

THE ROLE OF RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS AND ETHNIC RACIAL IDENTITY
AFFIRMATION ON ACADEMIC BELONGING AMONG BLACK AND LATINX
COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my loving mom, dad, sister, and partner. Their unconditional love and support have always provided me the strength to achieve my goals. Thank you for everything.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	6
Abstract.....	7
Introduction.....	8
Theoretical Framework: García Coll’s Integrative Model.....	9
Theoretical Background of Racial Microaggressions.....	10
Empirical Studies Linking Racial Microaggressions and Emerging Adults’ Well-Being	13
Theoretical Background of ERI Affirmation	15
ERI Affirmation as a Protective Factor	16
Current Study	17
Method	18
Participants.....	18
Procedure.....	18
Measures	19
Analytic Strategy.....	20
Results	21
Academic Belonging with Peers.....	22
Academic Belonging with Faculty	22
Academic Belonging with Administrators.....	23
Discussion	23
Limitations and Conclusion	28
References.....	35

List of Tables

Table 1	31
Table 2	32
Table 3	33
Table 4	34

Abstract

Racial microaggressions are subtle forms of racial discrimination experienced by marginalized groups during day-to-day interactions. Growing evidence suggests that these subtle experiences of racial discrimination negatively impact one's psychological and physical well-being. Despite this work, however, few studies have explored the role of racial microaggressions in college students' academic belonging. Alongside experiences of racial microaggressions, the current study also considered emerging adults' ethnic racial identity (ERI) affirmation, which refers to the positive attitudes and beliefs about one's ethnic or racial group membership. ERI affirmation is an important construct for adolescents that has been shown to reduce and mitigate stressors, in some instances. To address limitations in the literature, the current study utilized a weekly diary design to examine how fluctuations in racial microaggressions relate to Latinx and Black emerging adults' academic belonging and how ERI affirmation may mitigate the negative effects of racial microaggressions on academic belonging with peers, faculty, and administrators. Results indicated that week-to-week fluctuations in racial microaggressions were negatively associated with feelings of belonging with peers, but not with faculty or administrators. However, the average experiences of racial microaggressions on sense of belonging were positively associated with feelings of belonging with peers, faculty, and administrators. This suggests that even subtle forms of racial discrimination can impact one's sense of belonging with others. ERI affirmation, however, did not mitigate the weekly association between racial microaggressions and academic belonging. College institutions must acknowledge that these subtle, yet impactful forms of discrimination, are still very prominent on college campuses and they have implications for emerging adults' academic belonging

Introduction

Racial microaggressions are described as “brief, common-place, and daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental slights and indignities directed toward people of color, often automatically and unintentionally” (Sue et al., 2007, p.273). These experiences are common among emerging adults of color, especially on college campuses (Boysen, 2012; Ellis et al., 2019). Although racial microaggressions are sometimes considered subtle or unintentional, growing evidence suggests that these experiences negatively impact one’s psychological and physical well-being (Sue et al., 2007; Huynh, 2012; Nadal et al., 2017; Forrest-Bank & Cuellar, 2018). For instance, racial microaggressions have been linked to increased cortisol levels (Zeiders et al., 2018), lower self-esteem, and poorer overall self-reported physical health (Solórzano et al., 2000; Nadal et al., 2017). Despite this work, however, few studies have explored the role of racial microaggressions in college students’ academic well-being. Considering the educational context is a central part of youth’s lives, academic well-being is conceptualized as being composed of various components that include academic self-concept, schoolwork engagement, and perceived learning difficulties (Widlund et al., 2018). The focus on academic well-being is critical given that racial disparities in high school and college continue to persist. For instance, in 2016 the pushout rate¹ was higher for 16-24 year-olds who were Latinx (9.1%) and Black (7.0%), compared to those who were White (4.5%) (McFarland et al., 2018). Furthermore, among 18-24-year-olds, completion rates were higher among White students (94.5%) than among Black (92.2%) and Latinx students (89.1%) (McFarland et al., 2018). The current study examines the association between racial microaggressions and *academic*

¹ The term *dropout rate* was utilized in the McFarland et al (2018) article. The current manuscript uses the term *pushout rate*, a term that recognizes the complexities involved in youths’ non-persistence in schools and that multiple adverse situations within schools have consequences that impact youth (Doll et al., 2013).

belonging, an indicator of academic wellbeing that refers to the extent to which students feel accepted and supported by those in their school environment, including peers, teachers, and other adult figures (Goodenow & Grady, 1993).

Alongside experiences of racial microaggressions, the current study also considered emerging adults' ethnic racial identity (ERI) affirmation, which refers to the positive attitudes and beliefs about one's ethnic or racial group membership (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). ERI affirmation is an important construct for adolescents that has been shown to reduce and mitigate stressors, in some instances (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Yet, limited work examines the role of ERI affirmation in emerging adults' academic belonging or the role of ERI affirmation in buffering experiences of racial microaggressions.

To address these limitations, the current study utilized a weekly diary design to examine how fluctuations in racial microaggressions relate to Latinx² and Black³ emerging adults' academic belonging and how ERI affirmation may mitigate the negative effects of racial microaggressions on academic belonging. The reliance on weekly diary methods is a strength of the current study, as it allows for the examination of within-person changes in racial microaggressions and to link these fluctuations to emerging adults' weekly academic belonging. Such a design is critical as we move from drawing conclusions from between-person studies to understanding the dynamics within individuals (Almeida et al., 2009).

Theoretical Framework: García Coll's Integrative Model

The integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children is a conceptual framework that offers a perspective on the normative development for youth of

² *Latinx* is a term used to describe individuals of Latin American descent. Latinx is a gender neutral and non-binary alternative to the terms Latino and Latina.

³ The terms *African American* and *Black* are often used interchangeably; however, we use the term Black to be more inclusive and recognize individuals' culture, race, and lived experiences at a global scale.

color (García Coll et al., 1996) that a) challenges dominant models of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and b) draws attention to the developmental processes of youth of color and the issues surrounding the intersections of race, social class, ethnicity, and culture. Traditional models of human development are not easily applicable to minoritized youth because they do not adequately account for individual and contextual factors that are salient to their developmental processes. The integrative model of development proposes that social position factors (i.e., race, social class, ethnicity, gender) directly and indirectly effect developmental processes through the social stratification mechanisms of racism, racial discrimination, prejudice, and oppression.

In line with the integrative model, scholars have defined racism as “the system of power and privilege that is rooted in the historical oppression of non-dominant group members by dominant group members, through the maintenance of structures and ideologies that exclude power, status, and equal access to societal resources for those in the non-dominant group” (Harrell, 2000; p. 43). Racism as a system, is a macrolevel context that trickles down to directly and indirectly impact emerging adults’ everyday lives, which includes interpersonal experiences of racial discrimination. The integrative model posits that emerging adults of color navigate the societal system of racism and experience both inhibiting and promotive contexts/environments within this system. Schooling contexts, including university settings, can be considered both promoting and inhibiting environments because they are a place of support and growth; however, they can harm emerging adults and hinder their development through subtle forms of racism within the classroom, such as lower expectations from teachers, testing and tracking practices, and biased teaching curriculums (García Coll et al., 1996; pg. 1899).

Theoretical Background of Racial Microaggressions

One of the most commonly experienced social stressors among adolescents and emerging adults of color is racial discrimination, defined as the unfair treatment of individuals based on one's racial and/or ethnic group membership (Harrell, 2000). Research suggests that 91% of Black adolescents and 94% of Latinx youth have reported at least one experience of discrimination in their lifetime (Zeiders et al., 2018; Seaton et al., 2008). Similarly, in diary data, 77% of Black youth reported at least one discriminatory incident in the past 3 months, and Latinx emerging adults reported experiencing discrimination 32% of the days across a 2-week period (Torres & Ong, 2010). The deleterious impact of racial discrimination has been well researched. These experiences have been consistently linked to poor mental health, physical health, and negative academic outcomes (Benner et al., 2018). Most of this research, however, has primarily focused on more overt experiences of racial discrimination. For example, explicit forms of racial discrimination have been linked to lower self-esteem, increased depression, and a higher likelihood of developing cardiovascular problems (Jones et al., 2016). Less work has examined ambiguous and subtle forms of racial discrimination (i.e., *racial microaggressions*) (Sue et al., 2007).

Racial microaggressions include experiences that can be classified as *microinsults* or *microinvalidations*. Microinsults are thought to be an unconscious form of racial discrimination that degrade or shame a person's culture or racial identity. A microinsult may include a comment towards a college student of color, such as "Do you play a sport at your university?", with the underlying insinuation they might be in college for their athletic ability instead of their academic ability. A microinsult can also be a nonverbal action such as when a teacher calls on the White students in class, implying that the thoughts of Black or Latinx students are not as important. Microinvalidations are also considered an unconscious form of racial discrimination but defined

by a denial or invalidation of “thoughts, feelings, or the experiential reality” of individuals of color (Sue et al., 2007, p.274). For instance, when individuals are told “I don’t see color” or “All lives matter”, the statement negates the experiences of individuals of color.

One of the underlying features of racial microaggressions is that they are often subtle, unintentional, and/or unconscious, resulting in increased ambiguity by both the perpetrator and the recipient (Sue et al., 2017). For the perpetrator, who may view themselves as moral beings and believe that they do not hold racist views, racial microaggressions are perpetrated through comments, behaviors, or actions, and may even be interpreted by the perpetrator as questions or compliments (Sue et al., 2017). However, for perpetrators, in a society where whiteness is valued, meaning that whiteness is idealized and the “other” is devalued, individuals may be unaware of how they aggress towards people of color. Specifically, the preference for whiteness is so ingrained in societal habits that it creates an “invisible weight...that impacts visible structures and practices”, and for many, whiteness manifests in their everyday interactions (Bonilla-Silva, 2012; p.176-177). For the recipients of racial microaggressions, who also reside in a society where whiteness is valued, these experiences of racial microaggressions may be ambiguous, as compared to more overt racist behaviors. Given this, some have theorized that racial microaggressions may be especially burdensome and cognitively taxing (Sue et al., 2007; Huynh, 2012).

With that said, it is worth noting that although scholars often describe racial microaggressions as subtle and unintentional, growing evidence suggests that these experiences are harmful to people of color (discussed in more detail below; Sue et al., 2008). Given this, scholars have argued that even using the term *microaggressions* may be an inappropriate term that minimizes the impact of such experiences (Kendi, 2019). I maintain the use of the term

microaggression in the current study given that it is the term used in the larger literature; however, such a debate underscores the importance and salience of these experiences in the lives of people of color.

Empirical Studies Linking Racial Microaggressions and Emerging Adults' Well-Being

Most of the research examining racial microaggressions among Latinx and Black college students have been cross-sectional, have utilized between-person analyses, and have focused on indicators of mental and physical health. For instance, in a qualitative study of Black adults, racial microaggressions were linked to feelings of powerlessness, invisibility, loss of integrity, and pressure to represent one's group, which in turn related to increased psychological distress (Sue et al., 2008). Latinx and Black emerging adults have also reported less emotional well-being and feelings of inferiority due to racial microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2017). Furthermore, Torres et al. (2010), examined racial microaggressions and psychological functioning among Black graduate students. Results indicated that these experiences were associated with higher perceived stress and more depressive symptoms. As for physical health, racial microaggressions have been linked to worse self-reported health among Latinx and Black emerging adults (Nadal et al., 2017) and greater somatic symptoms among Latinx college students (Huynh, 2012). Although there has been limited longitudinal work, similar associations have been found. For instance, in a 2-week daily diary study, within-person and between-person associations were found linking racial microaggressions with greater somatic symptoms and negative affect among Asian American adolescents (Ong et al., 2013). In another study utilizing a 4-week diary method, Black and Latinx college students' experiences of racial microaggressions were associated with weekly changes in diurnal cortisol (Zeiders et al., 2018).

Although less studied, research examining racial microaggressions has found that these experiences are common within academic settings (Solórzano et al., 2000). In a qualitative study examining the role of racial microaggressions on campus for Black college students, researchers identified three themes: racial microaggression in the classroom, outside of the classroom, and in social spaces (Solórzano et al., 2000). Experiences of racial microaggressions in the classroom setting left students feeling like their teachers had low expectations of them. Outside of the classroom, racial microaggressions made students feel unaccepted in academic areas due to their race. Lastly, racial microaggressions within social spaces on campus, included experiences of being questioned by campus security despite not being engaged in inappropriate behaviors. This negative racial climate was related to decreased academic performance, the decision to leave the university, and dropping classes (Solórzano et al., 2000). In a quantitative study examining racial microaggressions and student success in graduate school, researchers found that participants who reported more experiences of racial microaggressions reported higher levels of emotional distress and lower social support within the academic environment. Lower social support was also related to less academic engagement (Clark et al., 2012). Among a diverse sample of undergraduate college students, racial microaggressions were negatively associated with academic self-efficacy (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015). This work, however, has exclusively focused on cross-sectional, between-person designs. To address this limitation, the current study utilized a robust four-week diary method to assess how individual fluctuations in racial microaggressions relate to fluctuations in emerging adults' academic belonging. Diary methods are essential in assessing within-person changes to stressors, including sociocultural related stress (Almeida et al., 2009). In this study, the diary method allowed us to measure individual-level weekly changes in racial

microaggressions to draw conclusions about an individual's level of academic belonging, by eliminating the possibility of third variable explanations.

Theoretical Background of ERI Affirmation

Alongside unique stressors, cultural developmental theories posit that youth develop resources that promote positive well-being (Neblett et al., 2012). One such resource is Ethnic Racial Identity (ERI). ERI is thought to have multiple domains, which include affirmation, resolution, and exploration (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). This study focuses on ERI *affirmation*, which refers to one's positive feelings towards their group membership, because of its salience to affective aspects of identity (e.g., having positive feelings towards one's own racial/ethnic group) and its association to positive adjustment across developmental periods.

ERI development is a critical aspect of youth's well-being and has been largely shown to be promotive and, in some instances, protective against negative racialized experiences. Social identity theory posits that one's self-image stems from their sense of belonging to their social group membership (Tajfel, 1981). Social identification plays an important role on self-concept (e.g., how one views themselves) and having positive feelings of connectedness towards one's group (Tajfel, 1981). In terms of ethnic group membership, youth who have a positive relationship with their ethnic group are more than likely to hold positive feelings about that group. In turn, these positive feelings about their ethnic group, may promote a positive self-image and thus, may be protective against experiences of racial discrimination. That is, ERI affirmation may aid youth when confronted with racial microaggressions, allowing them to draw from their own positive self-views to mitigate the negative experiences (Phinney, 1992; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Toomey, et al., 2013).

Most research examining ERI affirmation has focused on the developmental period of adolescence, because this is a time when youth become more capable of thinking abstractly, show an increase in social-cognitive abilities, and are able to navigate their social world (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). The developmental period of emerging adulthood is a time where numerous individual and contextual changes occur. That is, emerging adults have a greater ability to self-reflect, have greater flexibility in their identity development, and the ability to explore various realms of identity (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). ERI commitment has been shown to increase from the beginning to the end of college (Syed & Azmitia, 2009), indicating that ERI continues to develop even after adolescence. The college setting may be an especially important context for emerging adults because college campuses are typically more diverse in terms of other students, educators, and coursework that could invoke individuals to think about their own identity in ways that they have never done before (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Syed & Azmitia, 2008). Therefore, college-going emerging adults are at a particular advantage given that they are in a contextually suitable environment for the development of their identities.

ERI Affirmation as a Protective Factor

ERI affirmation has been linked to youth's positive psychosocial and academic outcomes (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Brook & Pahl, 2005; French et al., 2006; Piña-Watson, 2017; Brittan et al., 2013). Although the promotive effects of ERI affirmation are well established in the literature, few studies have examined its *protective* effects. In one study among Mexican American adolescents, results showed an interaction effect between discrimination and ERI affirmation, such that participants who had more experiences of racial discrimination maintained a higher self-esteem, when they also had a higher ERI affirmation. Adolescents with higher reports of racial discrimination and lower ERI affirmation, reported lower self-esteem (Romero

& Roberts, 2003). Also, among Black youth, higher ERI affirmation and belonging, even while exposed to risky behaviors, were less likely to consume alcohol, compared to those with lower levels of ERI affirmation and belonging (Nasim, Belgrave, Jagers, Wilson, & Owens, 2007). Despite the overarching evidence of ERI affirmation's protective nature, there is some evidence suggesting otherwise. For instance, among Black adolescents, ERI affirmation did not moderate the relationship between online racial discrimination and depressive symptoms among Black adolescents (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Among Black emerging adult males, private regard (similar to ERI affirmation) only moderated the relationship between racial discrimination and anxiety symptoms, but it did not mitigate depressive symptoms (Bynum et al., 2008). Given the salience of affirmation to emerging adults, and the limited work investigating ERI affirmation and its protective capabilities towards the negative effects of racial microaggressions, this study aimed to explore the moderating role of affirmation.

Current Study

Despite the overarching research on racial microaggressions and ERI, few studies have explored relations between racial microaggressions, ERI affirmation, and academic belonging. Guided by the García Coll's integrative model of development (1996) and emerging work showing the relevance of racial microaggressions and ERI affirmation in youths' lives (Nadal et al., 2017; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014), the current study aimed to investigate the role of racial microaggressions on academic belonging. Using a 4-week diary study, within-person fluctuations in racial microaggressions across the 4 weeks were examined in relation to fluctuations in academic belonging of Latinx and Black emerging adults. It was hypothesized that more experiences of racial microaggressions would be associated with lower academic belonging with peers, faculty, and administrators. Specifically, on weeks that youth

experience more racial microaggressions, they will report lower academic belonging with peers, faculty, and administrators. We also explored whether the relationship between racial microaggressions and academic belonging would be moderated by ERI affirmation. More specifically, we hypothesized that when emerging adults exhibit high ERI affirmation, the within-person association between racial microaggressions and academic belonging would be attenuated. In the current analyses, age, gender, race, and maternal education were controlled for, given that they have been previously linked to perceptions of academic belonging (Sánchez et al., 2005; Bonny et al., 2000).

Method

Participants

The current study utilized data from a larger weekly-diary study on health, relationships, and stress among college students at a Midwestern university (Davenport et al., 2020). The study was approved by University Institutional Review Board (IRB #2002764). Emerging adults between the ages of 18-25 years old ($M = 20$, $SD = 1.24$); enrolled at the university; and self-identified as Black/African American, or Hispanic/Latino, or Hispanic/Latino and White were eligible to participate. Ninety-one students (62.8%) identified as African American and fifty-four students (37.2%) identified as Latino/a. Participants' gender⁴ was identified as female (69.4%), male (28.5%), and other (2.1%).

Procedure

⁴ In the larger study, gender and sex were conflated. Participants were asked “*What is your gender?*” and participant responses included *Male, Female, Transgender, Other (queer, gender neutral)*. We acknowledge that gender and sex are not the same, such that sex refers to biological attributes, whereas gender is socially constructed. For consistency in relation to the data, however, we use the reported language.

The principal investigators of the study were provided a list of all identified Latinx and Black students enrolled at the university. Of the 2,122 eligible students emailed, 11.7% expressed interest in the study. Of those students, 145 (56%) consented to the study and completed an initial 1.5-hour assessment on a computer in the laboratory and 4-weekly diary surveys (lasting about 15 minutes each week) and end assessment on their own computer or electronic device. Participants were paid \$10 for the initial assessment, \$10 for the weekly surveys, and \$5 for the end assessment. In the current study, data from the initial survey and the weekly diary reports were utilized.

Measures

Racial microaggressions. Participants completed the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS) across all four weeks (Nadal, 2011). This scale is composed of subtle statements and behaviors that communicate negative messages to people of color. The five subscales that were utilized in the current study were: Assumptions of Inferiority (“Someone acted surprised at my scholastic or professional success”), Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality (“Someone clenched her/his purse or wallet upon seeing me”), Microinvalidations (“Someone told me they “don’t see color”), Exoticization and Assumptions of Similarity (“Someone told me that all people in my racial/ethnic group are all the same”), and Workplace/School (“I was ignored at school or at work”). Participants reported whether the event had occurred in the past 7 days (0 = *No*, 1 = *Yes*). A mean score was computed for each week. This scale has been utilized among Latinx and Black emerging adults (Nadal, 2011). Reliabilities for the microaggression subscales were not appropriate to compute due to the nature of the scale; microaggressions are rated as independent events, thus they do not affect the chance of experiencing another (Bollen & Lennox, 1991).

Ethnic Racial Identity Affirmation. Participants reported their ERI affirmation at the initial assessment, using the affirmation subscale from the brief version of the Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS) (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015). The subscale assessed youths' ERI affirmation (3 items, "I feel negatively about my race/ethnicity" (reverse coded)). Responses were coded on a Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 (*Does not describe me at all*) to 4 (*Describes me very well*). The scale was developed among Latinx youth but has been validated with Black youth (Umaña-Taylor & Shin, 2007). The affirmation subscale demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$).

Academic belonging. Using 3-items from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ), academic belonging was measured across all four weeks (Strayhorn, 2008). Participants self-reported the quality of relationship and sense of belonging with their peers, faculty members, and administrators (Strayhorn, 2008). The scale assessed participant's academic belonging with peers ("Relationships with other students"), faculty ("Relationships with faculty members"), and administrators ("Relationships with administrative personnel and offices"). Participants were asked, "thinking of your own experience, rate the quality of your relationships with other students/ faculty/administrators." Responses to each item were placed on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 ("*competitive, uninvolved, sense of alienation*") to 7 ("*friendly, supportive, sense of belonging*"). Items were used individually in the study to assess academic belonging to peers, faculty, and administrators, separately.

Analytic Strategy

Analyses were conducted in SAS. Given the nested structure of the data (i.e., weeks nested within individuals), multilevel regression models were estimated by which the intercept and slope components of model equations varied randomly across individuals. Weekly academic

belonging (i.e., belonging with peers, faculty, and administrators) served as dependent variables and were tested in separate models. At Level 1, racial microaggressions were included to assess within-person effects of discriminatory experiences on academic belonging. To assess the moderating effects, ERI affirmation was also included and an interaction term between within-person/between-person racial microaggressions and ERI affirmation were tested. Racial microaggressions were within-person centered to disaggregate within- and between-person effects (Curran & Bauer, 2011). At Level 1, a time variable was included to account for changes in academic belonging across time and centered at week 1 ($W1=0$, $W2=1$, $W3=2$, $W4=3$). ERI affirmation and individual controls (i.e., age, gender, maternal education, and race) were grand-mean centered and were included as time-invariant predictors (Level 2).

Results

Across the 4 weeks, emerging adults reported an average of 4 racial microaggressions per week. Nearly 90% of emerging adults reported at least 1 racial microaggression across the four weeks. Table 1 presents bivariate correlations among study variables and descriptive statistics. Race was not significantly associated with racial microaggressions; however, race was correlated with peer, faculty, and administrator academic belonging suggesting that Black participants reported lower academic belonging than their Latinx counterparts. Participants' gender was less consistently related to academic belonging, as it was only positively correlated with peer academic belonging, suggesting that males reported higher academic belonging with their peers than their female counterparts. Participants' self-reported age was positively related to peer academic belonging and ERI affirmation. Across most weeks, racial microaggressions were negatively related to peer academic belonging. The relations between racial microaggressions and faculty/administrator belonging were less consistent, but when significant, were negative.

Tests were also carried out to determine if the data were normally distributed. This was assessed by checking skewness and kurtosis. The ERI affirmation study variable was significantly skewed and leptokurtic. Given this, I conducted a log transformation of ERI affirmation and ran models with both the non-transformed and transformed ERI affirmation variable. No differences emerged, so for ease of interpretation I retained the use of the non-transformed ERI affirmation variable.

Academic Belonging with Peers

Using multilevel modeling, within-person and between-person effects of racial microaggressions were examined on academic belonging with peers, controlling for age, race, maternal education, gender, and time (changes in academic belonging across the 4 weeks). A significant within-person effect of racial microaggressions emerged; on weeks that students reported greater racial microaggressions (as compared to their average experience), they reported lower academic belonging with peers (Table 2). A between-person effect also emerged after accounting for time, age, race, maternal education, and gender; on average, students who reported more racial microaggressions, reported lower academic belonging with peers. Moderation analyses were performed to test the interactive effects of racial microaggressions and ERI affirmation. Analyses revealed no significant interactions.

Academic Belonging with Faculty

For academic belonging with faculty, no significant within-person effect of racial microaggression emerged (Table 3). There was, however, a significant between-person effect of racial microaggressions on faculty academic belonging after accounting for time, age, race, maternal education, and gender. Specifically, students who reported greater racial microaggressions reported lower academic belonging with faculty. Moderation analyses testing

whether ERI affirmation moderated within-person and between-person effects revealed no significant interactions.

Academic Belonging with Administrators

For academic belonging with administrators, no significant within-person effect of racial microaggression emerged (Table 4). There was, however, a significant between-person effect on administrator academic belonging after accounting for time, age, race, maternal education, and gender; on average, students who reported greater racial microaggressions reported lower academic belonging with administrators. Moderation analyses testing whether ERI affirmation moderated within-person and between-person effects revealed no significant interactions.

Discussion

Guided by a cultural developmental framework (García Coll et al., 1996), the current study examined the relations between racial microaggressions and students' academic belonging with peers, faculty, and administrators. Additionally, the current study also examined the moderating role of ERI affirmation. Our findings suggest that racial microaggressions are common among Latinx and Black emerging adults, and that these experiences relate to less academic belonging with peers, faculty, and administrators within academic contexts. ERI affirmation, however, did not mitigate the weekly association between racial microaggressions and academic belonging. The study contributes to our understanding of racism within academic spaces in important ways. First, my study uncovered the prevalence of racial microaggressions within the college context and that these experiences reliably manifest in academic spaces to pose detriment to students of color. My results found that, on average, Black and Latinx college students reported experiencing four racial microaggressions a week, with nearly 90% of emerging adults reported having experienced at least one racial microaggression across the four

week study period. These estimates highlight the salience of racial microaggressions on college campuses and align with other work showing that over 90% of Black and Latinx youth have reported at least one experience of racial discrimination in their lifetime (Zeiders et al., 2018; Seaton et al., 2008). The occurrence of racial microaggressions and the way they manifest in academic spaces can be quite detrimental. Considering the disparities in the pushout and completion rates among Latinx and Black students in comparison to white students, there is a need to identify ways that school contexts can facilitate promotive, rather than inhibitive environments (Garcia Coll, 1996; McFarland et al., 2018). Second, my study findings hold relevance for educators and policy makers, particularly in higher education. The sense of belonging within the academic space plays a larger role than what is typically thought. The lack of belonging within the college context can influence student success, retention, and one's trajectory through their educational and professional journey. A personal attribution such as ERI affirmation could not protect emerging adults of color in this study, thus racial microaggressions should be considered a major concern to individuals within the education system.

In addition to the prevalence of racial microaggressions on campuses, it was found that emerging adults' experiences of racial microaggressions related to changes in academic belonging. Specifically, within-person experiences of racial microaggressions related to lower academic belonging with *peers*, but not with *faculty* or *administrators*. Specific to peer academic belonging, findings suggested that on weeks that Black and Latinx college students reported greater racial microaggressions (as compared to their average experience), they also reported lower academic belonging with peers. Consistent with previous literature, racial discrimination has been consistently shown to relate to poor mental health, physical health, and negative academic outcomes (Benner et al., 2018). Racial discrimination from one's peers may be

especially harmful considering peers are a central part of students' social and academic lives (Niwa et al., 2014). These findings are unique however, because to our knowledge, no studies have linked individual level changes in racial microaggressions to academic belonging.

Inconsistent with our hypotheses, racial microaggressions did not relate to within-person changes in academic belonging with faculty and administrators. There may be a few explanations related to the context and design of the current study. One reason that a within-person effect of racial microaggressions emerged for peer academic belonging but not faculty or administrators, may be because of the salience of peers within college students' lives. Peer relationships have been shown to be an important aspect for emerging adults' adjustment to the college setting, such that positive peer relationships have been related to more persistence in college, better academic outcomes, and positive emotional well-being (Goguen et al., 2010; Swenson et al., 2008). Furthermore, the amount of time spent with adult figures notably decreases as youth progress through their educational journey (Swenson et al., 2008). During adolescence, youth typically attend school every day, with considerable contact with teachers (and peers) throughout a given school year. However, in college, students spend less quality time within the classroom, limiting their interactions with teachers, thus potentially increasing their time with peers (Lents & Cifuentes, 2010). As for administrators, emerging adults may have little to no interaction with them on campus. Although racial microaggressions may still emerge in interactions with faculty and administrators (Solórzano et al., 2000), they are potentially less impactful on one's sense of academic belonging, given the limited interactions compared to their peers.

Another explanation as to why within-person findings between racial microaggressions and faculty/administrator academic belonging did not emerge, could be due to how racial microaggressions were measured in the current study. The scale that was utilized was a broader

assessment of racial microaggressions and was not specific to teacher or administrator interactions. Common themes in qualitative work among Black and Latinx college students suggest that racial microaggressions within the classroom center around feelings of invisibility, feeling like faculty have low expectations of them, and course curriculum negating their experiences as students of color (Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). The scale that was utilized only asked two questions specific to the school context. For instance, “My opinion was overlooked in a group discussion because of my race” and “I was ignored at school or work because of my race”. Although these questions centered on the school context, they were still not specific to interactions with faculty or administrators. Specific items that reflect racial microaggressions from teachers and administrators are needed to fully understand the extent to which these experiences are occurring within the classroom setting and the impact on emerging adults’ academic belonging.

Although a within-person effect of racial microaggressions on faculty/administrator academic belonging was not found, between-person effects did emerge. That is, on average, racial microaggressions did relate to lower sense of academic belonging with peers, faculty, and administrators. A non-significant within-person effect, but a significant between-person effect suggests that racial microaggressions may not relate to week-to-week fluctuations in academic belonging with faculty and administrators; however, on average, emerging adults who are experiencing greater racial microaggressions, do tend to report feeling less academic belonging with faculty and administrators. Consistent with theory, racial discrimination is thought to directly and indirectly impact emerging adults’ everyday lives and their interpersonal experiences (Harrell, 2000). Not only does this include the salience of peers on academic belonging, but it also posits that academic figures, such as faculty and administrators hold

importance as well. Although levels of academic belonging based on racial discrimination might not function similarly, experiences of racial microaggressions on average still hold importance. Therefore, it is possible that racial microaggressions likely transpire in unique ways across weeks to impact belonging within the academic setting, which may suggest that all academic figures contribute to the larger school climate and still impact emerging adults and their well-being (Garcia Coll, 1996).

ERI affirmation did not significantly moderate the relationship between racial microaggressions and academic belonging with peers, faculty, and administrators. Indeed, prior work has suggested that ERI affirmation may protect youth from experiences of stress. For instance, ERI affirmation has been shown to mitigate experiences of racial discrimination and self-esteem, as well as exposure to risky behaviors and externalizing problems (Romero & Roberts, 2003; Nasim et al., 2007). However, in the current study, racial microaggressions emerged as a source of stress that could not be buffered by strong positive feelings about one's own ethnic/racial background. In fact, other studies have found that there are instances when ERI affirmation cannot protect youth. For example, ERI affirmation did not moderate the link between online racial discrimination and depressive symptoms among Black adolescents (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). In another study among Black emerging adult males, private regard (similar to ERI affirmation) only moderated the relationship between racial discrimination and anxiety symptoms, but not depressive symptoms (Bynum et al., 2008). In the current study, it may be that racial microaggressions are particularly harmful to academic belonging with peers and that even when individuals felt positively about their own ethnic group, this was not enough to minimize the effects of racial microaggressions. Alternatively, the lack of ERI affirmation buffering could be related to the lack of variability in ERI affirmation in the current sample.

Indeed, the majority Latinx and Black emerging adults in our sample reported high ERI affirmation, with very few reporting low ERI affirmation. Limited variability can impact statistical findings and limit the ability to detect moderation (Aiken & West, 1991). Further work should investigate the moderating role of ERI affirmation on racial microaggressions and academic outcomes more broadly to better understand how these relationships operate for emerging adults of color.

In sum, the current study examined the ways that racial microaggressions related to Latinx and Black emerging adults' academic belonging with peers, faculty, and administrators. The focus on Latinx and Black emerging adults is important given their unique experiences embedded within larger systems of oppression, and the reliance on weekly diary data allowed for a more rigorous examination of within- and between-person effects. The focus on within-person effects is important because such an approach aligns with theory of stress processes (Zeiders et al., 2018), and it provides a useful analytic approach to understand how racial microaggressions unfold across short-term studies.

Limitations and Conclusion

Despite the contributions of this study, there are limitations worth noting. First, the study was conducted among Black and Latinx emerging adults in college. College students are unique in that they are pursuing a higher education which often provides the means of a higher income and more access to resources (Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2008). Given that not all individuals have access to a college education, the college context itself can therefore be considered a privilege. Understanding how emerging adults experience and internalize racial microaggressions outside of the college setting is necessary to assess the full effects of racial microaggression and to determine just how far reaching these negative racial experiences are. Additionally, our sample

attended a PWI, and prior research suggests that these environments are rife with racial microaggressions (Yosso et al., 2009). Future studies should focus on the experiences of students of color across different college contexts in which they may be the numerical majority or better represented in terms of their ethnic group (e.g., Hispanic Serving Institutions). Although more representation at one's institution is important in terms of belonging and learning engagement, experiences of both out-group and within-group discrimination can emerge.

Related, participants in the current study were restricted to those who identified as Black or Latinx only. Afro-Latinx students were excluded due to the larger study's focus on a specific ethnic and racial group. This is an important limitation to highlight given that Afro-Latinx individuals offer their own unique background and experiences (Ramos et al., 2003). As a result of intersecting social position factors and social stratifications, individuals have distinct lived experiences (Garcia Coll, 1996). Therefore, it is important to note that although this study focused on Black and Latinx emerging adults, it is acknowledged that there are differences between these groups. The current study controlled for ethnicity and race; however, due to the small sample size, I was unable to explore differences between the groups (Black vs. Latinx) and differences within each group (e.g., different Latinx backgrounds). Future work should explore how Latinx and Black emerging adults' experiences of racial microaggressions may be similar and different and how these play out to impact their academic well-being.

An additional limitation of the current study was the reliance on week-to-week diary data. Although this design allowed for the examination of within-person changes in racial microaggressions and academic belonging, the focus on weekly reports may not have captured the variability or accuracy in emerging adults' academic belonging. With regards to the mood and affect, daily diary methodology has shown to provide a closer estimate of these reports,

rather than weekly assessments, because participants are more likely to report on a peak experience or their most recent experience (Parkinson et al., 1995). Empirical evidence also suggests that academic belonging fluctuates daily, particularly among first-generation college students (Gillen-O'Neel, 2021). First-generation college students are thought to experience negative stereotypes within the college context leading to daily fluctuations in academic belonging; continuing-generation college students may view these fluctuations as a normative aspect of being in college. Similarly, students of color may also face stereotypes regarding their ethnic/racial background, resulting in more vulnerability to these daily fluctuations in academic belonging. Thus, by utilizing weekly diary data, emerging adults' reports of academic belonging may have been truncated. A day-to-day assessment of academic belonging, alongside a larger sample of emerging adults, might better capture the dynamic changes that occur among students of color within the college context and allow for differences by generational status to be explored.

Taken together, these findings highlight the detrimental role that experiences of racial microaggressions play within a school context, particularly among emerging adults and their academic belonging with peers, faculty, and administrators. This suggests that even subtle forms of racial discrimination can impact one's sense of academic belonging with others. College institutions must acknowledge that these subtle, yet impactful forms of discrimination, are still very prominent on college campuses and they have implications for students' academic belonging. Efforts to reduce harm through supporting students of color experiencing these events, while also working to eliminate instances of racial microaggressions perpetrated by peers, faculty, and administrators, is greatly needed.

Table 1*Bivariate Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.	19.	20.	21.
1. Race	--																				
2. Gender	-.05	--																			
3. Age	.15	-.05	--																		
4. MEDU	.13	.14	-.18*	--																	
5. RMG W1	.05	-.04	.16	-.03	--																
6. RMG W2	.02	.09	.15	.01	.66***	--															
7. RMG W3	.10	-.03	.10	-.00	.45***	.56***	--														
8. RMG W4	-.01	-.04	.22*	.00	.48***	.54***	.68***	--													
9. P Blng W1	-.31***	.20*	-.10	-.03	-.27**	-.28**	-.12	-.22*	--												
10. P Blng W2	-.27**	.11	-.19*	.07	-.19*	-.33***	-.26**	-.32***	.61***	--											
11. P Blng W3	-.28**	.13	-.14	-.01	-.19*	-.23*	-.13	-.13	.67***	.60***	--										
12. P Blng W4	-.30**	.06	-.19*	.02	-.10	-.23*	-.14*	-.18*	.67***	.62***	.72***	--									
13. F Blng W1	-.16	-.03	.11	.05	-.20*	-.27**	-.15	-.10	.35***	.33***	.37***	.38***	--								
14. F Blng W2	-.20*	.01	-.07	.01	-.26**	-.27**	-.27**	-.18	.35***	.57***	.41***	.48***	.56***	--							
15. F Blng W3	-.19*	.13	.08	-.11	-.14	-.14	-.07	-.07	.34***	.41***	.46***	.43***	.65***	.61***	--						
16. F Blng W4	-.23**	-.05	.01	-.05	.00	-.06	-.12	-.04	.30**	.43***	.42***	.62***	.55***	.66***	.68***	--					
17. A Blng W1	-.24**	.08	.03	.01	-.14	-.27**	-.05	.05	.39***	.35***	.44***	.37***	.63***	.41***	.52***	.45***	--				
18. A Blng W2	-.22*	.01	-.13	-.02	-.14	-.25**	-.19*	-.08	.28**	.49***	.28**	.37***	.47***	.70***	.46***	.53***	.60***	--			
19. A Blng W3	-.24*	.04	.01	-.02	-.04	-.17	-.14	.05	.33***	.36***	.48***	.42***	.56***	.39***	.69***	.60***	.69***	.57***	--		
20. A Blng W4	-.23*	-.08	-.12	.06	.04	-.08	-.11	-.08	.34***	.38**	.42***	.57***	.46***	.50***	.51***	.70***	.53***	.70***	.69***	--	
21. ERI Aff	.10	-.15	.17*	-.06	.05	.04	.02	.04	-.12	-.07	.00	-.05	.13	-.13	-.04	-.07	.03	-.03	.07	-.07	--
Means		20.7	5.86	.18	.13	.10	.08	4.85	4.98	4.92	5.09	4.87	4.82	4.69	4.72	4.47	4.47	4.28	4.43	3.89	
SD		1.24	1.70	.18	.16	.15	.11	1.55	1.40	1.52	1.40	1.48	1.50	1.61	1.55	1.61	1.61	1.67	1.70	.36	
Skewness		.50	.16	1.13	1.92	2.48	2.11	-.56	-.55	-.65	-.49	-.44	-.38	-.53	-.45	-.49	-.44	-.38	-.37	-4.7	
Kurtosis		.61	.76	.58	3.87	6.94	5.42	-.27	-.04	.05	-.28	-.28	-.53	-.32	-.42	-.31	-.54	-.46	-.63	30.49	
Min		18.59	1.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	
Max		25.51	10.00	.71	.83	.77	.66	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	4.00

Note. For correlations, sample size varied from 120 to 145 due to missing data. Race was coded 0 = Latinx; 1 = Black. Gender was coded 0 = female, 1 = male. MEDU = Maternal Education; RMG = Racial microaggressions; P blng = Peer academic belonging; F blng = Faculty academic belonging; A blng = Administrative personnel academic belonging ERI Aff = ERI affirmation; W1 – W4 = Week 1 – Week 5; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 2*WP and BP Effects of Racial Microaggressions on Academic Belonging with Peers*

	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	5.33	0.18	<.0001***	5.33	0.19	<.0001***
Age	-0.05	0.09	0.54	-0.36	0.09	0.68
Race	-0.81	0.02	<.0001***	-0.82	0.20	<.0001***
Maternal Education	0.02	0.06	0.72	0.02	0.06	0.75
Gender	0.36	0.20	0.09	0.35	0.22	0.11
Time	0.03	0.04	0.38	0.04	0.04	0.35
WP Microaggressions (RMG)	-0.98	0.45	0.03*	-0.91	0.47	0.05
BP Microaggressions (RMG)	-2.07	0.75	0.006**	-1.98	0.77	0.01**
ERI Affirmation				-0.21	0.32	0.50
WP RMG X ERI Affirmation				-1.42	2.02	0.48
BP RMG X ERI Affirmation				-1.89	4.02	0.64

Note. Race was coded 0 = Latinx; 1 = Black. Gender was coded 0 = female, 1 = male. Time is included in the model to control for changes in the DV across the four weeks. WP = Within-person effect; BP = Between-person effect.

Table 3*Effects of Racial Microaggressions on Academic Belonging with Faculty*

	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>P</i>
Intercept	4.96	0.21	<.0001***	4.98	0.22	<.0001***
Age	-0.01	0.10	0.89	-0.01	0.11	0.92
Race	-0.78	0.24	0.001**	-0.81	0.24	0.001**
Maternal Education	0.04	0.07	0.53	0.05	0.07	0.50
Gender	0.002	0.26	0.99	-0.03	0.26	0.91
Time	-0.05	0.04	0.25	-0.05	0.04	0.22
WP Microaggressions (RMG)	-0.79	0.51	0.12	-0.92	0.52	0.08
BP Microaggressions (RMG)	-2.26	0.90	0.01**	-2.45	0.93	0.01**
ERI Affirmation				0.24	0.38	0.54
WP RMG X ERI Affirmation				2.50	2.24	0.26
BP RMG X ERI Affirmation				3.69	4.48	0.45

Note. Race was coded 0 = Latinx; 1 = Black. Gender was coded 0 = female, 1 = male. Time is included in the model to control for changes in the DV across the four weeks. WP = Within-Person effect; BP = Between-Person effect.

Table 4*Effects of Racial Microaggressions on Academic Belonging with Administrators*

	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	5.24	0.20	<.0001***	5.24	0.20	<.0001***
Age	0.09	0.09	0.38	0.10	0.10	0.31
Race	-0.61	0.22	0.007**	-0.61	0.23	0.01**
Maternal Education	0.02	0.07	0.81	0.01	0.07	0.85
Gender	0.05	0.24	0.83	0.06	0.24	0.80
Time	-0.06	0.04	0.13	-0.07	0.04	0.10
WP Microaggressions (RMG)	0.15	0.48	0.76	0.01	0.50	0.98
BP Microaggressions (RMG)	-2.65	0.84	0.002**	-2.47	0.86	0.01**
ERI Affirmation				-0.22	0.35	0.53
WP RMG X ERI Affirmation				2.55	2.15	0.24
BP RMG X ERI Affirmation				-3.82	4.50	0.40

Note. Race was coded 0 = Latinx; 1 = African American. Gender was coded 0 = female, 1 = male. Time is included in the model to control for changes in the DV across the four weeks. WP = Within-Person effect; BP = Between-Person effect.

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