that African Americans are going to steal from them. Other themes included *Second-Class Citizen* (e.g., when racial and ethnic minority customers are considered substandard, and thus treated second-rate to Whites), *Ascription of Intelligence* (e.g., when racial and ethnic minorities are assumed to be less intelligent or uneducated), *Assumption of Inferiority* (e.g., when racial and ethnic minorities are assumed to be poor or hold substandard careers), *Colorblindness* (e.g., when someone claims that they "don't see race"), and *Denial of Racial Reality* (e.g., when someone defensively denies that she or he is racist or engaged in racist behaviors). This study only focused on clinical implications within the therapeutic relationship between a White therapist and racial and ethnic minority client and is qualitative in nature. The authors mentioned the importance

of doing more research in this area on how racial microaggressions are manifested in society and ways to eventually eliminate them. Sue and colleagues (2007) purported that mental health training programs must support trainees in overcoming their fears and their resistance to talking about race by fostering safe and productive learning environments. Additionally, they posited that measures should be made towards creating adaptive ways of handling microaggressions by racial and ethnic minorities and increasing the awareness and sensitivity of Whites to racial and ethnic microaggressions so that they accept responsibility for their behaviors and for changing them (Sue et. al. 2007)

Recently, there has been an increase in the use of the term *microaggressions* in several fields including psychology, education, and counseling. However, there are still areas that need further research. In a seminal article, Sue and Constantine (2007) used the Privileged Identity Exploration (PIE) Model to identify the urgent need for research in the following areas: how microaggressions are manifested in society; the dynamic between the perpetrator of microaggressions and the individual experiencing microaggressions; the impact of microaggressions on racial and ethnic minorities; enhancement of the understanding of microaggressions; and the educational strategies that are needed to eliminate them.

In addition, qualitative studies have added to our understanding of racial microaggressions by allowing participants to describe their experiences in their own words, which allows for rich data and a depth of interpretation, however, it is important to note the limitations of this type of methodology to the study of racial

microaggressions. Also, most studies have focused exclusively on the experiences of students and faculty. Moreover, the students and faculty sampled in the majority of the studies were from psychology and related disciplines. The degree, types, and responses to racial microaggressions may differ qualitatively from the ways in which the general population experiences this phenomenon.

In an effort to produce quantitative studies to empirically support the presence of microaggressions, Nadal (2011) created one of the first measures- the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS) consisting of six subscales that paralleled several of the racial microaggression categories that were described by Sue and colleagues (2007). The six subscales of the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS) consist of (a) *Assumptions of Inferiority*, b) *Second-Class Citizen and Assumption of Criminality*, (c) *Microinvalidations*, (d) *Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity*, (e) *Environmental Microaggressions*, and (f) *Workplace and School Microaggressions*. The overall scale and the subscales support both theoretical literature (Sue et al., 2007) and qualitative studies (Hill et al., 2010; Rivera et al., 2010; Sue et al., 2010, 2008; Watkins et al., 2010), which asserts that people of color experience microaggressions in their everyday lives and are able to identify such instances as being racially related.

*Experiences of Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions within Various Populations.*

Several studies have explored how racial and ethnic microaggressions are experienced by African Americans (Sue et al., 2008), Latina/os (Rivera, Forquer & Rangel, 2010), Asian Americans (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2010), indigenous

people (Hill, Kim, & Williams, 2010, Clark et al., 2011), and other racial and ethnic minorities (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). Researchers have suggested that microaggressions, though seemingly trivial, may provoke considerable distress and might cause even more distress than overt racism experiences in racial and ethnic minorities (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2011). Racial and ethnic microaggressions may be especially stressful because racial and ethnic minorities might not know how or whether to respond to such “mild” incidents of racism. They may also be harmful because, although mild, their frequency may cause negative cumulative effects. These experiences may be harmful because they serve as painful reminders of the racial and ethnic minority’s lower status in society and contribute to a negative or hostile racial climate (Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2011).

When specifically examining the impact of racial and ethnic microaggressions, individuals have reported an array of negative psychological, physical, and psychosocial outcomes in quantitative and qualitative investigations. These effects have included increased anxiety, depression, perceived stress, anger, frustration, scorn/contempt, resentment, anxiety, shame, embarrassment, self-doubt, frustration, fatigue/exhaustion, discouragement, negative affect, somatic symptoms, alcohol misuse, and feeling powerless or invisible (Blume, Lovato, Thyken, & Denny, 2012; Ong et al., 2013; Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2008; Torres et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2011). Racial and ethnic minorities exposed to microaggressions have also reported negative impacts on the quality of interpersonal relationships with therapists, work or school peers,



instructors/professors, and training supervisors (Constantine, 2007; Constantine & Sue, 2007; Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2008).

Adding to the complexity of racial and ethnic microaggressions is determining whether or not one has been committed by the recipient. During focus groups, Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder (2008) found that the interpretations of microaggressions fell into five distinct communication categories: “You are not trustworthy,” “You are abnormal,” “You are intellectually inferior,” “You do not belong,” and “You are all the same.” They also found that the task of identifying racial and ethnic microaggressions created what he referred to as a “catch- 22” or a “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” thought process. They asserted that due to the covert nature of microaggressions, a racial and ethnic minority is left to determine if what was perceived was in fact a racial affront. If decided that a message did contain a racial connotation, the racial and ethnic minority must then elect to either respond to the microaggression or remain silent. In essence, the racial and ethnic minority must either risk looking paranoid and sensitive or they must suffer through muteness and deny their awareness of racism in their experience. Sue (2004) suggested that the emotional energy required in detecting, analyzing, and responding to a racial and ethnic microaggression is taxing on the recipients.

Another study that sheds light on the confusion that racial and ethnic microaggression recipients experience was conducted by Mendes, Major, McCoy and Blascovich (2008). When examining the physiological effects that racial discrimination (in the form of ambiguous social rejection) has on racial and ethnic minority individuals,

they were able to measure increased cardiovascular reactivity when victims were confronted with interracial discrimination. Furthermore, the recipients overwhelmingly reported having been aware of their increasingly activated physiological state during what they felt was race-based ostracism. Mendes et al (2008) showed that while logically the recipient was trying to determine if racism had been experienced, physically the recipient's body was already indicating that in fact racism had occurred. This study, along with Sue's (2004) catch-22 phenomenon, illustrated the underlying sources of confusion that a person might experience after a racial and ethnic microaggression. Although microaggressions occurred in almost every interracial encounter due to the analysis of those encounters, Hernandez, Carranza, & Almeida (2010) found that the process also included the recipient's understanding that even though they knew racism existed, they reminded themselves that not every situation should be interpreted as racially significant. Experiencing racial and ethnic microaggressions leads to internal dialogue and self-talk in an effort to clarify the intent of the perpetrator. This denotes an intentional interpersonal disconnect to avoid additional negative judgment and harm to the ego.

In light of a social climate wherein racial/ethnic group majority people and other special populations (e.g., women, people with disabilities, GLBTQ) also report interpersonal slights, and the phenomenon of increasing reports of 'bullying' in all social environments, the examination of one's identity formation, self-regulatory processes, and cognitive processes by which one interprets an experience with microaggressions

becomes even more imperative. This is especially the case, given that such life exposures have been identified as the primary cause of both homicidal and suicidal behaviors (Klien, Connell, & Konold. 2012; Mayes, et. al, 2014). The purpose of this study is to specifically examine to what degree does ethnic identity development, differentiation of self, and cognitive complexity, particularly need for cognition and tolerance of ambiguity, contribute to reports of experienced racial and ethnic microaggressions.

There are many aspects of racial and ethnic microaggressions that remain unanswered, which opens this construct to stirring and promising research. There are unlimited influences to consider in terms of why it is important to study racial and ethnic microaggressions. Based on the literature, thus far, the negative impact of racial and ethnic microaggressions on psychological and physical health is well-documented; however, research that would help deconstruct specific mechanisms in which racial and ethnic microaggressions are processed by the recipient, have yet to be explored. For instance, Sue (2004) suggested that the considerable emotional energy required in detecting, analyzing, and responding to a microaggression is quite taxing on the recipient, however, this process has not been clearly delineated. Little is known about the typically un-examined variance in an individual's racial/ethnic identity formation, cognitive processing, as well as affective processes that may impact the way in which they detect and analyze racial and ethnic microaggressions.

For example, historically, many racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States have endured different conditions of marginalization and oppression. As a result, for

some racial and ethnic minority individuals, race and ethnicity is highly salient (Arce, 1981). Potentially, individuals who choose an in-group may become highly sensitive to environmental cues related to that aspect of their in-group (Hornsey, 2008; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). For instance, experiences with racism call attention to an individual's racial or ethnic group. Because the individual identifies with a particular in-group, and since he/she is sensitive to cues (i.e., racism) against the in-group, the individual is likely to be more sensitive to challenges against the in-group. Research on racial and ethnic microaggressions as it relates to one's ethnic identity development has not been clearly explained.

### **Ethnic Identity Development**

Ethnic identity emerged in social psychology out of social identity theory. Social identity theory posits that belonging to social groups (e.g. religious groups or occupational groups) serves an important basis for one's identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Membership in a group(s), as well as one's value and emotional significance attached to this membership, is an important part of one's self-concept. Social identity theory emphasizes a need to maintain a positive sense of self.

Therefore, in respect to ethnic identity, this stresses affirmation to and salience of ethnic group membership(s). In light of this, affirmation of ethnicity has been proposed to be more salient among groups who have faced greater discrimination, in order to maintain self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Many tend to think of race and ethnicity as one and the same. Often, the words are used interchangeably. However, these two words

do have separate meanings. Race is primarily associated with the physical features of a person, whereas ethnicity is associated with culture (Jones, 1997).

Some researchers believe that the idea of race and ethnicity has been socially constructed (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Hornsey, 2008). This is because their definitions change over time, based on widely accepted public opinion. Race was once believed to be due to genetic differences and biological morphologies. This belief gave way to racism, the idea of racial superiority and inferiority. For example, when Italian immigrants began arriving in the United States, they were not considered part of the “white race.” The same is true of Irish and Eastern European immigrants. The widely accepted view that these individuals were not white led to restrictions of immigration policies and on the entrance of “non-white” immigrants. In fact, during this time, people from these areas were considered of the “Alpine” or “Mediterranean” races. Today, these race categories no longer exist. Instead, due to later policy changes, people from these groups began to be accepted into the wider “white” race. They are now identified as individual ethnic groups. Which shows that, like the idea of race, the idea of ethnicity also changes over time based on widely held public opinion. Ethnic identity is believed to promote group cohesiveness, particularly in communities of immigrants.

People of color in the United States are generally considered members of devalued groups (Jones, 1997). Tajfel (1978) predicted that groups held in low regard by society would internalize these negative attitudes and would be adversely affected. However, research on African Americans has not borne out his prediction. In a meta-

analysis of hundreds of studies of self-esteem, researchers found that African Americans have consistently reported self-esteem that is as high or even higher than European Americans (Twenge & Crocker, 2002). Given consistent findings on the relationship between self-esteem and minority group membership, researchers began to explore ethnic identity as a mediating factor. Many developmental and social psychologists regard ethnic identity as one of many facets of an individual's social identity (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Living in the United States, where there are many different ethnic groups coexisting in society, makes one's ethnicity highly salient, especially as the numbers of ethnic "minorities" grow and move toward surpassing the European American "majority." Multiple models of ethnic identity development have been proposed for African Americans, Latino Americans, and European Americans (e.g., Arce, 1981; Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990, respectively).

Ethnic identity development has been heavily researched in recent decades, mostly focusing on Phinney's model which defines ethnic identity as a sense of personal investment and attachment to one's ethnic group (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Jean Phinney (1989) developed a three-stage model of ethnic identity formation to describe the process by which individuals come to understand their ethnicity and make decisions about its role in their lives. The first stage, *unexamined ethnic identity*, is often marked by a lack of interest in ethnicity, or diffusion, or views of ethnicity that are based on the opinions of others. During stage two, *ethnic identity search*, ethnicity is explored in which an individual learns about what it means to be a member of a certain ethnic group. Lastly,

stage three, *achieved ethnic identity*, is characterized by a commitment to and appreciation of one's ethnic group. According to Phinney (1992), ethnic identity achievement often means acknowledgment of two fundamental problems for ethnic minorities: (a) cultural differences between their own group and the dominant group and (b) the lower or disparaged status of their group in society. Phinney approached ethnic identity as more of a universal experience and created a single brief measure, called the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), to assess the construct in all ethnicities. This measure has been widely used since it was first published two decades ago (Phinney & Ong, 2007)

Ethnic identity has been found to be associated with positive adjustment (Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005; Smith & Silva, 2011; Thompson & Kiang, 2010). While ethnic identity has generally been suggested as a protective factor in relation to mental health outcomes (Kiang, Yip, Gonzales-Backen, Witkow, & Fuligni, 2006; Shelton et al., 2005; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003; Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2008), some studies have suggested ethnic identity can exacerbate negative experiences and worsen mental health outcomes. For instance, for some African Americans who have a strong ethnic identity, racial discrimination was more likely to be reported (Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Shelton & Sellers, 2000). It might be that for some African Americans, ethnic or racial identity attitudes are the lens through which many interracial interactions are interpreted. That is, depending on one's ethnic and racial identity attitudes, potentially ambiguous situations that may not be explicitly racist (e.g. racial and ethnic microaggressions) are

interpreted as being prejudicial or discriminatory (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). It would also follow that potentially having a strong racial or ethnic identity may lead to poorer psychological outcomes specifically related to racism. Research that suggests the possibility that strong identification with a group and experiences with racism are related to increased psychological distress, were found among Latinos (McCoy & Major, 2003), African Americans (Operario & Fiske, 2001), and among Asians (Noh et al., 1999). Therefore, it is possible that depending on the extent of affiliation an individual holds, racial identity and ethnic identity may predict the psychological distress related to racism and affect the individual's psychological well-being.

Although most identity development research focuses on the psychosocial process of defining the self, recent research has examined the extent to which identity may influence cognition (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Torres, Jones, & Renn, , 2009; Berzonsky, 2010) . For example, Abes and Jones' study (2004) explored 10 lesbian college students' identity development through a narrative inquiry methodology. Their analysis revealed the role of meaning-making capacity and its relationship with identity development. Abes and Jones posited that the presence of a diverse perspective within an individual's cognitive development may emphasize the role that contexts play within their meaning-making process. Thus, marginalized identities might facilitate cognitive development and lead toward a more cognitively complex individual. For instance, dominant identity individuals may have difficulty in understanding the need to critically analyze a potentially prejudiced or discriminative



interaction (Pizzalto, 2003). Conversely, marginalized identity individuals may readily see a need for critical analysis. These assertions lend credence to the importance of examining the role of ethnic identity development and the processes by which one detects and analyzes their experiences with racial-cultural stressors.

### **Cognitive Complexity**

Cognitive complexity is the psychological characteristic or variable that shows how complex or simple the frame and perceptual skills of a person are (Streufert & Swezey, 1986). It is the extent to which a person differentiates and integrates an event. A person who measures highly on cognitive complexity, tends to observe subtle differences; while a person with a less complex cognitive structure does not. In general, human thought processes tend to automatically categorize things based largely on surface information. This adaptive process allows people to quickly perceive the meaning of a given stimulus and move onto other things that require more elaborate cognition. These mental snapshots can be pretty accurate, but when this automatic categorization is applied to extremely complex human beings, particularly in regards to racial and ethnic background, impressions can be incorrect. Thus, the normal ways by which we simplify the world and our experiences can lead to underlying prejudice that may be a by-product of social categories (Mullen, Pizzuto, & Foels, 2002).

### *Cognitive Complexity and Racism*

Reid and Foels' (2010) study examined how cognitive complexity is related to the perception of subtle racism. The results of the research suggest that the perception of

subtle racism is related to cognitive complexity. Social context is rich with information that helps us to better understand an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Individuals that were higher in cognitive complexity were attuned to the situational indicators of subtle racism such as perpetrator intent and victim harm. Therefore, the more cognitively complex a person presents, the less prejudiced they are.

Studies have also shown that lower cognitive complexity is significantly related to low levels of White racial identity, which is typically associated with attitudes related to racist thinking (Steward, 1998). One study suggested that those who gravitate toward socially conservative ideologies were more inclined to form and hold racist and prejudice views, because the conservative ideologies stress hierarchy and “resistance to change” (Hodson & Busseri, 2012). Hodson and Busseri (2012) found that lower general intelligence in childhood predicts greater racism in adulthood. They compared 254 individuals with the same level of education, but had varying levels of ability in abstract reasoning. The comparison found that people who were worse at abstract reasoning were also more likely to exhibit prejudice, with this effect being mediated through conservative ideology. A secondary analysis also confirmed a predictive effect that people with lower cognitive abilities were found to interact less with individuals of other races. Socially conservative ideologies tend to offer structure and order, and these beliefs might draw those with low intelligence. Unfortunately, many of these features can also contribute to prejudice. Those who are less-tolerant fall on the slightly close-minded side, perhaps because they lack the ability to think abstractly or critically about information for

themselves. Though research has linked conservative ideologies to a stronger inclination to form racist and prejudice views, liberalism and systematic racism are not necessarily antithetical (Hodson & Busseri, 2012).

### *Cognitive Complexity and the Need for Cognition*

Need for cognition has been conceptualized as a construct of cognitive complexity. Need for Cognition is defined as the tendency to engage in and enjoy cognitive efforts (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). The nature of racial and ethnic microaggressions is considered to be subtle and overt; need for cognition may be indicative of one's inclination to detect and analyze these experiences beyond face-value. An individual with a high Need for Cognition finds satisfaction in thinking whereas an individual with a low Need for Cognition perceives thinking as a chore, in which they engage only when some incentive is present (Cacioppo et al., 1996). Research in psychology has demonstrated clear links between variations in Need for Cognition and some aspects of information behavior studied in information science. Individuals with a high Need for Cognition are more likely to engage in information seeking activities than individuals with a low Need for Cognition (Cacioppo et al., 1996). An individual with a high Need for Cognition will also seek more information, evaluate more thoroughly the quality of the information found, be more likely to rely on all of the pertinent information (as opposed to relying on simple cues), and use a wider variety of information sources, including sources that were previously unknown (Cacioppo et al., 1996; Petty et al., 2009). Last, simple messages tend to be more accepted by individuals with a low Need

for Cognition, but rejected by individuals with a high Need for Cognition, and vice versa (Williams-Piehotka et al., 2003)

Need for cognition is a stable and gender-neutral variable (Cacioppo & Petty 1982; Cacioppo et al. 1996,) with predictable consequences for information behavior. However, despite one's level in Need for Cognition, behaviors can be moderated at times by situational factors such as personal relevance of the situation or external contingencies surrounding a task, as indicated by Lewin's (1936) dictum on the importance of both the person and the environment. Literature indicates that differences between individuals of low and high Need for Cognition are more perceptible in situations with a moderate level of personal relevance (Cacioppo et al., 1996,). For instance, a message of high personal relevance, or one with emotional content, can motivate an individual with a lower need for cognition to scrutinize the information at hand more carefully (Petty et al., 2009). In other circumstances, a message that is framed for people who do not like to think or one that is of no relevance at all might be simply ignored by an individual with a high Need for Cognition, as it would be maladaptive for one to think extensively about every stimulus in one's daily life (Petty et al., 2009; Cacioppo et al., 1996).

In terms of experiences with racial-cultural stressors such as racial and ethnic microaggressions, Sue et. al (2007) posited that adding to the complexity of racial and ethnic microaggressions is determining whether or not one has been committed. Further, it was asserted that much effort is expended in detecting and analyzing racial and ethnic microaggressions. Thus, it is of importance to examine the role of need for cognition in

one's detection and analysis of their reported experiences with racial and ethnic microaggressions.

*Cognitive Complexity and Tolerance for Ambiguity*

Tolerance for ambiguity has also been conceptualized as a construct of cognitive complexity. Tolerance for ambiguity was originally developed by Frenkel-Brunswik (1948) in which it is described as an "emotional and perceptual personality variable." Frenkel-Brunswik's definition of tolerance for ambiguity generalizes the various aspects of emotional and cognitive functioning of an individual. She stated that those who are intolerant of ambiguity have a tendency to resort to black-and-white solutions, making rapid and overconfident judgment, often at the neglect of reality

Budner (1962) extended Frenkel-Brunswik's definition of tolerance of ambiguity as "the tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as desirable or threatening." Due to the subtle, ambiguous nature of racial and ethnic microaggressions, perception of these experiences as either threatening, or desirable warrants further investigation. In addition to extended Frenkel-Brunswik's definition, Budner conceptualized three types of ambiguous situations: *novelty*, *complexity*, and *insolubility*. *Novelty* situations are the extent to which one is tolerant of new, unfamiliar information or situations. *Complexity* situations are the extent to which one is tolerant of multiple, distinctive, or unrelated information. Lastly, *Insolubility* is the extent to which one is tolerant of problems that are difficult to solve because alternative solutions are not evident. Additionally, for those with low tolerance of ambiguity, there is an aversive reaction to ambiguous

situations because the lack of information makes it difficult to assess risk and correctly make a decision. These situations are perceived as a threat and source of discomfort. Reactions to the perceived threat are stress, avoidance, delay, suppression, or denial (1962). Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007) described racial and ethnic microaggressions as being more subtle or ambiguous than other forms of perceived discrimination. They also found that the task of identifying racial and ethnic microaggressions created what they referred to as a “catch- 22” thought process. Due to the covert nature of racial and ethnic microaggressions, a racial and ethnic minority is left to determine if what was perceived was in fact a racial affront. Additionally, when considering the ambiguous nature of racial and ethnic microaggressions, the intent of the perpetrator may be hard to discern. Thus, it is of importance to examine the role of tolerance of ambiguity in one’s reported experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions.

Due to the emotional energy required in detecting, analyzing, and responding to a racial and ethnic microaggression, the means by which racial-cultural stressors are affectively processed must also be considered. If decided that a message does contain a racial connotation, the racial and ethnic minority must then elect to either respond to the microaggression or remain silent (Sue, 2004). In essence, the racial and ethnic minority must also identify and use feedback related to their affective state to make judgments about current situations (Schwarz, 1990; Schwarz & Clore, 1996).

## **Differentiation of Self**

Differentiation of self has been conceptualized as a means to determine affective responses (Bowen, 1978). Differentiation of self is defined as the capacity of a system and its members to manage emotional reactivity and act thoughtfully under stress. It is thought to operate on both an intrapersonal and interpersonal level (Skowron, Van Epps, & Cipriano). The construct of differentiation of self involves a capacity for self-regulation—that is, an ability to distinguish between thinking and feeling systems, comfort with one's feelings, and capacity to access them freely. Additionally, differentiation of self involves the ability to achieve a solid sense of self, identify and express one's personal thoughts and perspectives. According to this theory, people who are more differentiated tend to have greater autonomy in their relationships, without feeling smothered or experiencing debilitating fear of abandonment (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). During stressful times, poorly differentiated people tend to experience higher levels of anxiety and dysfunction.

Four factors are indicators of a person's level of differentiation of self: emotional reactivity, the ability to take an I-position, emotional cut-off, and fusion with others (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). *Emotional Reactivity* is conceptualized to encompass how individuals direct their energy toward experience, expression, and intensity of their feelings. Highly differentiated individuals experience strong emotions, but are not consumed by them, and are able to consider alternative ways of thinking or being. *I Position* is the ability of an individual to take independent positions in

relationships and maintain personal convictions when pressured by others to do otherwise. Highly differentiated individuals are capable of being more self-directed and rely on their own thoughts and feelings rather than conforming to others' expectations or beliefs. *Emotional Cutoff* represents the person that finds intimacy and emotionality profoundly threatening. When internal experiences or interpersonal interactions are too intense, poorly differentiated individuals isolate themselves from others, as well as from their emotions. Differentiated individuals do not feel this need to cut themselves off emotionally. They are not afraid that they will lose their identity, having resolved problematic emotional attachments to their family of origin or close loved ones. *Fusion with Others* represents the extent to which a person is overly involved or fused with individuals that they have an emotional relationship with.

#### *Differentiation of Self and Discrimination*

Research has used outcomes of psychological distress and stress-related health problems to conceptualize discrimination as a chronic stressor (Broudy, et al., 2007; Clark, Anderson, Clark & Williams, 1999; Lopez, 2005; Ong, Fuller-Rowell, & Burrow, 2009; Outlaw, 1993). Race/ethnicity-related stress has been positively associated with depression, even when general stress has been controlled (Wei, Liao, et al., 2010). A study by Ong, Fuller-Rowell, and Burrow (2009) examined the influence of chronic discrimination on daily mental health in a sample of African Americans. The authors found that chronic discrimination influenced mental health negatively through an accumulation or “bundling of daily negative events across multiple life domains (e.g.,



family, friends, finances, health)” (p. 1267). In a study of the effects of discrimination on mood and social interactions, Broudy and colleagues (2007) found that exposure to discrimination was associated with negative mood (i.e., anger, sadness, and nervousness) and perceptions of discriminative daily social interactions as harassing or exclusionary. The effects of discrimination on mood and social interaction were present when individual variables were controlled, thus supporting the conceptualization of discrimination as a stressor, rather than just an individual’s negative perception of others’ actions.

Research has begun to examine how a target’s affect may inform attributions to discrimination (Moradi & Risco, 2006). One’s affect has been conceptualized as a means for the individual to identify and use feedback related to their internal psychological state to make judgments about current situations (Schwarz, 1990; Schwarz & Clore, 1996). This affect-as-information approach regards affective states as tools the person may use to process information and, therefore, make judgments and decisions (Sechrist, Swim, & Mark, 2003). Affect is used when making judgments, particularly when there is 1) no salient external source deemed responsible for the affective state, 2) when the situation provides minimal information, 3) when the decision requires complex processing, or 4) when a time constraint is involved (Clore, Gasper, & Garvin, 2001; Clore, Schwarz, & Conway, 1994). This information may be used to make attributions to discrimination. However, due to the subtle nature in which racism presents itself in modern times (e.g. racial and ethnic microaggressions), an external source may not be readily identifiable;

therefore, the affective response may be an important cue about the situation, particularly whether the situation actually involves discrimination (Schwarz, 1990; Schwarz & Bless, 1991; Schwarz & Clore, 1988). Thus, it is important to examine how racial-cultural stressors, such as racial and ethnic microaggressions, are affectively processed, in addition to cognitively processed.

**The relationship between experiences of microaggressions, cognitive complexity, and differentiation of self.**

Davis' (2015) thesis research sought to enhance understanding of the relationship between an individual's self-regulation- that is, the ability to manage emotional reactivity and act thoughtfully under stress, by examining reports of interpersonal verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities and the cognitive mechanisms used to detect and analyze them. Specifically, she examined the degree to which Black/African American participants (race-ethnicity status), reported experiences with microaggressions, need for cognition (cognitive complexity construct), and tolerance for ambiguity (cognitive complexity construct), predict the variance within individual responses (differentiation of self). Overall, findings suggested that those who were more inclined toward effortful cognitive activities, more tolerant of ambiguous messages and situations, and who reported experiences of microaggressions to a lesser degree, are significantly associated with the ability to manage emotional reactivity under stress to a greater degree. Specifically, the analysis showed that need for cognition and reported experiences with microaggressions were significant variables that predicted differentiation of self. Thus,

participants who reported a preference or enjoyment for engaging in reflection and thought and reported fewer experiences of microaggressions, also reported greater containment of emotions during stressful, traumatic experiences.

In addition, there was a strong, positive correlation between need for cognition and differentiation of self and need for cognition and tolerance for ambiguity. Therefore, those who have a preference toward effortful cognitive activities were significantly associated with the ability to manage their emotional reactivity under stress to a greater degree. Also, the participants in this sample who have a preference toward effortful cognitive activities tended to report scores that indicated a lesser degree to perceive threat from experiences that are new, not easily understood, and had no resolution immediately accessible.

The findings confirmed that an individual's differentiation of self-or their capacities for autonomous, independent thinking and emotional regulation was accounted for by reported experiences of microaggressions, tolerance of ambiguous situations and messages, and inclination toward effortful cognitive activities. The role of differentiation of self is emphasized among the participants in the study. The study suggests Black participants who have a greater preference to engage in reflection and thought (NFC) also report greater containment of emotions during stressful and traumatic experiences (differentiation of self). In previous studies of discrimination (e.g., Sanders-Thompson, 1996) and race-related stress (e.g., Clark et al., 1999; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996), exposure to such experiences are related to psychological (e.g., anxiety) and physical

distress (e.g., increased blood pressure). These finds are of particular importance because Davis' study is the first study to examine the relationships between individuals' experiences and responses to racism, particularly a subtle form of racism, by examining cognitive processes underlining their perceptions.

The purpose of the present research is to extend Davis' (2015) thesis research by enhancing understanding of the relationship between individuals' experiences of the everyday manifestation of racism at the interpersonal level, by examining one's sense of personal investment and attachment to one's ethnic group and the cognitive mechanisms used to detect, analyze, and respond to the everyday manifestation of racism. The present research will examine the relationship between reported experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions, ethnic identity development, cognitive complexity, and differentiation of self.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants**

The participants in this study consisted of three hundred ninety three participants ( $n= 393$ ); of these, three hundred eight participants ( $n= 308$ ), 78% were female and eighty-two ( $n=82$ ), 21% were male. Three participants ( $n= 3$ ), 1 % selected other, identifying themselves as non-binary. The range of ages was 18 to 73 years old with a mean age of 28.25 years old. All participants had the opportunity to participate in the study, but for the purpose of Doctoral Dissertation those who identified their ethnicity as African Origin; African American or Black or European Origin or White will be used for statistical analysis. Only participants who identified their ethnicity as African Origin; African American or Black and European Origin or White were selected to be used for statistical analysis because they have the greatest representation among the participant pool.

One hundred twenty-four (32%) participants identified their ethnicity as African Origin, African American or Black. Of these participants 105 (85%) were female and 19 (15%) were male. The range of ages was 18 to 73 years old with a mean age of 28.77 years old. One hundred twelve (90%) participants were from the United States and 12 (10%) participants were international. Thirty-five (28%) participants' highest level of education was high school; 16 (13%) participants completed an associate's degree; 43 (35%) participants completed a bachelor's degree; 25 (20%) completed a master's

degree; 2 (2%) participants completed a specialist level degree; and 3 (2%) participants completed a doctorate degree.

One hundred eighty-nine (48%) participants identified as European Origin or White. Of these participants 134 (80%) were female, 52 (28%) were male, and 3 (2%) identified as gender non-binary. The range of ages was 18 to 73 years old with a mean age of 29.55 years old. One hundred sixty-four (87%) participants were from the United States and 24 (12%) participants were international. Seventy-eight (41%) participants' highest level of education was high school; 13 (7%) participants completed an associate's degree; 66 (35%) participants completed a bachelor's degree; 21 (11%) completed a master's degree; 1 (.5%) participants completed a specialist level degree; and 13 (7%) participants completed a doctorate degree.

Participants were recruited using the Stephen F. Austin State University Human Services department subject pool (i.e. Sona-System) and from social media outlets including Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Tumblr. A research lottery was offered as an incentive for participation. Participants were awarded in-class credit, if recruited through Sona-system. All participants were entered in a drawing to win a \$100 Amazon gift card. Participants were at least 18 years or older. Informed consent was provided to the participants in the study. Participation in this study was voluntary, and refusal to participate did not involve penalty or loss of benefits.

The approval process for this study consisted of completing an application of approval of research involving the use of human subjects for Stephen F. Austin State

University Institutional Review Board. Data collection occurred from June 26, 2015 through June 25, 2016.

### **Dependent Variable.**

**The Racial Ethnic Microaggressions Scale-Checklist.** The Racial Ethnic Microaggression Scale-Checklist (REMS-checklist; Nadal, 2011) is a 45 item scale that uses dichotomous answers (1 and 0). Participants answered 0 they did not experience each racial microaggression event, and 1 if they did experience it in the last six months. The scale takes 15 minutes to complete. The scale measures racial microaggressions using six subscales: (1) *Assumptions of Inferiority* (8 items)- when people of color are assumed to be poor or hold substandard careers, (2) *Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality* (7 items)- Occurs when a person with social privilege is given preferential treatment over people with oppressed identities and experiences in which people of color are stereotyped to be deviant or criminals, (3) *Microinvalidations* (9 items)- unconscious verbal statements in which the perpetrator may have good intentions, but which convey negative messages to people of color, (4) *Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity* (9 items)- assumptions of being foreign based on race, (5) *Environmental Microaggressions* (7 items) - Ways in which larger systems beyond the individual realm (such as institutional policies and practices) work to maintain systems of privilege and oppression., and (6) *Workplace and School Microaggressions* (5 items)- when people of color are assumed to be uneducated or hold substandard careers. A maximum score of 45 can be obtained and will indicate high levels of experience with racial microaggressions.

The REMS-checklist reports having an overall Cronbach's alpha of .91 and subscales ranging from .78 to .87. The validity of the REMS-checklist was assessed by analyzing correlations with scales that measure modern racism such as the Racism and Life Experiences-Self-Administration Version (RaLES-S; Utsey, 1998, as cited in Nadal, 2011). Each subscale produced a coefficient alpha well over .80— Subscale 1: Assumptions of Inferiority ( $\alpha = .89$ ), Subscale 2: Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality ( $\alpha = .88$ ), Subscale 3: Microinvalidations ( $\alpha = .89$ ), Subscale 4: Exoticization/ Assumptions of Similarity ( $\alpha = .85$ ), Subscale 5: Environmental Microaggressions ( $\alpha = .85$ ), and Subscale 6: Workplace and School Microaggressions ( $\alpha = .85$ ). The REMS-45 produced high internal reliabilities with all major racial groups—Black/African Americans ( $\alpha = .92$ ), Latina/os ( $\alpha = .91$ ), Asian Americans ( $\alpha = .91$ ), and multiracial persons ( $\alpha = .92$ ). The REMS-45 Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the REMS-45 in the current study is .92. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the REMS-45 Assumptions of Inferiority subscale is .89. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the REMS-45 *Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality* subscale is .88. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the REMS-45 *Microinvalidations* subscale is .85. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the REMS-45 *Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity* subscale is .76. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the REMS-45 *Environmental Microaggressions* subscale is .82. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the REMS-45 *Workplace and School*



*Microaggressions* subscale is .82. The high correlations obtained suggest that the REMS-checklist is a valid measure of racial microaggressions.

### **Independent Variables.**

**Demographic questionnaire.** The demographic questionnaire consists of questions regarding the participants' gender, age, race, ethnicity, student classification, highest level of education completed, and point of origin of the participant.

**The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM).** The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992) is a 15-item measure designed for use with all ethnic groups and contains 15 items, 12 to which participants respond using a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The total score is obtained by summing across items and deriving the mean. In addition to the composite score, two subscales can be derived: the *Affirmation, Belonging, and commitment (ABC)* subscale, which measures an affective component of Ethnicity identity, and the *Ethnic identity search (EIS)* subscale, which measures a developmental and cognitive component of ethnic identity. Multiple-groups confirmatory factor analyses provided evidence of measurement invariance suggests that the MEIM-R could be used to measure and compare ethnic identity across multiple racial and ethnic groups, including varied ethnicities among Whites (Brown, et al., 2014). The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the MEIM-R is typically above .80. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the MEIM-R in the current study is .92. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the MEIM-R *Ethnic identity search (EIS)* subscale is .77. The Cronbach's

alpha reliability coefficient for the MEIM-R *Affirmation, Belonging, and commitment (ABC)* subscale is .92. The high correlations obtained suggest that the MEIM-R is a valid measure of ethnic identity development

**Need for Cognition Scale.** Need for Cognition Scale (NFC-SF; Cacioppo et al., 1982), is an 18-item measure that assesses an individual's desire for effortful cognitive activities (Cacioppo et al., 1996). The scale takes 5 minutes to complete. Example items include “the idea of relying on thought to make my way to the top appeals to me” and “I only think as hard as I have to”. Items were evaluated on a Likert-scale from 1 (extremely uncharacteristic) to 5 (extremely characteristic). The possible range of scores was from 17 to 90. Higher scores on the NCS–SF represent more favorable attitudes toward cognitive effort. The NFC-SF scale demonstrated good reliability, Cronbach's alpha=.83. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the NFC in current study is .87. The high correlations obtained suggest that the NFC-SF is a valid measure that assesses an individual's desire for effortful cognitive activities.

**Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale (TAS).** Tolerance of ambiguity is defined as “the tendency to perceive situations as threatening rather than promising” (Budner, 1962). Lack of information or uncertainty, for example, would make such a person uncomfortable. Budner devised a 16-item (half positive statements and half negative statements) scale that takes 5 minutes to complete. He argued that each item had to tap at least one postulated indicator of perceived threat, namely phenomenological submissions or denial, operative submission or denial. Items referred to one of either of three types of

ambiguous situations: *novelty* or new situation (4 items), *complexity* or situations that are complicated (9 items), and *insolubility* or situations in which a resolution is not readily available (3 items). All responses are based on a 7-point scale, from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The possible range of scores was from 16 to 112. High scores indicate a greater intolerance for ambiguity. The scale was validated on 17 different, mainly student, populations and shown to be free of acquiescent and social desirability response tendencies. The average scoring reflects scores in ranges of 44-48. The scale has an average internal reliability of .59 (Cronbach alpha). Although the test correlation was good (0.85) the internal alpha was poor (0.49), Budner (1962) argues that the low internal consistency of his measure is due to the complex nature of the concept of tolerance for ambiguity. Budner contends that the more complex a construct and its corresponding measure are, the lower the reliability estimate may be as a result. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the TOA in the current study is .51.

**The Differentiation of Self Inventory.** The Differentiation of Self Inventory (STAI; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998) is a 43- item, self-report instrument that was developed to examine propositions of Bowen's differentiation of self construct. Skowron and Friedlander (1998) reported that, on an intrapersonal level, differentiation of self refers to "the ability to distinguish between the emotional system and the intellectual system and to decide which of the two takes precedence in a given situation". The scale takes 15 minutes to complete. Internal consistency reliabilities were moderate to high for the full scale DSI ( $\alpha = .88$ ). The following four subscales underlie the DSI (Skowron &

Friedlander, 1998) and are defined in the following way: (1) *Emotional Reactivity* (11 items)- subscale reflects the degree to which a person responds to environmental stimuli with emotional flooding, emotional lability, or hypersensitivity. Internal consistency for the subscales were Emotional Reactivity  $\alpha = .88$ . (2) *"I Position"* (11 items)- reflect a clearly defined sense of self and the ability to thoughtfully adhere to one's convictions when pressured to do otherwise. Internal consistency for the subscales were I Position  $\alpha = .85$ . (3) *Emotional Cutoff* (12 items)- reflects feeling threatened by intimacy and feeling excessive vulnerability in relations with others. Internal consistency for the subscales were Emotional Cutoff  $\alpha = .79$ . (4) *Fusion with Others* (9 items)- reflects emotional overinvolvement with others, including triangulation and overidentification with parents. Internal consistency for the subscales were Fusion with Others  $\alpha = .70$ . The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the DSI in current study is .80. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the DSI *Emotional Reactivity* subscale is .72. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the DSI *I-position* subscale is .82. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the DSI *Emotional cutoff* subscale is .69. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the DSI *Fusion with others* subscale is .63.

### **Design**

The study design is correlational in that it examined relationships between the following variables: reported experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions, ethnic identity development, need for cognition, tolerance for ambiguity, and differentiation of self. Pearson product correlations will be computed to identify significant relationships

and note the existence of any multicollinearity, to guide decision-making about the inclusion of variables in the regression model. A multiple regression analysis will be performed to examine the degree to which need for cognition, and subscale scores of the ethnic identity development, tolerance of ambiguity, and differentiation of self are significantly associated with the variance in reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions in a sample of participants who identified their ethnicity as African Origin; African American and Black or European Origin or White. A secondary analysis, consisting of a chi-square analysis, will be performed to examine differences in frequency of types of reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions found by ethnic group. A third analysis, consisting of an independent samples t-test will compare the means of scores on the ethnic identity development, need for cognition, tolerance for ambiguity, differentiation of self, and racial and ethnic microaggression measures between participants who identified their ethnicity as African Origin; African American and Black or European Origin or White.

The primary analysis will include ethnic identity development, need for cognition, tolerance for ambiguity, and differentiation of self measures as the independent variables. The measure consisting reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions will serve as the dependent variable. A multiple regression will be used to examine the relationship between several independent or predictor variables and a dependent or criterion variable (Kerlinger & Pedhazur, 1973). A multiple regression analysis will be conducted to explore to what degree do ethnic identity development, cognitive complexity (the need

for cognition and tolerance of ambiguity), and differentiation of self predict the variance within reported experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions. The purpose of multiple linear regression analysis was used to develop a model for predicting. Two regression models were administered because two the distinct ethnic groups (e.g. African Origin/African American/ or Black; European Origin/White) included in the analysis. This is a study of perception and to better understand the multiple perspectives, two models were required. It is also important to run two analyses to examine the within group diversity, respecting previous findings that support the heterogeneity within ethnic groups.

The secondary analysis will include an independent samples *t*-test to compare the means of two independent groups in order to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different. An independent samples *t*-test to compare the means of scores on the ethnic identity development, need for cognition, tolerance for ambiguity, differentiation of self, and racial and ethnic microaggression measures between participants who identified their ethnicity as African Origin; African American and Black or European Origin or White.

### **Procedure**

All procedures in this study were approved by the Institutional Review Board of Stephen F. Austin State University. Participants were recruited using the Stephen F. Austin State University Human Services department subject pool (i.e. Sona-System) and from social media outlets including Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Tumblr. In-class

credit and a research lottery was offered as an incentive for participation. All participants were entered into a drawing to win a \$100 Amazon gift card. Participants were at least 18 years or older. Data collection occurred from June 26, 2015 through June 25, 2016.

The measures in this study were administered online through [www.sfasu.qualtrics.com](http://www.sfasu.qualtrics.com). The participants were presented with an informed consent form that explained the voluntary participation in the study, and its potential risks and benefits. Specifically, participants were told that the study was designed to examine the social significance of understanding how individuals perceive and interpret everyday experiences with racism. Participants were given the option to participate, or refuse to participate and were informed that they will not be penalized in any way if they decided not to participate. After completing an informed consent form, participants completed the demographic questionnaire. After completing the demographic questionnaire, the participants completed the research packet consisting of the DSI, REMS-checklist, MEIM-R, TAS, and the NFC. Participants completed the survey packet in 45 minutes. After completion of the research questionnaire, the participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation in the study.

## Chapter 4

### Results

The sample consisted of three hundred thirteen participants ( $n= 313$ ); of these 124 (32%) participants identified their ethnicity as African Origin, African American or Black. Of these participants 105 (85%) were female and 19 (15%) were male. The range of ages was 18 to 73 years old with a mean age of 28.77 years old. One hundred twelve (90%) participants were from the United States and 12 (10%) participants were international

One hundred eighty-nine (48%) participants identified as European Origin or White. Of these participants 134 (80%) were female, 52 (28%) were male, and 3 (2%) identified as gender non-binary. The range of ages was 18 to 73 years old with a mean age of 29.55 years old. One hundred sixty-four (87%) participants were from the United States and 24 (12%) participants were international.

The mean score for the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale-45 (REMS-45) (Nadal, 2011) for participants who identified their ethnicity as African Origin, African American or Black was 19.58 ( $SD= 9.73$ ). The mean score for the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale-45 (REMS-45) for participants who identified as European Origin or White was 11.84 ( $SD= 6.56$ ).

The scale also measures racial and ethnic microaggressions using six subscales: (1) *Assumptions of Inferiority* (8 items)- when people of color are assumed to be poor or hold substandard careers, (2) *Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality* (7



items)- Occurs when a person with social privilege is given preferential treatment over people with oppressed identities and experiences in which people of color are stereotyped to be deviant or criminals , (3) *Microinvalidations* (9 items)- unconscious verbal statements in which the perpetrator may have good intentions, but which convey negative messages to people of color, (4) *Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity* (9 items)- assumptions of being foreign based on race, (5) *Environmental Microaggressions* (7 items) - Ways in which larger systems beyond the individual realm (such as institutional policies and practices) work to maintain systems of privilege and oppression., and (6) *Workplace and School Microaggressions* (5 items)- when people of color are assumed to be uneducated or hold substandard careers. The mean score of the *Assumptions of Inferiority* subscale for participants who identified their ethnicity as African Origin, African American or Black was 4.01 ( $SD= 2.75$ ). The mean score for the *Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality* subscale was 2.80 ( $SD= 2.35$ ). The mean score for the *Microinvalidations* subscale was 4.82 ( $SD= 2.92$ ). The mean score for the *Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity* subscale was 2.46 ( $SD= 2.27$ ). The mean score for the *Environmental Microaggressions* subscale was 3.85 ( $SD= 2.07$ ). The mean score for the *Workplace and School Microaggressions* subscale was 1.64 ( $SD= 1.81$ ). The mean score of the *Assumptions of Inferiority* subscale for participants who identified their ethnicity as European Origin or White .66 ( $SD= 1.22$ ). The mean score for the *Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality* subscale was .44 ( $SD= 1.00$ ). The mean score for the *Microinvalidations* subscale was 2.69 ( $SD= 2.56$ ). The mean score for the

*Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity* subscale was 2.15 ( $SD= 2.06$ ). The mean score for the *Environmental Microaggressions* subscale was 5.56 ( $SD= 2.01$ ). The mean score for the *Workplace and School Microaggressions* subscale was .33 ( $SD= .77$ ). Though the REMS-45 is a new scale developed to measure experiences of racial microaggressions, the findings in the current study are consistent with Nadal's studies (2011) that indicate individuals are able to identify and report racial and ethnic microaggressions experienced. The REMS-45 was also found to be a reliable measure across four major racial groups, namely, Black/African Americans.

The MEIM measures three aspects of ethnic identity; affirmation and belonging, ethnic identity achievement, and ethnic identity search behaviors (Phinney, 1992). Items were evaluated on a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The total score is obtained by summing across items and deriving the mean. In addition to the composite score, two subscales can be derived: the *Affirmation, Belonging, and commitment (ABC)* subscale, which measures an affective component of Ethnicity identity, and the *Ethnic identity search (EIS)* subscale, which measures a developmental and cognitive component of ethnic identity. The mean score for the *Affirmation, Belonging, and commitment (ABC)* subscale for participants who identified their ethnicity as African Origin, African American or Black was 1.90 ( $SD= .84$ ). The mean score for the *Ethnic identity search (EIS)* subscale was 2.30 ( $SD= .91$ ). The mean score for the *Affirmation, Belonging, and commitment (ABC)* subscale for participants who identified their ethnicity as European Origin or White was 2.66 ( $SD= .92$ ). The mean score for the

*Ethnic identity search (EIS)* subscale was 3.05 ( $SD = .87$ ). A higher score on the MEIM represents a more positive ethnic identity (Phinney, 1992). The range of scores is from 1 to 4. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the MEIM-R is typically above .80. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the MEIM-R in the current study is .92. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the MEIM-R *Ethnic identity search (EIS)* subscale is .77. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the MEIM-R *Affirmation, Belonging, and commitment (ABC)* subscale is .92.

The mean score for the Need for Cognition Scale (NFC-SF; Cacioppo et al., 1982) for participants who identified their ethnicity as African Origin, African American or Black was 64.56 ( $SD = 11.56$ ). The mean score for the Need for Cognition Scale for participants who identified as European Origin or White was 66.39 ( $SD = 11.92$ ). Need for Cognition is defined as the preference to engage in and enjoy cognitive efforts (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). The scale contains items such as "The notion of thinking abstractly is appealing to me," and "Thinking is not my idea of fun (reverse-coded)." Items were evaluated on a Likert-scale from 1 (extremely uncharacteristic) to 5 (extremely characteristic). The possible range of scores on the NFC-SF is 18 (low) to 90 (high). The participants' range of scores was from 28-88. Higher scores on the NCS-SF represent more favorable attitudes toward engaging in cognitive effort. Results indicate that the sample scored in the average range. The current sample is consistent with previous research in which participants', consisting of mostly undergraduate students, had a mean score of 65.3 ( $SD = 10.32$ ) (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992).

Tolerance of Ambiguity is defined as the tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as sources of threat (Budner, 1962). All responses are based on a 7-point scale, from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The maximum possible range of scores obtained from the Tolerance of Ambiguity scale is from 16 to 112. Each item referred to one of either of three types of ambiguous situations: *novelty* or new situation (4 items), *complexity* or situations that are complicated (9 items), and *insolubility* or situations in which a resolution is not readily available (3 items). These subscales can be computed to reveal the major source of intolerance of ambiguity. The mean score of *novelty* for participants who identified their ethnicity as African Origin, African American or Black was 15.69 ( $SD= 4.26$ ). The mean score for *complexity* was 36.81 ( $SD= 7.32$ ). The mean score for *insolubility* was 12.32 ( $SD= 3.10$ ). The mean score of *novelty* for participants who identified their ethnicity as European Origin or White was 16.05 ( $SD= 4.15$ ). The mean score for *complexity* was 37.41 ( $SD= 6.06$ ). The mean score for *insolubility* was 13.24 ( $SD= 3.54$ ). Individuals with overall high scores may have a higher tendency to perceive situations as threatening, rather than opportunistic, and are considered to be less tolerant of ambiguity. A score between 44 and 48 is considered relevantly neutral. Scores below 44 indicate a high tolerance to ambiguity, while scores above 48 indicate a low tolerance to ambiguity. Maintained by Budner (1962), the validation of the scale was across 17 different populations including high school students, university students, and medical students. The current study's sample is inconsistent with previous research in

which participants' scores on the Tolerance of Ambiguity scale fell within the neutral to high range (Budner, 1962).

To compute the Differentiation of Self Inventory full-scale and subscale scores, raw scores on all items on the scale are summed and divided by the total number of items. Scores range from 1 (low differentiation) to 6 (high differentiation). Higher scores signify greater differentiation of self. Results indicate that the sample reported higher levels of differentiation of self, which is defined as the capacity of a system and its members to manage emotional reactivity under stress (Bowen, 1978). Higher scores on the DSI reflect less fusion with others, less reactivity to stress, less emotional cutoff, and more I positions. The mean score of the *Emotional Reactivity* subscale for participants who identified their ethnicity as African Origin, African American or Black was 4.15 ( $SD = .95$ ). The mean score of the *I-position* subscale was 5.11 ( $SD = .97$ ). The mean score of the *Emotional cutoff* subscale was 4.79 ( $SD = .90$ ). The mean score of the *Fusion with others* subscale was 3.41 ( $SD = .82$ ). The mean score of the *Emotional Reactivity* subscale for participants who identified their ethnicity as European Origin or White was 3.93 ( $SD = .90$ ). The mean score of the *I-position* subscale was 4.65 ( $SD = .96$ ). The mean score of the *Emotional cutoff* subscale was 4.72 ( $SD = .87$ ). The mean score of the *Fusion with others* subscale was 3.59 ( $SD = .98$ ). This sample is comparable to previous research in which respondents were, on average, middle-aged, White, educated, employed individuals who were married and had children.

Table 1 presents the Pearson-product correlation coefficients between the dependent variables and all independent variables for participants who identified their ethnicity as African Origin, African American or Black. Significant and positive relationships were found between racial and ethnic microaggressions: need for cognition ( $r = .192$ ;  $p = .016$ ) and fusion with others ( $r = .167$ ;  $p = .032$ ). Significant and negative relationships were found between racial and ethnic microaggressions and the following: ethnic identity search ( $r = -.357$ ;  $p = .000$ ), emotional reactivity ( $r = -.184$ ;  $p = .021$ ), and emotional cutoff ( $r = -.232$ ;  $p = .005$ ). Significant and positive relationships were found between ethnic identity search and the following: ethnic identity commitment ( $r = .724$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Significant and negative relationships were found between ethnic identity search and the following: need for cognition ( $r = -.251$ ;  $p = .002$ ), complex ambiguous situations ( $r = -.378$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and insoluble ambiguous situations ( $r = -.237$ ;  $p = .004$ ). Significant and negative relationships were found between ethnic identity commitment and the following: need for cognition ( $r = -.366$ ;  $p = .000$ ), complex ambiguous situations ( $r = -.466$ ;  $p = .000$ ), insoluble ambiguous situations ( $r = -.233$ ;  $p = .005$ ), emotional cutoff ( $r = -.170$ ;  $p = .030$ ), and I-position ( $r = -.175$ ;  $p = .026$ ). Significant and positive relationships were found between need for cognition and the following: new ambiguous situations ( $r = .359$ ;  $p = .000$ ), complex ambiguous situations ( $r = .489$ ;  $p = .000$ ), insoluble ambiguous situations ( $r = .261$ ;  $p = .002$ ), I-position ( $r = .281$ ;  $p = .001$ ), and emotional cutoff ( $r = .167$ ;  $p = .032$ ). Significant and positive relationships were found between new ambiguous situations and the following: insoluble ambiguous situations ( $r =$

.160;  $p = .038$ ), emotional reactivity ( $r = .170$ ;  $p = .030$ ), emotional cutoff ( $r = .162$ ;  $p = .036$ ). Significant and positive relationships were found between complex ambiguous situations and the following: insoluble ambiguous situations ( $r = .271$ ;  $p = .001$ ) and fusion with others ( $r = -.187$ ;  $p = .019$ ). Significant and positive relationships were found between emotional reactivity and the following: I-position ( $r = .521$ ;  $p = .000$ ), emotional cutoff ( $r = .397$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and fusion with others ( $r = .371$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Significant and positive relationships were found between I-position and the following: emotional cutoff ( $r = .195$ ;  $p = .015$ ).

Participants who reported racial and ethnic microaggressions to a greater degree tended to report favoring engagement in cognitive activities (NFC) and greater emotional over-involvement with others. Participants who reported racial and ethnic microaggressions to a lesser degree tended to report greater exploration of their ethnic identity, were more emotionally reactive, and more emotionally cutoff. Participants who reported greater exploration of their ethnic identity also reported a stronger acceptance, belonging, and commitment to their ethnic identity. Participants who reported less exploration of their ethnic identity also reported favoring engagement in cognitive activities (NFC) and were more tolerant of complex and insoluble ambiguous situations

Participants who reported a stronger acceptance, belonging, and commitment to their ethnic identity also reported favoring engagement in cognitive activities (NFC) to a lesser degree, were more tolerant of complex and insoluble ambiguous situations, were not as emotionally cutoff, and a less defined sense of self. Participants who reported

favoring engagement in cognitive activities (NFC) also tended to be less tolerant of new, complex, and insoluble ambiguous situations, and were more emotionally cutoff .

Participants who reported intolerance of new ambiguous situations tended to report intolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations, greater emotional reactivity, and greater emotional cutoff. Participants who reported intolerance of complex ambiguous situations tended to report intolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations and greater emotional over-involvement with others. Participants who reported greater emotional reactivity tended to report a clearly defined sense of self, greater emotional cutoff, and greater emotional over-involvement with others. Participants who reported a clearly defined sense of self tended to report greater emotional cutoff.



Table 1- *Pearson Correlation Coefficients*

	Micro- aggression s	Ethnic Commitment	Ethnic Identity Search	Need For Cognition	Novel	Compl ex	Insolub le	Emoti onal Reacti vity	I- Position	Emotio nal Cutoff	Fusion w/ Others
Pearson Correlation	1.000	-.111	-.357 **	.192*	.038	.040	-.124	-.184 *	-.106	-.232**	.167*
	Ethnic Commitment	1.000	.724**	-.366**	.091	- .466**	-.233**	-.080	-.175*	-.170*	.077
	Ethnic Identity Search		1.000	-.251**	.072	- .378**	-.237**	.286* *	.120	.170*	.032
	Need For Cognition			1.000	.359**	.489**	.261**	.127	.281**	.167*	-.054
	Novel				1.000	.064	.160*	.170*	.036	.162*	.123
	Complex					1.000	.271**	-.082	.057	.001	-.187*
	Insoluble						1.000	.004	.025	-.126	-.031
	Emotional Reactivity							1.000	.521**	.397**	.371**
	I-Position								1.000	.195*	-.119
	Emotional Cutoff									1.000	-.004
	Fusion w/ Others										1.000

\*p &lt; .05, \*\*p &lt; .01

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the degree to which degree do affirmation, belonging, and commitment to ethnic identity, ethnic identity search, need for cognition, tolerance of novel ambiguous situations, tolerance of complex ambiguous situations, tolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations, emotional reactivity, a clearly defined sense of self, emotional cutoff, and fusion with others, predict reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions for participants who identified their ethnicity as African origin/Black. Basic descriptive statistics and regression coefficients are shown in Table 2. The analysis indicated that affirmation, belonging, and commitment to ethnic identity, ethnic identity search, need for cognition, tolerance of novel ambiguous situations, tolerance of complex ambiguous situations, tolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations, emotional reactivity, a clearly defined sense of self, emotional cutoff, and fusion with others were significantly related to the criterion variable, racial and ethnic microaggressions ( $F(11,112) = 4.902$ ,  $R^2 = .325$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In addition, the analysis shows that ethnic identity search ( $Beta = -.46$ ,  $t(112) = -3.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ), need for cognition ( $Beta = .30$ ,  $t(112) = 2.88$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and tolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations ( $Beta = -.26$ ,  $t(112) = -3.09$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were significant predictor variables of racial and ethnic microaggressions. Thus, participants who identified their ethnicity as African origin/Black who reported less exploration of their ethnic identity, a tendency to favor engagement in cognitive activities, and more tolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations tended to report more experiences with racial and ethnic microaggressions. Neither ethnic

identity achievement, intolerance of complex and insoluble ambiguous situations, or differentiation of self were found to be significant contributors of reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions for participants who identified their ethnicity as African origin/Black. It was also proposed that gender be added to the model, however, there was not a significant correlation or prediction identified between gender and reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions. The assumption of multiple regression analysis is the predictor variable are related to the criterion variable, therefore, gender was not used in the current analysis.

Table 2

*Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables racial and ethnic microaggressions (N= 124)*

Model	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.	Correlations		
	Coefficients					Beta	Zero-order	Partial
	B	Std. Error						
(Constant)	34.467	11.265		3.060	.003			
MEIM_EIS_	-4.811	1.515	-.452*	-3.175	.002	-.357	-.287	-.246
MEIM_ABC_	1.964	1.716	.169	1.145	.255	-.111	.108	-.246
Need For Cognition	.248	.088	.295*	2.830	.006	.192	.258	.220
TOA_Novelty	.104	.215	.046	.482	.631	.038	.045	.037
TOA_Complexity	-.135	.132	-.102	-1.024	.308	.040	-.096	-.079
TOA_Insolubility	-.847	.268	-.270*	-3.162	.002	-.124	-.286	-.246
DSI_ER	-1.129	1.290	-.110	-.875	.383	-.184	-.082	-.068
DSI_IP	-.001	1.055	.000	-.001	.999	-.106	.000	.000
DSI_FO	2.233	1.142	.188	1.955	.053	.167	.182	.152

The multiple correlation coefficient for this sample was .570, indicating that 33% of the variance in racial and ethnic microaggressions can be accounted for by affirmation, belonging, and commitment to ethnic identity, ethnic identity search, need for cognition, tolerance of novel ambiguous situations, tolerance of complex ambiguous situations, tolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations, emotional reactivity, a clearly defined sense of self, emotional cutoff, and fusion with others.

Table 3 presents the Pearson-product correlation coefficients between the dependent variables and all independent variables for participants who identified their ethnicity as European Origin or White. Significant and positive relationships were found between racial and ethnic microaggressions: ethnic identity achievement ( $r = .216$ ;  $p = .001$ ), need for cognition ( $r = .128$ ;  $p = .040$ ), new ambiguous situations ( $r = .203$ ;  $p = .003$ ), and insoluble situations ( $r = .168$ ;  $p = .011$ ). Significant and negative relationships were found between racial and ethnic microaggressions and the following: emotional reactivity ( $r = -.219$ ;  $p = .001$ ), emotional cutoff ( $r = -.139$ ;  $p = .028$ ), and fusion with others ( $r = -.142$ ;  $p = .025$ ). Significant and positive relationships were found between ethnic identity search and the following: ethnic identity commitment ( $r = .584$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Significant and negative relationships were found between ethnic identity search and the following: complex ambiguous situations ( $r = -.178$ ;  $p = .007$ ) and insoluble ambiguous situations ( $r = -.143$ ;  $p = .025$ ). Significant and positive relationships were found between ethnic identity commitment and the following: new ambiguous situations ( $r = .325$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Significant and negative relationships were found between ethnic identity

commitment and the following: emotional reactivity ( $r = -.175$ ;  $p = .008$ ) and emotional cutoff ( $r = -.189$ ;  $p = .005$ ). Significant and positive relationships were found between need for cognition and the following: new ambiguous situations ( $r = .315$ ;  $p = .000$ ), complex ambiguous situations ( $r = .471$ ;  $p = .000$ ), and I-position ( $r = .225$ ;  $p = .001$ ). Significant and positive relationships were found between new ambiguous situations and the following: complex ambiguous situations ( $r = .170$ ;  $p = .010$ ). Significant and negative relationships were found between new ambiguous situations and the following: emotional cutoff ( $r = -.127$ ;  $p = .041$ ). Significant and positive relationships were found between complex ambiguous situations and the following: insoluble ambiguous situations ( $r = .211$ ;  $p = .002$ ). Significant and negative relationships were found between insoluble ambiguous situations and the following: emotional reactivity ( $r = -.196$ ;  $p = .003$ ). Significant and positive relationships were found between emotional reactivity and the following: I-position ( $r = .411$ ;  $p = .000$ ), emotional cutoff ( $r = .205$ ;  $p = .002$ ), and fusion with others ( $r = .482$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Significant and negative relationships were found between emotional cutoff and the following: fusion with others ( $r = -.235$ ;  $p = .001$ ).

Participants who reported racial and ethnic microaggressions to a greater degree tended to report greater acceptance, belonging, and commitment to their ethnic identity, reported favoring engagement in cognitive activities, and greater intolerance of new and insoluble ambiguous situations. Participants who reported racial and ethnic microaggressions to a lesser degree tended to report greater emotional reactivity, greater emotional cutoff, and greater emotional over-involvement with others. Participants who

reported greater exploration of their ethnic identity also reported greater acceptance, belonging, and commitment to their ethnic identity. Participants who reported less exploration of their ethnic identity tend to report greater tolerance of complex and insoluble ambiguous situations. Participants who reported stronger commitment to their ethnic identity tended to report greater intolerance of new ambiguous situations. Participants who reported a weaker commitment to their ethnic identity tended to report greater emotional reactivity and greater emotional cutoff. Participants who report a favoring engagement in cognitive activities tended to report greater intolerance to new ambiguous, complex ambiguous situations, and a clearly defined self. Participants who reported intolerance of new ambiguous situations also reported greater intolerance of complex ambiguous situations. Participants who reported greater tolerance of new ambiguous situations tended to be less emotionally cutoff.

Participants who reported greater intolerance for complex ambiguous situations tended to report intolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations. Participant who reported greater tolerance of o insoluble ambiguous situation tended to report less emotional reactivity. Participants who reported greater emotional reactivity tended to report a clearly defined sense of self, greater emotional cutoff, and greater emotional over-involvement with others. Participant who reported greater emotional cutoff tended to report less emotional over-involvement with others.

Table 3- *Pearson Correlation Coefficients*

	Micro-aggressions	Ethnic Commitment	Ethnic Identity Search	Need For Cognition	Novel	Complex	Insoluble	Emotional Reactivity	I-Position	Emotional Cutoff	Fusion w/ Others
Microaggressions	1.000	.216	-.027	.128*	.203**	.020	.168*	-.219**	.041	-.139*	-.142**
Ethnic Commitment		1.000	.584**	.020	.325**	-.106	.027	.175*	-.084	.189**	-.026
Ethnic Identity Search			1.000	-.101	.072	-.178**	-.143*	.014	.109	-.041	.083
Need For Cognition				1.000	.315**	.471*	.062	.048	.225**	.063	.059
Novel					1.000	.170*	-.004	.101	.039	-.127*	-.044
Complex						1.000	.211**	-.099	.109	.019	.323
Insoluble							1.000	.196*	-.113	-.110	-.074
Emotional Reactivity								1.000	.411**	.205**	.482**
I-Position									1.000	.113	.165*
Emotional Cutoff										1.000	-.235**
Fusion w/ Others											1.000

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01



A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the degree to which degree do affirmation, belonging, and commitment to ethnic identity, ethnic identity search, need for cognition, tolerance of novel ambiguous situations, tolerance of complex ambiguous situations, tolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations, emotional reactivity, a clearly defined sense of self, emotional cutoff, and fusion with others, predict reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions were associated with experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions for participants who identified their ethnicity as European Origin or White. Basic descriptive statistics and regression coefficients are shown in Table 4. The analysis indicated that the model that included to which degree do affirmation, belonging, and commitment to ethnic identity, ethnic identity search, need for cognition, tolerance of novel ambiguous situations, tolerance of complex ambiguous situations, tolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations, emotional reactivity, a clearly defined sense of self, emotional cutoff, fusion with others, and were significantly related to the criterion variable, racial and ethnic microaggressions ( $F(11,177) = 3.65$ ,  $R^2 = .170$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In addition, the analysis shows that ethnic identity search ( $Beta = -.194$ ,  $t(177) = -2.119$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and ethnic acceptance, belonging, and commitment ( $Beta = .256$ ,  $t(177) = 2.640$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were significant predictor variables of racial and ethnic microaggressions. Participants who reported less exploration of their ethnic identity and stronger commitment to their ethnic identity, tended to report more racial and microaggressions. Neither need for cognition, tolerance of ambiguity, or differentiation of self were found to be significant contributors of reports of racial and ethnic

microaggressions for participants who identified their ethnicity as European Origin or White. It was also proposed that gender be added to the model, however, there was not a significant correlation or prediction identified between gender and reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions. The assumption of multiple regression analysis is the predictor variable are related to the criterion variable, therefore, gender was not used in the current analysis.

Table 4

*Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions (N= 189)*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.	Correlations		
	B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part
(Constant)	10.265	6.261		1.640	.103			
MEIM_EIS _	-1.494	.695	-.199*	-2.149	.033	-.027	-.159	-.147
MEIM_ABC _	1.847	.693	.260*	2.663	.008	.216	.196	.182
Need For Cognition	.060	.047	.109	1.288	.199	.128	.096	.088
TOA_Novelty	.105	.127	.066	.826	.410	.203	.062	.057
TOA_Complexity	-.116	.089	-.108	-1.304	.194	.020	-.098	-.089
TOA_Insolubility	.215	.136	.116	1.585	.115	.168	.118	.108
DSI_ER	-1.466	.795	-.201	-1.843	.067	-.219	-.137	-.126
DSI_IP	1.147	.627	.168	1.831	.069	.041	.136	.125
DSI_EC	-.516	.601	-.069	-.859	.392	-.139	-.064	-.059
DSI_FO	-.225	.672	-.034	-.335	.738	-.142	-.025	-.023

The multiple correlation coefficient for this sample was .414, indicating that 17% of the variance in racial and ethnic microaggressions can be accounted for by affirmation, belonging, and commitment to ethnic identity, ethnic identity search, need for cognition, tolerance of novel ambiguous situations, tolerance of complex ambiguous situations, tolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations, emotional reactivity, a clearly defined sense of self, emotional cutoff, and fusion with others.

To examine differences in ethnic identity development, need for cognition, tolerance of ambiguity, differentiation of self, and reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions between the African Origin/African American participants and European Origin/ White participants, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted. The results indicated that there was a significant difference in reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions observed between the two groups,  $t(311) = 8.42, p = .000$ ). These results suggest that African Origin/African American participants ( $M = 19.58; SD = 9.73$ ) reported more racial and ethnic microaggressions than European Origin/ White participants ( $M = 11.84; SD = 6.56$ ). The results of this test indicated that there was a significant difference in ethnic identity search observed between the two groups,  $t(311) = 7.34, p = .000$ ). These results suggest that European Origin/ White participants ( $M = 3.05; SD = .87$ ) reported more exploration of their ethnic identity than African Origin/African American participants ( $M = 2.30; SD = .91$ ). The results of this test indicated that there was a significant difference in affirmation, belonging, and commitment to ethnic identity

observed between the two groups,  $t(311)=-7.44, p = .000$ ). These results suggest that European Origin/ White participants ( $M = 2.66; SD = .92$ ) reported greater acceptance, belonging, and commitment to their ethnic identity than African Origin/African American participants ( $M = 1.90; SD = .84$ ). The results of this test indicated that there was a significant difference in tolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations observed between the two groups,  $t(311)=-2.35, p < .05$ ). These results suggest that African Origin/African American participants ( $M = 12.32; SD = 3.10$ ) reported greater tolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations than European Origin/ White participants ( $M = 13.24; SD = 3.54$ ). The results of this test indicated that there was a significant difference in emotional reactivity observed between the two groups,  $t(311)= 2.10, p < .05$ ). These results suggest that African Origin/African American participants ( $M = 4.15; SD = .97$ ) reported greater emotional reactivity than European Origin/ White participants ( $M = 3.93; SD = .90$ ). The results of this test indicated that there was a significant difference in a clearly defined sense of self reported between the two groups,  $t(311)= 4.20, p = .000$ ). These results suggest that African Origin/African American participants ( $M = 5.11; SD = .97$ ) reported a greater clearly defined sense of self than European Origin/ White participants ( $M = 4.65; SD = .96$ ).

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

The processes by which one detects and analyzes their experiences with racial and ethnic microaggressions as it relates to ethnic identity development, cognitive complexity, and differentiation of self, has not been clearly explained. Based on the literature, thus far, the negative impact of racial and ethnic microaggressions on psychological and physiological health is well-documented; little is known about the typically un-examined variance in an individual's identity formation, cognitive processing, as well as affective processing, that may impact their identification of microaggressions.

The primary aim of the present study was to determine to what degree do ethnic identity development, need for cognition, tolerance of ambiguity, and differentiation of self predict reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions in participants who identified their ethnicity as African origin/Black and European origin/White. The findings of this study suggested the model that included these variables is significantly associated with reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions in participants who identified their ethnicity as African origin/Black. Specifically, the analysis indicated that ethnic identity search, need for cognition, and tolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations were significantly

related to reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions. Thus, participants who identified their ethnicity as African origin/Black and reported more experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions, tended to report engaging in less exploration of their ethnic identity, favored engaging in cognitive activities, and expressed more tolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations. These findings are consistent with previous literature on African Origin/Black individuals' experiences with racial and ethnic microaggressions. In particular, the U.S. political and social structure historically excluded African Americans/Black people from equal access to educational attainment through racial segregation, restricted social mobility, limited access to resources, and enforced economic, health, and political disparities (Steele, 1997). As a consequence, African Americans/Black are the direct recipients of an oppressive legacy by having to navigate culturally incongruent environments where they receive continual direct and indirect social cues that they are intellectually inferior and not expected to succeed beyond subordinate careers. Additionally, given the disparities in police stops, prosecutorial charging, disproportional penalties, and media outlets' differential presentations of crimes committed by race and ethnicity, it is evident that African Origin/Black participants were more likely to report being stereotyped as a criminal (Sunnafrank & Fontes, 1983; Bodenhausen & Wyer 1985; Gordon et al. 1988; Peffley and Hurwitz 1993).

The findings of the current study contrast with previous literature relating to ethnic identity development of individuals as it pertains to participants of African

Origin/Black ethnicity. Research has suggested the possibility that the extent of one's identification to an in-group may lead to increased sensitivity to environmental cues related to certain aspects about their in-group (Hornsey, 2008; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Living in the United States, where there are many different ethnic groups coexisting in society, one's ethnicity may become highly salient. The current study suggests that participants of African Origin/Black ethnicity who tended to engage in less exploration of their ethnic identity, reported more microaggressions, implying that although these participants have not explored their identity; they are just as likely to be privy to environmental cues related to their race and/or ethnicity. It is possible, that although these participants report less exploration of their ethnic identity, they are very much aware of the different conditions of marginalization and oppression many racial and ethnic minority groups endure in the United States and globally, and are able to report such experiences.

African origin/Black participants who reported more racial and ethnic microaggressions also reported favoring engaging in cognitive activities and more tolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations. This finding is rather interesting considering the tendency to engage in lesser exploration of ethnic identity was also reported by these individuals. Budner (1962) described insoluble situations to encompass the extent to which one is tolerant of problems that are difficult to solve because alternative solutions are not evident. Perhaps, due to a preference for engaging in cognitive activities, these individuals are more likely to expend effort on information acquisition, reasoning, and



problem solving. Thus, insoluble situations do not pose as great of a threat due to an inclination to make efforts towards processing and addressing the situation in a way that is deemed most appropriate.

Additional findings of this study suggest the model that includes ethnic identity development, need for cognition, tolerance of ambiguity, and differentiation of self is significantly associated with reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions in participants who identified their ethnicity as European Origin/White. In addition, the analysis specifically indicated that ethnic identity search and stronger ethnic identity were significantly related to reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions. Thus, participants who identified their ethnicity as European Origin/White who reported racial and ethnic microaggressions to a greater degree tended to engage in less exploration of their ethnic identity and reported a stronger ethnic identity.

It is rather curious that members of the racial and ethnic majority in the United States (e.g. European Origin/White) would report such interpersonal slights. However, given the rise of sensationalized national discussions covered by mainstream media, such as police brutality, and increases in exposure to social justice activism by groups such as Muslims for Progressive Values, Indigenous Environmental Network, Black Lives Matter, and a plethora of other groups, insulation from ethnic and race-based stress has significantly decreased. Dr. Robin DiAngelo, a critical racial and social justice educator described this insulation from ethnic and race-based stress as “White Fragility” (2011). She posits “White Fragility” is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress

becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive responses such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation (DiAngelo, 2011). Potential reasons for such responses include a tendency to lead segregated lives (e.g. White flight), and deeming oneself as an individual, as opposed to members of a group. Additionally, she asserted that constant messages purport Whiteness as valuable, and as the default for social and cultural normalcy. Many members of the European Origin/White population have never really had to think critically about race, at all. Thus, when challenged about their thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality relating to race and ethnicity, it is very likely they feel invalidated in this respect. For European Origin/White individuals, the possibility of being accused of racism is often connected to feelings of resentment and expressed with the ‘reverse racism’ discourse, wherein they view themselves as the new victims of racial prejudice and discrimination (McIntyre 1997; Perry 2002; Bonilla-Silva 2006; Trainor 2008). As such, these findings support previous literature that suggests increased perception of anti-White prejudice and discrimination by European Origin/White individuals (Bonilla-Silva 2002; Feagin & O’Brein, 2003; Eibach & Keegan, 2006; Norton & Sommers 2011; Cabrera 2014)

As stated previously, participants who identified their ethnicity as European Origin White who reported more experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions, tended to engage in less exploration of their ethnic identity and reported a stronger ethnic identity. Phinney’s (1990) model of ethnic identity development described those who

engaged in less exploration of their ethnic identity, but possessed a sense of acceptance and commitment to this identity, as *foreclosure*. *Foreclosure* is the result of committing to an ethnic identity based on the influence of significant affiliates in one's life, such as family. Thus, a "pseudo-identity" may form that is too rigid or fixed to adjust to change (Slavin, 1990).

From the 'Reagan Revolution' to the election of President Barack Obama in 2008, and the subsequent election of President Donald Trump in 2016, a strikingly adamant discourse has evolved- growing numbers of white people claim that they are racially oppressed and seek redress against policies, laws and practices that they believe discriminate against them (Bonilla-Silva 2002; Feagin & O'Brein, 2003; Eibach & Keegan, 2006; Norton & Sommers 2011; Cabrera 2014). For example, Norton and Sommers (2011) found that today's "White backlash" manifests as a set of extensive beliefs held by some Whites, in which many view racism as a 'zero-sum game.' In other words, racism against Black Americans has declined significantly—at White Americans' expense. Norton (2011) suggests Whites' views on racism may be influenced by affirmative action policies, which may be perceived as a threat to their educational and employment opportunities. The current findings align with emerging research that suggests White Americans are reporting more experiences with prejudice and discrimination.

It was noted that both the African Origin/Black and European Origin/White groups in the current study reportedly engaged in less exploration of their ethnic identity.

Although previous research suggests ethnic identity is a prominent aspect of identity for African Americans, we must consider that identity is much broader than race and ethnicity. For some individuals, an academic identity or a social identity may be more central than the racial or ethnic components of one's identity. Consideration of individual differences that exist for all people may lead us to draw unique conclusions about the course and function of identity development across ethnic groups.

The secondary aim of the present study was to determine if there were significant differences amongst the ethnic identity development, need for cognition, tolerance of ambiguity, differentiation of self, and reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions between participants who identified their ethnicity as African origin/Black and European origin/White. The findings suggested differences in regards to reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions, ethnic identity development, tolerance of insoluble situations, emotional reactivity, and a clearly defined sense of self. In particular, African origin/Black participants reported more racial and ethnic microaggressions, greater emotional reactivity, and a greater defined sense of self than European Origin/ White participants. These findings are consistent with previous research that determined African Americans/Black individuals experience many racial and ethnic microaggressions in their daily interactions and report considerable disparities in the current state of race relations and racial equality more than their European Origin/ White counterparts (Sue et al., 2008; Pew Research Center, 2016). Further, racial and ethnic minorities must cope with the effects of racism, such as psychological-emotional distress, interpersonal conflict, and

social exclusion. Hence, emotions such as anger, feeling threatened, and anxieties are reported in response (Cose, 1993; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). The greater emotional reactivity reported by the African origin/Black participants compared to the European Origin/ White participants may be indicative of the impact of racial-cultural stressor conflated with the overall, general stressors of daily life.

African origin/Black participants reported greater tolerance of insoluble situations and ability to take independent positions and maintain personal convictions when compared to the European Origin/ White participants. Budner (1962), described insoluble situations to encompass the extent to which one is tolerant of problems that are difficult to solve because alternative solutions are not evident. African origin/Black individuals experience significant cultural incongruence, friction in trying to balance identification with their racial-cultural heritage, while trying to succeed within the parameters of a Eurocentric, middle-class values dominated environment (Feagin & Sikes, 1994). Stress occurs when an individual appraises an event as upsetting or threatening and does not have a foreseeable solution toward fixing it (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Launier, 1978). The greater tolerance for insolubility, in addition to the greater ability to take independent positions and maintain personal convictions reported by the African origin/Black participants, suggests they are more likely to expend effort on information acquisition, reasoning, and problem solving to cope with a wide variety of predicaments in their world. This ability is especially important when considering the history of racism toward racial and ethnic minority groups and the inequity in access to resources, compensation,

wealth, and criminal convictions (Costello, Keeler, & Angold, 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007; Simms, 2009; Hartney & Vuong, 2009).

European Origin/ White participants reported more exploration of their ethnic identity and a stronger ethnic identity than African origin/Black participants. This finding was surprising when comparing these two groups, however, previous research on racial and ethnic identity have almost exclusively focused on non-White populations. Although White is typically used to refer to those with European ancestry (Bonnett 1998), local understandings of just what white means vary, often reflecting the racial ecology of a community or region. Further, much of the research on White racial identity has focused on how whiteness, and the privileges associated with whiteness, remain invisible to many Whites, especially those with limited interracial contact (Delgado & Stefancic 1997, Lipsitz 1998). In fact, much of the recent work on Whiteness concerns how Whites minimize, acknowledge, deny, embrace, or feel guilty about their privileged status (Doane & Bonilla-Silva 2003). Some studies (Jacobson, 1998; Jackson & Heckman, 2002; Mazie et al., 1993), suggested Whites generally appear to eschew racial labels and often find them meaningless, especially in reference to themselves. The current findings appear to refute this assertion. Perhaps, the European Origin/ White participants in this study who report more exploration of their ethnic identity and a stronger commitment ethnic identity endorsed this sentiment based on the racial and ethnic ecology of their community or region. However, the mechanisms of the racial and ethnic ecology of their community or region were not examined in the current study.

Although significant differences were noted between the African origin/Black and European Origin/ White participants in regards to reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions, ethnic identity development, tolerance of insoluble situations, emotional reactivity, and a clearly defined sense of self, similarities between these two groups were also noted. There was an absence of significance differences between these two groups in terms of the inclination toward reflection and thought (need for cognition), emotional cutoff, and emotional over-involvement with others. Both reported a greater desire to engage in thought and reflection, a reduced capacity to cut off others emotionally, and a reduced tendency become emotionally overinvolved with others. These similarities should also be emphasized because over-emphasis of intergroup differences continue to create barriers. For example, Brown and Hewstone (2005) and Hewstone & Brown (1986), propose that both similarities and differences between ethnic groups need to be kept salient during intergroup contact situations so a positive contact experience reflects on both the outgroup member and their in-group. In a similar vein, Gaertner et al. (1993) advocated dual identities, suggesting that a common in-group identity, can be simultaneously highlighted while people maintain an original group identity (e.g., their ethnic or racial identity). Indeed, emphasizing dual identities (simultaneous focus on subgroup identity as well as shared superordinate identity) has been shown to be more effective than emphasizing a common ingroup identity alone (focus on shared superordinate identity), especially for members of the ethnic and racial minority group (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000).

## **Limitations**

The results of the current study should be considered within the context of several potential limitations. Reported experiences of ethnic identity development, need for cognition, tolerance of ambiguity and differentiation of self taken together did not account for a considerably large percentage of the variance in reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions for participants who identified their ethnicity as European Origin/White, in particular. Given that only 17% of the variance could be explained by the model, more extensive investigation is warranted. Consequently, other mitigating variables should be identified in the future to develop a richer perspective about the variance in reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions.

Another potential limitation is that participants were mostly recruited through online organizational list-serves and internet-based social networks. While recruiting via research announcements on the web has become an increasingly popular and effective method for attracting a nationwide sample of participants (Illingworth, 2001), there may be some inherent bias toward individuals who are active within online social networks and communities. In consideration of this potential sampling bias, the generalizability of findings to individuals who are not engaged in online social media forums may not be appropriate.

Additional limitations may be the basic assumption that the measures accurately and fully measure what was intended. Indeed, findings could be due in part to the novelty and limited scope of the measures. This study made use of one of the first quantitative



measures of racial and ethnic microaggressions (Nadal, 2010) to measure the quantity and types of experiences of racial microaggressions within the six months prior to completing the measure. It should be noted that Nadal's Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS-45, 2011) was created to measure the microaggressions that racial and ethnic minorities experience in their everyday lives. The current study examined reported experiences of microaggressions of participants who identified their ethnicity as European origin/White, in addition to those who identified as African Origin/African American/Black. In essence, the REMS-45's intended use is for racial and ethnic minorities. Thus, utilizing the REMS-45 with a population it was not originally intended for may serve as a limitation in this study. Additionally, the REMS-45 includes an *Environmental Microaggression* subscale consisting of items written inversely, measuring positive perceptions of race, instead of identifying negative or active experiences with racism or microaggressions. According to scoring procedures, which is dichotomous in nature, an endorsement of 'yes' on items of the *Environmental Microaggression* subscale were counted as a microaggression. In actuality an endorsement of 'no' on the *Environmental Microaggression* subscale would reflect an experience of a microaggression. Therefore, it is recommended that in future utilization of the REMS-45, the items of the *Environmental Microaggression* subscale should be inversely scored, in order to accurately reflect the number of racial and ethnic microaggression reported on this measure. The aforementioned limitations indicate that

the results should be interpreted with caution. Replication studies are necessary to confirm that the results are generalizable to a broader population.

### **Implications**

The evolving demographic diversity in the United States springs forth an era characterized by increased awareness of the value of cross-cultural perspectives. This study utilized a quantitative survey method to explore (a) the extent to which African origin/Black and European Origin/ White participants experience microaggressions (b) the role of ethnic identity development, (c) the role of cognitive complexity and (c) the role of differentiation of self. The findings confirmed, contrasted, and yielded surprising results in regards to the examination of multicultural perspectives of race-cultural stressors. These findings have particular significance for mental health practitioners, educators, and future research.

These findings are consistent with previous literature on African Origin/Black individuals' experiences with racial and ethnic microaggressions. All participants who identified their ethnicity as African Origin/Black reported at least one experience with racial and ethnic microaggressions. Dr. DiAngelo (2011) asserts that "the most effective adaptation of racism over time is the idea that racism is conscious bias held by mean people." The operative term is "adaptation." Racism today does not look the way it did in 1865, 1965, or even 2000. It remains alive by shape-shifting over time, and the good/bad binary is just part of its insidious current form. The current research will increase the public consciousness regarding the perpetuation and impact of

microaggressions. Raising critical awareness serves to dispel the ambiguity inherent in microaggressive exchanges that can result in added pressure for racial and ethnic minority individuals to identify and confront microaggressions as they occur (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008; Watkins, Labarrie, Appio, 2010).

Future research is also critical in exposing strategies to effectively combat the embedded and systemic nature of racial and ethnic microaggressions, and to promote cultural congruence for individuals from diverse backgrounds within various institutions including political, economic, educational, and social. There are a number of recommendations to combat microaggressions and create culturally inclusive atmospheres. First and foremost, it is fundamental that various forms of diversity are addressed: (1) structural diversity – ensuring a diverse demographic make-up of the members of the institution; (2) diversity initiatives – incorporating culturally conscious curriculum and programming in support of multicultural centers, clubs, and organizations; and (3) diverse interactions – facilitating individual and group interracial interactions (Milem, 2003). In order to fully realize the advantages of diversity, educational institutions, for example, must continually develop improved methods for attracting, retaining, and promoting inclusion among students from socio-culturally variant backgrounds. For instance, racial and ethnic minority students report feeling more at ease and safe within cultural inclusive spaces on college campuses, punctuated by visibility and integration of faculty, staff, and students of color (Watkins, Labarrie, & Appio, 2010) Culturally inclusive spaces should reflect a welcoming climate where cross-

cultural dialogues about race and culture are embraced, and the inevitable incidence of microaggressions are acknowledged and non-defensively addressed (Sue & Sue, 2010). Institutions must continually evaluate multicultural training programs and initiatives to assure the cultural competence of administrators, faculty, and staff (Bourke, 2010).

It should be noted that although the preponderance of the literature continues to site the inclusion of diversity through various initiatives, racial and ethnic minorities still report experiences with racism. Because of the seeming permanence of reported experiences with racism, prejudice, and discrimination, I recommend diversity initiatives incorporate accountability. Recommendations for future research include examining diversity policies' implementation in real organizations and institutions to mark the impact of specific diversity initiatives. In addition, research should focus on developing diversity policies that include evidenced based practices such as operationally defining the areas of concern, creating concrete, measurable goals around diversity, such as in hiring practices, for example. Furthermore, research that focuses on how diversity policies can alter perceptions of how individuals in the institution are treated is also imperative to understanding the effectiveness of diversity programs.

The current findings have particular significance for mental health practitioners. In order to best serve racial and ethnic minority clients, therapists must be aware of their own potential to inadvertently perpetuate microaggressions or cultural incongruence. For instance, if all or the majority of the staff is Caucasian, the counseling center may represent another space where racial and ethnic minority individuals perceive they are not

welcome. Consequently, it is essential that threads of multicultural inclusivity be strewn throughout outreach efforts, the counseling center's physical presence, and therapeutic approaches. First, clinicians must be able to conduct thorough diagnostic interviews and assessment in order to individualize treatments and avoid lumping racial and ethnic minority clients into one homogenous group. Second, due to the ambiguous nature of microaggressions and cognitive expense, clinicians are in a unique position to provide support and help racial and ethnic minority clients develop adaptive self-regulation techniques to navigate the stress of facing racial microaggressions and cultural incongruence. It is critical that mental health providers be prepared to address the diverse experiences of racial and ethnic minority clients and to clearly identify themselves as allies in the mission to promote cultural inclusivity.

In regards to ethnic identity development and reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions, the findings suggested African Origin/Black participants who engaged in less exploration of their ethnic identity, tended to report more microaggressions. This was a surprising and curious finding, given that unexamined identity is characterized by the internalization of the values and norms of the dominant group and a strong desire to assimilate into the dominant culture (Marcia 1989). Future research should further explore the role of ethnic identity development as it relates to the "catch-22" phenomenon of detecting, analyzing, and responding to racial and ethnic microaggressions, as the mechanisms underlying the decision to respond or remain silent during these experiences was not examined in the current study.

Findings of the study are also consistent with previous research on need for cognition and tolerance of ambiguity, two constructs of cognitive complexity. Need for cognition indicates social interaction is governed by the way an individual processes information and forms their knowledge (Kruglanski & Freund, 1983). For example, the need for cognition was found to affect a person's tendency to use stereotypes or render judgments in a category-based versus attribute-based fashion (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Jamieson & Zanna, 1989) and tolerance of ambiguity was found to exhibit construct-accessibility effects in interpreting ambiguous information (Thompson et al., 1993). Thus, they have a preference to seek more information, evaluate more thoroughly the quality of the information found, were more likely to rely on all of the pertinent information (as opposed to relying on simple cues), and used a wider variety of information sources before reaching a conclusion about an ambiguous interaction (Cacioppo et al., 1996; Petty et al., 2009).

These findings have particular significance for mental health practitioners and educators. Early education in grade school on critical thinking will benefit all populations. Systems of thinking such as complexity, nonlinearity, unpredictability and examining ambiguity as a source for understanding the richness of a unique situation are skills that can be taught (Rowland, 2003). In addition, learners can be taught to treat ambiguity as a sign that a situation may be shifted dramatically by small actions and, therefore, one needs to respect this sensitivity and exercise great care. For example, a

therapist should recognize that ambiguity is where a breakthrough or breakdown is possible and thus, provide careful guidance when necessary (Rowland, 2003).

These findings have particular significance for the study of White racial and ethnic identity as it pertains to their perception of racial-cultural stressors. Specifically, participants who identified their ethnicity as European Origin or White who reported racial and ethnic microaggressions to a greater degree, tended to engage in less exploration of their ethnic identity, yet reported a stronger ethnic identity. This mentality is dangerous as Norton and Sommers (2011) found growing sentiment that racism against African Americans has declined significantly at White Americans' expense. As such, we have witness the overt revival of White Nationalism sentiments (e.g. Klu Klux Klan, Tea Party, Alt-Right) in response to perceived anti-White rhetoric. Examination of the mechanisms underlying Whites' view of racism as a zero-sum game is imperative. The examination of racial and ethnic identity may benefit from moving away from simply naming Whiteness as an overlooked, privileged identity and by paying closer attention to empirical studies of racial and ethnic identity in the areas of social movements, ethnic identity, and social psychology (Moon, 2016). Navigating between the long-term staying power of White privilege and the multifarious manifestations of the experience of Whiteness remains the task of the next era of research on White racial and ethnic identity. Further, for both samples included in the group, there are variables beyond the model that must be identified to best explain the whole phenomenon of reporting experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions. However, for the European Origin or

White group, given that only 17% of the variance could be explained by the model, more extensive investigation is warranted.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of the present research is to enhance understanding of the relationship between reported experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions and its detection and analysis through an individual's identity formation, cognitive processing, as well as affective processing. Specifically, the experiences of with racial and ethnic microaggressions as reported by African origin/Black and European origin/White participants, as it relates to ethnic identity development, cognitive complexity, and differentiation of self was examined. This study contributes to the dearth in literature on cognitive and affective processes by which one detects and analyzes their experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions.

The findings of this study suggested the model that included these variables is significantly associated with reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions in participants who identified their ethnicity as African origin/Black and European origin/White participants. Specifically, for African origin/Black participants, ethnic identity search, need for cognition, and tolerance of insoluble ambiguous situations were significantly related to reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions. Ethnic identity search and stronger ethnic identity were significantly related to increased reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions by European origin/White participants.



Finally, the findings suggested significant differences regarding reports of racial and ethnic microaggressions, ethnic identity development, tolerance of insoluble situations, emotional reactivity, and a clearly defined sense of self. In particular, African origin/Black participants reported more racial and ethnic microaggressions, greater emotional reactivity, and a greater defined sense of self than European Origin/ White participants. European Origin/ White participants reported more exploration of their ethnic identity and a stronger ethnic identity than African origin/Black participants.

The goal of this investigation was to continue the advocacy articulated by Sue (2010) “to make the invisible visible” to empower racial and ethnic minority and majority individuals to confront negative racial and ethnic-based embedded beliefs and behaviors. Extension of the current investigation is paramount to bolstering the understanding of the cognitive and affective factors used to analyze and detect racial and ethnic microaggression and thus, promote resilience among racial and ethnic minority individuals. To gain further insight about factors used to analyze and detect racial and ethnic microaggressions, and how to buffer against negative outcomes, more empirical investigation and continual dialogue are essential. Future research should focus on broadening our understanding of additional factors of identity as it relates to racial and ethnic microaggressions, affective processes and responses to racial and ethnic microaggressions, and white racial/ethnic identity as it relates to perceptions of racial-cultural stressors. Additional considerations for future research may include developing a more complex role of demographical information and intersectionality- defined as the

relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formation (Crenshaw, 1991), and its role in reported experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions.

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