

Exploring the Me-searcher Stereotype to Illuminate the Multifaceted Impact of Epistemic  
Exclusion: Faculty Perceptions, Graduate Experiences, and Undergraduate Student Evaluations

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## Abstract

Attacks on race scholarship—scholarly research that examines racial identity, racism, and racial inequality—in the United States have been exacerbated by discriminatory political efforts under the second Trump Presidency (Barry, 2025; Trump, 2025). However, even prior to anti-DEI legislation, U.S. psychology oppressed and excluded race scholarship, especially when such work was produced by Black psychologists (Dupree & Kraus, 2022; Remedios, 2022; Settles et al., 2021; Shelton, 2000; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). The current dissertation examines perceiver’s (White individuals’) and target’s (Black individuals’) perspectives on the *epistemic exclusion* of scholarship on anti-Black racism produced by Black scholars. Each chapter examines epistemic exclusion at a different level of the academy: among faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. Study 1 captures how faculty apply the stereotype that minority researchers who study their own identities and communities are “me-searchers”. Study 2 captures the harm of the me-searcher stereotype experienced by Black graduate students who study anti-Black racism. Lastly, Study 3 focuses on the devaluation of courses on anti-Black racism when those courses are taught by Black instructors. I suggest that the devaluation of Black scholarship on anti-Black racism occurs across these multiple levels, wherein (1) White faculty and undergraduate students perceive Black psychologists who study anti-Black racism as lacking objectivity and having a personal agenda (Studies 1 and 3) and (2) Black graduate students who study anti-Black racism learn that mainstream psychology does not value their work (Study 2). Collectively, this research examines negative attitudes toward Black psychologists who center anti-Black racism in their research and teaching and highlights the disparities faced by Black scholars due to the personal relevance of their intellectual contributions.

*Keywords:* anti-Black racism, epistemic exclusion, objectivity, me-searcher, psychology

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As I tie a bow on my doctorate program, I dedicate this section of my dissertation to my dad and school dad. Two people whose memory I will carry on and who inspired so much of my research and everything else I do.

To my bestie, Dad,

To my heavenly angel who watches over me every day, thank you. Thank you for all your guidance and love that always made and continues to make me feel like the smartest person on the planet. Sitting and watching TV and having hour long debates has shaped so much of who I am today and my ability to critically think. You have been one of my biggest inspirations and reasons to do something great in this world. I would not be the woman I am if it weren't for your love, support, and kindness. Thank you for always seeing me and loving me for who I am. I will always be grateful for the times we shared and getting the opportunity to have you as my dad. I promise to always make you proud and committing my life's work to helping others who look

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Both my dad and Sam always told me to "stick it to the man." And throughout everything I have done, including this dissertation, I know I did just that. And that's on what, period.

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## **Exploring the Me-searcher Stereotype to Illuminate the Multifaceted Impact of Epistemic Exclusion: Faculty Perceptions, Graduate Experiences, and Undergraduate Student Evaluations**

Black faculty are underrepresented in psychology in the United States (U.S.) (American Psychological Association, APA Task Force on Inequities in Academic Tenure and Promotion, 2023; Lin et al., 2018). Only 6% of U.S. psychology faculty are Black, yet Black people make up nearly 13.7% of the general population in the United States (Lin et al., 2018; United States Census Bureau, 2024). However, White individuals are overrepresented in psychology such that 86% of psychology faculty are White and White individuals make up 75.3% of the U.S. population (American Psychological Association, APA Task Force on Inequities in Academic Tenure and Promotion, 2023; Lin et al., 2018; United States Census Bureau, 2024). Efforts to increase racial diversity among faculty have failed as a result of Black faculty experiencing barriers during hiring, promotion, and the tenure-process, discrimination, and a lack of support (Haizlip, 2012). Representation of Black faculty is imperative as increased representation of minoritized individuals helps the recruitment, retention, and success of Black undergraduate and graduate students attending predominately, White institutions (PWI) (Hussain & Jones, 2021).

The overrepresentation of White individuals in psychology has led to a standard of using White-centered research practices (e.g., predominately sampling White individuals) and the devaluation of racial scholarship that deviates from these norms (Dupree & Kraus, 2022; Remedios, 2022; Settles et al., 2021; Shelton, 2000; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Black faculty have reported that colleagues make them feel as though their research is unclear and should conform to norms within the discipline, by prioritizing non-identity related topics (Settles et al., 2020). Altogether, systemic racism stifles the recruitment and retention of Black scholars in

psychology (as well as other scholars of color), resulting in academic spaces that are predominantly White and devaluing the study of Black experiences (Buchanan et al., 2021; Dupree & Kraus, 2022; Remedios, 2022; Settles et al., 2021; Shelton, 2000; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Notably, research has focused on biases faced by Black scholars and scholars studying racism in psychology separately, while the current research examines the intersection of these experiences. Thus, this dissertation aims to evaluate the systemic inequities that contribute to the suppression and epistemic exclusion of the intellectual contributions of Black scholars who center anti-Black racism in their research and teaching.

### **Epistemic Exclusion of Race Scholarship Produced by Black Scholars**

Epistemic exclusion describes how research produced by minoritized scholars is delegitimized, undervalued, or ignored when it deviates from White mainstream psychology (Settles et al., 2021). Black scholars are overlooked and devalued by formal (e.g., publications, grants/funding) and informal hierarchies (e.g., lack of recognition) that make them feel invisible and illegitimate (Settles et al., 2020). For example, Roberts and colleagues (2020) conducted a systematic review of 26,000 published articles in top-tier psychology journals from 1974 and 2018 and discovered that race scholarship produced by White scholars mostly consists of White participants and is published more compared to scholars of color research on race. Importantly, this disparity is not due to racial minorities producing lower-quality research than White researchers but rather a reflection of the biases that seek to suppress race scholarship produced by racially minoritized scholars. White psychologists in positions of power in academia exclude Black scholars, often by using racial stereotypes (e.g., unintelligent and uneducated) to characterize their scholarship as low-quality, illegitimate, and incomprehensible (Dupree & Kraus, 2022; Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Settles et al., 2021). Thai and colleagues (2021)

experimentally tested the influence of researcher race on these biased perceptions revealing that White individuals perceive scholarship on anti-Black racism produced by Black researchers as being less legitimate and trustworthy research compared to scholarship on anti-Black racism produced by White researchers. These results highlight the need to further understand how Black researchers studying anti-Black racism are labeled and perceived in academic spaces given the overrepresentation of White individuals in positions of power in academia (e.g., senior faculty, administration, editorial boards).

### **Challenges of Conducting Me-search**

Me-search is a label used informally in academic settings to describe research conducted based on a researcher's personal interests and/or identity (Altenmüller, 2021). However, this term is rarely used toward White researchers who study White populations, revealing how the field is content with ignoring the motivations and subjectivity of White researchers while discouraging people of color from conducting race scholarship (Ray, 2016; Thai et al., 2021). For example, Torrez and colleagues (2024) showed that research on race conducted by scholars of color in psychology has been questioned regarding its objectivity and minimized as me-search. This label may be an underexplored stereotype deployed disproportionately towards Black scholars and other minoritized scholars that is used to covertly question a researcher's objectivity and legitimacy. However, White psychologists have the privilege of not labeling themselves as a me-searcher and not indicating they are studying race when studying White identity or White samples (Remedios, 2022). This also enables White psychologists in positions of power to have the privilege of using the term me-search to minimize race scholarship produced by Black and other minoritized scholars, hindering the success of minoritized scholars in hiring and promotion. Thus, investigating White psychologists' perceptions of me-search is

essential to understand the systemic oppression and epistemic exclusion of Black scholars studying anti-Black racism in psychology and how the label “me-searcher” may exacerbate experiences of epistemic exclusion.

### **Perceived Objectivity of Black Me-Search**

When conducted by scholars of color, research on race is deemed to lack objectivity and scientific rigor. Objectivity is defined as the ability to make judgments and interpretations based on data, while maintaining neutrality and detachment from all outcomes (Carrier, 2013). The social sciences uphold norms of objectivity, emphasizing that science must be neutral and objective to be impactful, rigorous, and trustworthy (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Individuals who have not upheld these norms may face *objectivity interrogation*, defined as “written and verbal questioning in academic contexts that implicate their scientific rigor” (Torrez et al., 2024). Torrez and colleagues (2024) conducted interviews on scholars of color studying race in psychology and found that they tend to be questioned regarding the objectivity and quality of their scholarship. These findings reflect how objectivity norms are maintained by White racial privilege as White individuals benefit from deciding which topics, methods, and analysis procedures are deemed appropriate for scientific investigation (Mills, 1997; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). This privilege allows White scholars to have the power in deciding who is labeled a me-searcher and the ability to deem such work as lacking objectivity and legitimacy. Thus, it is important to investigate how White individuals’ biases maintain hierarchies, the epistemic exclusion of race scholarship created by Black scholars, and the privileges attached to White identity and studying White identity in psychology.

### **Epistemic Exclusion of Black Scholarship on Anti-Black Racism**

Understanding how the exclusionary label of me-search is used systemically in psychology requires investigating both the perceiver and target perspectives. This approach highlights the consequences of how the disproportionate overrepresentation of White people grants them power to decide what scholarship should be included in the discipline. Thus, the following set of studies investigates the perceiver perspectives of White faculty and White undergraduate students and the target perspective of Black graduate students. It is imperative to focus on the target and perceiver perspectives as we need to understand the perceptions of people in power (perceiver) and how these perceptions have detrimental consequences on those affected by this oppressive system (target).

**Perceiver.** Psychology has historically rewarded the use of White-centered research practices further contributing to the persistence of Whiteness in the field. White perceivers devalue and question race scholarship through creating a culture of White-centric norms that doesn't value research on racism (Buchanan, 2021; Dupree & Kraus, 2022; Durrheim, 2024; Lewis Jr., 2021; Ray, 2016; Remedios, 2022; Roberts & Mortenson, 2023; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). White individuals benefit from these White-centric norms that grant them racial power and the ability to influence others career paths as they are overrepresented in psychology and thus able to decide who and what scholarship is prioritized (Buchanan, 2021; Dupree & Kraus, 2022; Remedios, 2022; Settles et al., 2021; Shelton, 2000). Notably, White faculty are not the only individuals who shape the career trajectories of Black scholars. Student course evaluations also affect hiring and promotion decisions (Griffin et al., 2011). Previous research has shown that Black faculty are rated more negatively by students than White faculty based on racial biases and stereotypes that unfairly label Black faculty as illegitimate, incompetent, and unintelligent (Bavishi et al., 2010; Chávez & Mitchell, 2020; Ho et al., 2009; Reid, 2010). Black

faculty have been evaluated more poorly, and even evaluated as being racist, in predominately White classrooms versus more racially diverse classrooms, especially when they teach classes where race and racism are discussed (Arnold et al., 2016; Harris, 2019; Settles et al., 2021). Thus, it is essential to examine the role that White perceivers, including faculty (Chapter 1) and undergraduate students (Chapter 3) play in systemic racism towards Black scholars studying anti-Black racism.

**Target.** Black faculty studying anti-Black racism face disparities in review processes (e.g., grants and publications) that negatively impact them during tenure and promotion. For example, there is evidence of racial disparities in *whose* research in psychology is cited such that Black scholars, especially Black women, are less likely to be published and cited than White scholars (Bertolero et al., 2020; Buchanan, 2021; Smith et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021) further excluding Black scholarship, especially when it centers anti-Black racism. Previous research examining publications over time reflect White scholars' preference in citing White authors more than Black and other scholars of color (Bertolero et al., 2020; Buchanan, 2021; Chakravartty; 2018; Smith et al., 2021). Disparities in publication and citation rates limit scholars' research opportunities and perpetuates exclusionary practices that prevent researchers from receiving recognition for their work. This can lead to the potential filtering out or departure of Black faculty studying race in psychology as they may not advance in their career trajectory for not publishing their research or being heavily cited (Buchanan, 2021; Settles et al; 2021). The suppression of such work—whether through funding decisions or other academic hierarchies (e.g., journal publications)—not only limits the presence of race scholarship in psychology (Durrheim, 2024; Roberts et al., 2021; Settles et al; 2021) but also reduces opportunities for Black students interested in these topics (Buchanan, 2021; Dupree & Kraus, 2022; Remedios,

2022; Settles et al., 2021; Shelton, 2000). This includes Black prospective graduate students applying to psychology programs and undergraduate students seeking research opportunities in these areas. Thus, Chapter 2 focuses on Black psychology graduate students' experiences navigating epistemic exclusion and observing their Black colleagues (e.g., advisor) navigate these barriers.

### **The Present Research**

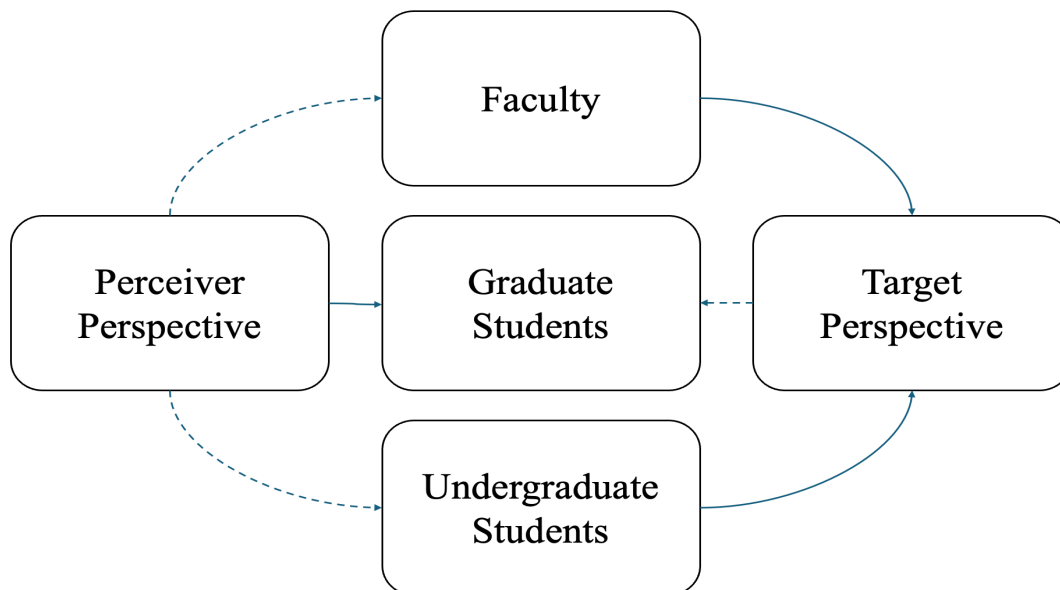
The following chapters describe three studies varying in methodological approaches that seek to further understand the epistemic exclusion of Black scholars studying anti-Black racism in psychology. The first chapter assesses psychology faculty members' perceptions of "me-searchers" to shed light on some of the attitudes that underlie the me-searcher stereotype. Importantly, this study captures how psychology faculty define me-search and how they perceive researchers who conduct personally relevant research. The second chapter describes qualitative research on the experiences of current and recent Black graduate students who study anti-Black racism. This study seeks to provide evidence on the challenges and disparities Black graduate students may face when conducting research on anti-Black racism, such as me-searcher labeling, observed epistemic exclusion, and lack of belonging. The third chapter includes a mixed-methods study that assesses undergraduate students' perceptions of Black instructors teaching a Black psychology course that highlights anti-Black racism.

The final chapter of this dissertation focuses on how the findings of these three studies contribute to our overall understanding of how epistemic exclusion sustains the oppression and devaluation of research on anti-Black racism produced by Black scholars. Thus, the final chapter emphasizes the importance of recognizing that epistemic exclusion unfolds because of interlocking systems of oppression. All studies showcase that race scholarship is not valued in

the psychological sciences and when conducted by Black scholars, is scrutinized. The collective findings within this dissertation work should not only inform future studies examining the systemic oppression and devaluation of Black racial scholarship but should be taken in consideration by leadership within academic departments, society organizations (e.g., American Psychological Association), and editorial boards. Examining epistemic exclusion at various levels throughout one's academic career is critical to fully acknowledge the extent to which the systematic oppression of Black scholars and studying anti-Black racism in psychology has been and continues to be maintained.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework of Dissertation Studies*



Note. The dashed lines indicate the perspectives investigated in the following studies.

## **Chapter 1: Faculty Perceptions of Me-searchers- Objectivity, Vested Interest, and Legitimacy**

Black scholars in higher education face racism from students and colleagues, as well as the devaluation of their scholarship, resulting in a loss of opportunities and continued underrepresentation (Fox Tree & Vaid, 2022; Griffin et al., 2011). The recruitment and retention of Black scholars studying racism and Black samples, especially in psychology, is not only important in dismantling Whiteness but also shows a department's commitment to diversity and inclusion (Dupree & Boykin, 2021; Hussain & Jones, 2019; Llamas, 2021). Prioritizing racial diversity and representation of Black scholars studying racism also signals support of diversity science and safety for other Black researchers, especially Black students (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). However, White individuals tend to perceive Black scholars who study anti-Black racism as illegitimate, subjective, and as having a personal agenda (Thai et al., 2021). These perceptions are result from White-centric biases that have primarily centered the lived experiences of White individuals in research while shaping norms to devalue Black racial scholarship. For example, Black scholars who study anti-Black racism and other scholars of color studying race have been labeled as a "me-searcher" to minimize the legitimacy of racial scholarship produced by racially minoritized scholars (Ray, 2016; Torrez et al., 2024). Investigating how faculty in psychology perceive and use the term "me-search" will shed light on how the label is used towards Black scholars studying anti-Black racism and other scholars of color studying racial minorities.

### **Perceptions of Me-search**

Scholars often use the term "me-search" to describe individuals who conduct research based on their own personal interests and/or identities (Altenmüller, 2021). By this definition, anyone can be a me-searcher; however, the term may be disproportionately used to question the

validity of race scholarship conducted by people of color (Ray, 2016; Thai et al., 2021; Torrez et al., 2024). The term me-search may also be used disproportionately to devalue minoritized scholarship in addition to race as well, such as scholarship on sexism. Specifically, Thai and colleagues (2021) found that individuals perceive minoritized researchers studying racism, sexism, and weight stigma as having a personal agenda leading to perceptions that the research lacks legitimacy and trustworthiness more than research on racism, sexism, and weight stigma produced by dominant group researchers. Similarly, Torrez and colleagues (2024) found that scholars of color conducting race scholarship in psychology and management have been labeled as conducting me-search, implying that their research is driven by a personal agenda and lacks objectivity and scientific rigor. The previous findings are concerning since scholars of color studying racism may be stereotyped as a me-searcher and thus, devalued by other scholars. Accordingly, the present study examined how psychology faculty perceive me-search. I hypothesized that perceptions of researcher objectivity and vested interest (having a personal agenda) in addition to research legitimacy represent underlying attitudes of the me-searcher label. These hypotheses were preregistered on the Open Science Framework (accessible here: [https://osf.io/z7pu3/?view\\_only=224265ae39b6482ebb80744175c8ecf6](https://osf.io/z7pu3/?view_only=224265ae39b6482ebb80744175c8ecf6)).

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants (n=150) were faculty members currently employed in a psychology department in the United States and who were located in the United States at the time of study completion. All participants included in final analyses provided a working academic email address to verify their faculty status and so that they could receive compensation. Participants received \$10 Amazon.com gift cards for completing the study. A research assistant verified that

each email address was associated with a current faculty member by finding their university webpage. The total number of participants needed for the study was determined by previous research indicating that confirmatory factor analyses require a minimum of 5-10 responses per item (the current study has a total of 15 items) (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021).

Most of the faculty participants were tenured (56%), 23.3% were pre-tenure and 20.7% were non-tenure track. Participants self-reported the following areas of expertise in psychology: 29.3% clinical, 28.7% social, 18.7% cognitive, 16.7% developmental, 7.3% experimental, 7.3% industrial/organizational, 7.3% neuroscience, 7.3% interdisciplinary, 6.7% applied psychology, 3.3% counseling, 2.7% school psychology, and 11.3% in other psychology areas not listed. The mean age was 44.7 years old ( $SD = 10.5$  years). The majority of participants racially identified as White (81.3%), and of the remaining sample, 8% identified as Asian, 6% as Hispanic, 4.7% as Biracial/Multiracial, 3.3% as Black, 2% Indigenous and 1.3% as another race not listed; 2.7% of participants preferred not to answer. The sample was also 65.3% women, 32.7% men, 1.3% non-binary/non-conforming, and 0.7% gender identity not listed. Faculty in the sample were employed at universities from the five regions of the U.S.: 33.3% in the Midwest, 27.3% in the Northeast, 22.7% in the Southeast, 11.3% in the Southwest, and 5.3% in the West. Most participants were faculty members at an R1 institution (very high research activity) (78.7%), with 20% at R2 institutions (high research activity) and 1.3% at Doctoral/Professional Universities. Lastly, 67.3% of faculty were employed at public universities, while 32.7% were employed at private not-for-profit universities.

## **Procedures**

Over 1,100 psychology faculty across the United States were directly contacted via email, which were obtained from their faculty webpages by research assistants. There was an 11%

response rate of the survey. The list of schools was derived from an APA resource that listed the psychology programs that receive the most applications every year (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Participants completed several pre-screen questions (e.g., do you hold a PhD in Psychology? Are you currently a faculty member teaching in a Psychology department?) to determine eligibility for the study. Upon indicating their academic email address and providing informed consent, participants completed open-ended questions assessing participants' prior knowledge and usage of the term *me-searcher*. These questions also asked participants to provide a definition of the term *me-searcher* and to indicate whether they would consider themselves to be a *me-searcher*. Then, participants completed a series of measures assessing perceptions of researcher objectivity, vested interest and the research legitimacy of *me-searchers*. Lastly, participants completed a single item measure (i.e., Prior to completing this study, were you familiar with this term being used against faculty of color?) and then completed a demographics questionnaire, were debriefed, and compensated.

## Measures

**Perceptions of Objectivity (Torrez et al., 2024).** The perceptions of objectivity scale assessed perceptions of whether *me-searchers* are objective. The six-item scale was modified as the scale was previously used to measure perceptions of objectivity and biases among journalists (Torrez et al., 2024). The following two items were reverse coded: "A *me-searcher* is biased in conducting their research" and "A *me-searcher* is biased toward their racial group in conducting their research". Participants rated statements on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Reliability analyses were conducted indicating good reliability ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Researcher Vested Interest (Thai et al., 2021).** The four-item researcher vested interest scale assessed whether the researcher personally benefits from conducting the research. The

scale was modified to assess perceptions of me-searchers vested interest since the previous study assessed perceptions of researcher vested interest (Thai et al., 2021). Participants rated statements (“How much do you think *me-searchers* have to gain from conducting their research?”) on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Reliability analyses indicated acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .75$ ).

**Legitimacy of Research (Thai et al., 2021).** The five-item legitimacy of research scale assessed whether the research is considered to be legitimate. The scale was modified to assess perceptions of the legitimacy of research produced by me-search since the previous study assessed perceptions of research legitimacy (Thai et al., 2021). Participants rated statements (“To what extent do you think the research conducted by this researcher is important?”) on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Reliability analyses indicated excellent reliability ( $\alpha = .97$ ).

### **Data Analysis**

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine whether researcher objectivity, vested interest, and research legitimacy are observable constructs for the latent construct of the me-searcher stereotype. The endogenous variables included in the model were from the following outcome measures: researcher objectivity, researcher vested interest, and research legitimacy. Additionally, an inductive thematic coding analysis was conducted to find reoccurring themes in the open-ended responses. The first author and three research assistants coded the open-ended responses for the presence of themes (0= theme not present, 1= theme present). This process allowed for understanding whether participants identified as a me-searcher, how participants define the term me-searcher, and to understand how participants perceive me-searchers. There is a lack of research on how psychology faculty use the term me-search to describe research that centers minoritized identities and whether they use the term to

describe their own research. Additionally, there is a lack of research on how prior knowledge of the term may relate to their current perceptions of me-search. Conducting these exploratory analyses would provide evidence on how psychology faculty who identify as a me-searcher and/or have prior knowledge of the term perceive me-search in psychology. Additionally, these analyses also capture the initial impressions of me-search among faculty encountering the term for the first time in this study. This analysis plan was preregistered on the Open Science Framework (accessible here:

[https://osf.io/z7pu3/?view\\_only=224265ae39b6482ebb80744175c8ecf6](https://osf.io/z7pu3/?view_only=224265ae39b6482ebb80744175c8ecf6)).

Additionally, exploratory analyses were conducted to assess researcher objectivity, researcher vested interest, and research legitimacy as a function of participant race and gender in addition to whether the participant identified as a me-searcher. Lewis Jr. (2021) emphasizes how researchers in psychology are embedded within social systems that influences how they approach the world and what research questions they choose to investigate. This prior research also discusses how diversity scientists are likely to not value detachment and objectivity standards when deciding what research is legitimate (Lewis J., 2021). Thus, it is important to investigate how perceptions of research may vary as minoritized scholars—including faculty of color and women—are more likely than dominant group faculty to ask research questions from diverse perspectives (Devendorf et al., 2023; Dupree & Kraus, 2022; Remedios, 2022; Roberts et al., 2020). Additionally, those who identify as a me-searcher may evaluate me-search differently compared to those who do not identify as a me-searcher. Although those who identify as a me-searcher likely perceive their work to be more legitimate than those who do not identify as a me-searcher, there is a possibility that me-searchers may also share some of the same scientific values as diversity scientists.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analyses were conducted to assess the distributional properties of the items. Items pertaining to all 3 scales—researcher objectivity, vested interest and research legitimacy—were approximately normally distributed with indications of slight skewness (values ranging from  $-.97$  to  $.42$ ) and kurtosis (values ranging from  $-1.19$  to  $.30$ ) (Table 1 in Appendix B).

### Preliminary Analyses

Correlational analyses indicated that there were significant positive relationships among all items on the researcher objectivity, vested interest and research legitimacy scales (see Tables 2-4 in Appendix B). Additionally, the Mahalanobis distance test was calculated to detect multivariate outliers by comparing the observed data points to the chi-square distribution depending on the degrees of freedom. The Mahalanobis distance test of perceptions of objectivity scale indicated that there were 7 outliers given that the cutoff chi-square critical value for 6 degrees of freedom is 12.59 ( $df = 6; p = .05$ ). The Mahalanobis distance test of the researcher vested interest scale indicated that there were 22 outliers given that the cutoff chi-square critical value for 4 degrees of freedom is 9.49 ( $df = 4; p = .05$ ). The Mahalanobis distance test of legitimacy of research scale indicated that there were 16 outliers given that the cutoff chi-square critical value for 5 degrees of freedom is 11.07 ( $df = 5; p = .05$ ). These outliers were not removed as they are plausible.

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

A three-factor confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to evaluate the items intended to measure the latent construct of the me-searcher stereotype. The three factors included researcher objectivity, researcher vested interest, and research legitimacy. The model provided

an acceptable to good fit to the data (CFI= .94; SRMR: .08; RMSEA= .09, 90% CI [.08, .11]). All the factor loadings were statistically significant (see Figure 1 in Appendix B). More specifically, the standardized factor loadings were moderate to high in magnitude ranging from .57 to .98.

The latent variables, researcher objectivity and researcher vested interest, have a significantly negative, moderate relationship ( $r = -.48, p = .001$ ) with each other. The latent variables, researcher objectivity and research legitimacy, have a significantly positive, moderate relationship ( $r = .55, p = .001$ ) with each other. The latent variables, researcher vested interest and research legitimacy, have a significantly negative relationship ( $r = -.27, p = .004$ ) with each other.

Modification indices and standardized residuals were also examined for the three-factor model. The analyses for modification indices were examined if the value was greater than 3.84. The modification indices suggested that the model would be improved if crossloadings and covariances between the different items were added to the model likely due to the items being related across scales. However, these modifications were not made as examining the standard residuals also revealed that some of the scale items overestimated and underestimated the relationships with the other scale items. These analyses indicate that there is overlap across the latent constructs and some overlap among the items used to assess them.

### **Exploratory Analyses**

**Identify as a Me-searcher.** Although only 29.72% of the sample identified as a me-searcher, faculty of color were more likely to identify as me-searchers than White faculty participants [OR= 2.49, 95% CI= 1.09, 5.79] (Table 5 in Appendix B). Thus, a series of independent samples *t*-test were conducted to examine differences in perceptions of researcher

objectivity, researcher vested interest, and research legitimacy based on whether participants identified as a me-searcher. Participants who did not identify as a me-searcher ( $M = 4.16$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ) perceived me-searchers to be less objective,  $t(111) = -2.04$ ,  $p = .044$ , compared to participants who did identify as a me-searcher ( $M = 4.64$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ) (Table 5 in Appendix B). There was no significant difference in perceptions of me-searcher vested interest based on whether participants identified as a me-searcher,  $t(111) = 1.03$ ,  $p = .305$ . Participants who did not identify as a me-searcher ( $M = 5.28$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ) perceived me-search to be less legitimate,  $t(110) = -3.16$ ,  $p = .001$ , compared to participants who did identify as a me-searcher ( $M = 6.05$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) (Table 5 in Appendix B).

**Previous Knowledge of Term.** A series of independent samples  $t$ -tests were conducted to examine differences in perceptions of researcher objectivity, researcher vested interest, and research legitimacy based on whether participants have previously heard of the term me-search. Participants who participants who had not heard of the term me-search ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) rated me-searchers as being less objective,  $t(142) = -2.91$ ,  $p = .004$ , compared to participants who had heard the term ( $M = 4.48$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ) (Table 6 in Appendix B). There were no significant differences between participants who had and had not heard of the term me-search in terms of researcher vested interest,  $t(142) = .31$ ,  $p = .757$  (Table 6 in Appendix B). Also, participants who had not heard of the term me-search ( $M = 4.82$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ) rated me-search as being less legitimate,  $t(141) = -4.00$ ,  $p = .001$ , compared to participants who had heard the term ( $M = 5.81$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) (Table 6 in Appendix B).

A series of independent samples  $t$ -tests were conducted to examine differences in perceptions of researcher objectivity, researcher vested interest, and research legitimacy based on whether participants have previously used the term me-search. There were no significant

differences between participants who had and had not used the term me-search in terms of researcher objectivity,  $t(145) = -1.49, p = .139$ , and researcher vested interest,  $t(145) = -.35, p = .727$  (Table 7 in Appendix B). However, participants who had not used the term me-search ( $M = 5.32, SD = 1.42$ ) rated me-search as being less legitimate,  $t(144) = -2.33, p = .021$ , compared to participants who have used the term ( $M = 5.83, SD = 1.22$ ) (Table 7 in Appendix B).

**Participant Race.** A series of independent samples  $t$ -tests were conducted to examine differences in perceptions of researcher objectivity, researcher vested interest, and research legitimacy between White faculty and faculty of color. There were no significant differences between White faculty and faculty of color in terms of their perceptions of researcher objectivity,  $t(148) = -.14, p = .891$ , researcher vested interest,  $t(148) = -.39, p = .696$ , and research legitimacy,  $t(147) = -.38, p = .702$ .

**Participant Gender.** A series of independent samples  $t$ -tests were conducted to examine differences in perceptions of researcher objectivity, researcher vested interest, and research legitimacy between women and men faculty. Given there were only a few non-binary/non-conforming participants, analyses only included women and men participants. There were significant differences between women and men's faculty perceptions of me-search such that men faculty ( $M = 3.98, SD = 1.20$ ) perceived me-searchers as being less objective,  $t(144) = -2.61, p = .010$ , compared to women faculty ( $M = 4.51, SD = 1.12$ ) (Table 8 in Appendix B). Men faculty ( $M = 4.92, SD = 1.08$ ) also me-searchers as having high vested interest,  $t(144) = 2.42, p = .017$ , in conducting their research compared to women faculty ( $M = 4.45, SD = 1.11$ ) (Table 8 in Appendix B). Lastly, men faculty ( $M = 4.97, SD = 1.43$ ) rated me-search as less objective,  $t(143) = -3.87, p = .001$ , than women faculty ( $M = 5.84, SD = 1.21$ ) (Table 8 in Appendix B).

**Open Responses.** A thematic coding analysis was conducted to understand how participants defined the term me-search in addition to the prior context in which they heard and used the term me-search.

**Definition and Examples.** The majority of participants (85.3%) defined me-search as a person researching a topic that is personally relevant (see Table 9 in Appendix B). Inter-rater reliability analyses were conducted indicating substantial agreement among raters of the personal relevance code of the definition of me-search as the Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) was .70. Notably, over half of the participants (52.0%) indicating identity research as an example of me-search and 11.3% of participants listed themselves as an example of a me-searcher (see Table 9 in Appendix B). Inter-rater reliability analyses were conducted on coders' responses. All Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) values ranged from .72 to .83, indicating substantial agreement between coders: disability research ( $\kappa = .81$ ), race research ( $\kappa = .77$ ), gender research ( $\kappa = .72$ ), sexuality research ( $\kappa = .76$ ), and listed themselves as a me-searcher ( $\kappa = .83$ ).

**Identifying as a Me-searcher.** Among the participants who self-identified as me-searchers (N= 44), 86.4% of participants indicated that they were a me-searcher because their research is personally relevant to themselves (see Table 10 in Appendix B). Inter-rater reliability analyses were conducted indicating substantial agreement among raters of the personal relevance code of the reasoning provided as to why the participant's identified as a me-searcher as the Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) was .87.

Alternatively, among the participants who did not self-identify as me-searchers (N= 69), 62.3% of participants indicated that they were not me-searchers because their research is not personally relevant to themselves (see Table 11 in Appendix B). Inter-rater reliability analyses were conducted indicating substantial agreement among raters of the lacks personal relevance

code of the reasoning provided as to why the participants did not identify as a me-searcher as the Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) was .77.

***Previous Knowledge of Term.*** The participants who had previously heard the term me-search (N= 109) indicating hearing the term in an academic context (59.6%) (see Table 12 in Appendix B). Specifically, participants indicated hearing this term from faculty and colleagues (28.4%), during graduate school (27.5%) and while at conferences (11.9%). Over 10% of the sample noted that the term has a negative connotation. Inter-rater reliability analyses were conducted indicating substantial agreement among raters as all Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) values ranged from .68 to .85: heard by faculty and colleagues ( $\kappa = .68$ ), heard in graduate school ( $\kappa = .78$ ), heard at conferences ( $\kappa = .68$ ), and heard in a negative connotation ( $\kappa = .85$ ).

The participants who had previously used the term me-search (N= 74) indicated using the term in an academic context (55.5%) and when describing other researchers (23%) (see Table 13 in Appendix B). Specifically, participants used this term in casual conversations (39.2%) and classes (20.3%). Participants also indicated using the term to describe other researchers (13.5%) and 12.2% to describe themselves. Inter-rater reliability analyses were conducted indicating substantial agreement among raters as all Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) values ranged from .66 to .88: used in casual conversations ( $\kappa = .72$ ), used in classes ( $\kappa = .71$ ), used to describe other researchers ( $\kappa = .88$ ), used to describe themselves ( $\kappa = .66$ ).

## **Discussion**

The current study sought to uncover current psychology faculty members' perceptions of me-search and the underlying attitudes that represent me-search as a stereotype. Specifically, faculty participants rated their perceptions of me-search in terms of objectivity, vested interest, and legitimacy. The current results from the CFA provide evidence that perceptions of researcher

objectivity, vested interest and research legitimacy are components of the me-searcher stereotype. Notably, these results do not conclude that these are the only components of the me-searcher stereotype but provide a preliminary understanding of what attitudes contribute to the me-searcher stereotype. Me-searchers being perceived as subjective and biased in pursuing a personal agenda and thus, as producing illegitimate research, may reinforce the use of the term to delegitimize research on minoritized groups produced by minoritized group members. These results also showcase that the me-searcher stereotype can be used as a form of objectivity interrogation to imply that the research is not legitimate or rigorous. Objectivity interrogation and additional consequences of the me-searcher stereotype (e.g., perceptions of illegitimacy) may include denied opportunities for minoritized scholars studying minoritized groups (e.g., Black scholars studying anti-Black racism) in one's academic journey maintaining the absence of research on minoritized experiences in psychology. This results in a discipline allowing White and other majority group members to determine what scholarship is valued while deeming other topics, such as race scholarship, as "niche" and unworthy of being rewarded and promoted. Thus, the exploratory analyses provide more evidence on the ways in which perceptions of me-search vary as a function of whether participants self-identify as a me-searcher and participant racial and gender identity in addition to how me-search is conceptualized by psychology faculty.

The use of the me-searcher label to devalue personally relevant research is concerning as the exploratory results revealed that psychology faculty indicated previously hearing and using the term in academic contexts, such as graduate school. The results make it clear that faculty are exposed to the term early in their academic career, allowing them to form perceptions of me-search at an early stage in their academic journey. The exploratory results also indicated that those who were not previously exposed to the term may perceive me-search, personally relevant

research, to be lower in quality reflecting how those without prior knowledge of me-search may buy into its oppression when hearing others label a researcher as such. Even without prior knowledge of the term, contextually, the term having “me” in it implies that one conducts personally relevant research. For example, the label could be used informally by a faculty member on a hiring search committee when discussing the applicant’s research. In this scenario, the person hearing this word for the first time may automatically deem the research as being personally relevant and thus, illegitimate causing them to not support the candidate even though they had no prior knowledge regarding the term me-search.

Importantly, among the entire sample, regardless of whether they had previously heard of the term, most participants defined me-search as studying a topic that is personally relevant to oneself. By this same definition, most participants explained whether they identify as a me-searcher based on whether they consider their research to personally relate to themselves. The exploratory analyses indicated that faculty of color were more likely to identify me-searchers compared to White faculty. Faculty of color being more likely to identify as a me-searcher reflects how faculty of color are more likely to conduct personally relevant research and center minoritized perspectives when asking and answering research questions (Devendorf et al., 2023; Dupree & Kraus, 2022; Remedios, 2022; Roberts et al., 2020). Although White faculty mostly indicated that their work lacks personal relevance, this does not mean that they do not study White populations. Notably, about half of the sample listed research on identity as an example of me-search mostly when such research is conducted by a minoritized individual on minoritized identities. These results reflect how White faculty have the privilege in not thinking about whether studying White identity is personally relevant as centering White experiences is normalized, rewarded, and overlooked by White researchers in psychology (Buchanan, 2021;

Dupree & Kraus, 2022; Ray, 2016; Remedios, 2022; Roberts & Mortenson, 2023; Settles et al., 2021; Shelton, 2000; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). For example, a substantial number of published authors in psychology fail to include racial demographic information of the participants (Remedios, 2022; Roberts & Mortenson, 2023). Even when this information is reported, the sample tends to be predominantly White as the authors make overgeneralizations of their study findings while they treat the lack of participant diversity as a small limitation rather than acknowledging how power and privilege embedded in White identity limits their research. While the results point to racialized elements of perceptions of me-search, the results also showed gendered elements the me-searcher stereotype as well.

Gender disparities have persisted in psychology even though the representation of women has increased substantially over time (American Psychological Association, 2020; Bischel et al., 2019). Over the last two decades, men have been underrepresented compared to women among psychology faculty and graduate students, yet men tend to be in positions of power in psychology (Clay, 2017). Concerningly, previous research has shown that men have negative perceptions of research examining sexism when produced by women (Thai et al., 2021). Research has also shown that although women faculty in social and personality psychology are more likely to receive rewards for their teaching and service efforts, they are less likely to receive rewards for their research (Hopkin-Doyle et al., 2024). Thus, men's biases towards women conducting personally relevant research not only limits opportunities for women, especially women of color, studying minoritized populations but also perpetuates the epistemic exclusion of this research as it is deemed illegitimate scholarship. Thus, future research should continue investigating the disparities women me-searchers experience in psychology.

## Limitations

The current study sought to investigate the attitudes underlying negative biases towards me-search that were previously examined by Thai and colleagues (2021) study. There are possibly attitudes that were not tested in the current study calling for further investigation to the biases that claim conducting me-search is negative. One possible component could be perceptions of using the word itself; for example, the exploratory findings show that individuals who identify as a me-searcher hold more positive attitudes towards me-search compared to individuals who do not identify as a me-searcher. Uncovering these positive biases as a component of the me-searcher stereotype would further explain the positive and negative use of this stereotype towards minoritized researchers reinforcing Thai and colleagues' (2021) argument that perceptions of minoritized researchers studying minoritized groups is a double-edged sword.

An important limitation of this study is the sample's racial composition as 81% of the sample identified as White. Although this is reflective of the overrepresentation of White faculty in psychology, this limited the ability to conduct measurement invariance testing to understand if the items were interpreted differently as a function of participant race. The findings on participant race are also limited as all participants of color were grouped into one level of the participant race variable rather than examining how the perceptions of me-search vary across all racial groups in the sample. It is possible that White faculty and faculty of color would respond to these questions differently. For example, faculty of color may not endorse the same scientific principles regarding objectivity, especially given White faculty have been able to define objectivity and shape norms within the discipline. Thus, future research should recruit more

faculty of color who vary in racial identity to capture a better understanding of current psychology faculty perceptions of me-search.

### **Future Directions**

Future research should also focus on the hierarchical structure of perceptions of me-search as it varies across identity research topics studied by minoritized group members (e.g., race studied by a person of color, sexuality research studied by a queer individual). These perceptions should not be studied in attempt to determine what type of identity research is considered me-search more than the other but rather to document the degree to which the label is used for various types of identity research. This work should also seek to understand how perceptions of me-search vary as a function of which intersectional group membership for minoritized group members conducting the research, such as examining perceptions of Black women studying racism and Black women studying sexism.

Importantly, the results indicate that several faculty participants provided an example of a me-searcher as someone who investigates social identity and faculty who had prior knowledge of the term indicated that they heard this term in academic settings. There are several consequences of faculty holding these biases and attitudes that negatively impact prospective students and faculty, throughout recruitment, hiring and promotion, by reducing their access to opportunities (e.g., positions, grants, publications). Given the prevalence of participants who heard this term in graduate school and other academic contexts, future research could assess current graduate students' perceptions of me-search to understand the influence ones' advisor and peers have on them. It would be important to document whether the contexts and connotation at which students interact with this stereotype are negative or in attempt to devalue their research. As such, minoritized scholars conducting research on minoritized populations, including Black graduate

students studying anti-black racism, who encounter this word in graduate school may be labeled as such to devalue their research. Thus, it is imperative to understand whether Black graduate students studying anti-black racism, have been labeled as a me-searcher and have experienced their research being devalued because of its' personal relevance.

## **Chapter 2: Disparities in Graduate Education Socialization Due to the Stigmatizing 'Me-searcher' Label**

The previous study provides evidence that psychology faculty are exposed to the term me-search during their time in graduate school. The use of the me-searcher label with intent to diminish the work by Black faculty studying racism likely has adverse effects on the academic and professional growth of Black graduate students. The devaluation of Black scholarship on anti-Black racism may create obstacles for Black students who study race by limiting their access to the resources, including mentorship, funding, and opportunities, that are essential to achieving success throughout ones' academic journey (Buchanan et al., 2021). The inequitable treatment and negative experiences of Black faculty studying race also may contribute to the lack of Black graduate students who go on to work in academia, as observing these experiences may impact how graduate students feel in terms of their own sense of belonging and whether they should pursue an academic career (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Settles et al., 2021). Importantly, faculty are not the only individuals at risk of being stereotyped as a me-searcher. Thus, it is essential to understand whether Black psychology graduate students studying anti-Black racism have been labeled as me-searchers to imply their research lacks legitimacy and in efforts to devalue their work.

As students are navigating graduate school, they are questioning whether they will be successful, whether they want to be a graduate student pursuing graduate work, and whether they will belong (Golde, 1998). In particular, Black graduate students navigate unique experiences in graduate school that are impacted by the underrepresentation of Black individuals in psychology as a discipline (Lin et al., 2018). Hussain and Jones (2021) surveyed students attending a predominately White institution (PWI) and found that Black students have a poor sense of

belonging on their campus due to poor racial representation, among students and faculty, and poor commitment to diversity on campus. Faculty diversity is essential to student diversity as representation of minority faculty increases the recruitment, retention, and success of undergraduate and graduate students of color (Dupree & Boykin, 2021; Hussain & Jones, 2021; Maton et al., 2006; Neblett Jr., 2019). Unfortunately, low representation of Black faculty and students is one inequity that Black graduate students face paired with the low representation and devaluation of Black scholarship rooted in diversity science.

### **Diversity Science Training in Graduate School**

Given that White individuals are overrepresented in academia (Dupree & Kraus, 2020; Remedios, 2022; Roberts et al., 2020; Winston, 2020), this raises the question of *who* gets to determine the values that graduate students learn and what scholarship is considered meritorious. Austin (2002) describes socialization as a two-way process wherein students influence and are influenced by an institution or organization. However, the previous work did not describe how students may be exposed to biases in graduate school based on the students' identities and/or research interests, especially when the students study diversity science. Diversity science is an approach used to conduct science that considers *how* and *why* humans are different by recognizing and examining individual and sociocultural realities, such as the consideration of how one's racial identity impacts their lived experiences (Plaut, 2010). Diversity science in psychology is essential as it accounts for the sociocontextual and historical components of psychological processes (Miller et al., 2019; Neblett Jr., 2019; Plaut, 2010; Purdie-Vaughns & Dittmann, 2010). However, diversity science often gets treated as a special topic rather than a scientific approach and is seldom discussed in graduate and undergraduate classes, especially when students initiate conversations about race and racism (Neblett Jr., 2019). Graduate and

undergraduate students in psychology programs report feeling as though discussing and conducting research using a diversity science approach was not a priority to the research or the curriculum of their program (Neblett Jr., 2019). The lack of discussion surrounding diversity science in the classroom limits opportunities for Black students studying anti-Black racism to have the appropriate training required for conducting diversity science.

As recommended by Buchanan and colleagues (2021), psychological science needs appropriate methods for studying and recruiting racially minoritized participants and promoting diversity science in general. Unfortunately, previous research has shown that psychologists invested in diversity science face disparities in training that negatively impact their access to opportunities, such as grant funding and publications, and professional development (Buchanan et al., 2021; Neblett Jr., 2019; Torrez et al., 2024). For example, qualitative methods have been identified as effective and necessary to approach research questions within diversity science, yet mainstream psychology currently diminishes the importance of using this methodological approach (Kidd, 2020; McKim, 2017; Settles et al., 2021; Torrez et al., 2024). Qualitative methodology—ranging from interviews to observational studies—captures deeper-level knowledge of various psychological phenomena and has provided explanations for complex and unique lived experiences (Kidd, 2020; Sutton & Austin, 2015; Torrez et al., 2024). However, current qualitative training in psychology has largely been ineffective due to a lack of faculty expertise in conducting qualitative research (Kidd, 2020). Previous research has argued that using qualitative methods paired with quantitative methods in psychological research is necessary for conducting equitable diversity science that centers minoritized experiences (Watson-Singleton et al., 2021). Yet, qualitative research in psychology remains overlooked and ignored (Kidd, 2020).

Despite the benefits of qualitative research, especially to diversity science, qualitative research in psychology has been perceived as lacking objectivity and scientific rigor (Kidd, 2020; McKim, 2017; Settles et al., 2021; Torrez et al., 2024), and thus, may not be prioritized in psychology doctoral programs. Students and faculty of color report that their qualitative research is devalued, such that others perceive qualitative research as less objective compared to quantitative research resulting in pushback against the research (Torrez et al., 2024). This is concerning as qualitative research in psychology is mostly conducted by marginalized individuals (Kidd, 2020). As such, Black psychology graduate students studying anti-Black racism interested in using qualitative and diversity science approaches may question whether their scholarship will produce success, belong in the field, and be considered valuable since they are navigating socialization process that remind them their research deviates from scientific norms and lacks value. Thus, it is important to understand whether Black psychology graduate students studying anti-Black racism are receiving the necessary training, including qualitative methods and other courses (e.g., courses on racism), to achieve success throughout their academic journey.

### **Present Study**

The present study uses qualitative methods to understand the unique experiences of Black psychology graduate students studying anti-Black racism navigating disparities in psychology. Although research on scholars of color studying race has increased, there remains a lack of research focusing solely on the experience of Black graduate students studying anti-Black racism in psychology. Specifically, the current study examines the following three research questions:

1. What training (e.g., coursework) would Black students studying anti-Black racism like to receive that is not provided in their graduate program?

2. Do Black students studying anti-Black racism report being labeled as a “me-searcher”? Do they feel that the intention of the label is to devalue their work and, if so, does this label relate to a poor sense of belonging in graduate school?
3. How is a sense of belonging in graduate school among Black students impacted by low representation of Black faculty in psychology and the devaluation of scholarship produced by Black faculty in psychology?

These research questions were preregistered on the Open Science Framework (accessible here: [https://osf.io/fsd8e/?view\\_only=e07467f78051400883b810226b7cae31](https://osf.io/fsd8e/?view_only=e07467f78051400883b810226b7cae31)).

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Current and former (up to 2 years post Ph.D.) Black graduate students (n= 15) in psychology doctoral programs were recruited to participate in the current study. All participants study anti-Black racism in their graduate research. Two of the participants also identified as biracial/multiracial (1 Black/Asian and 1 Black/Latina). The sample consisted of 12 women, 1 man, 1 gender queer individual, and 1 non-binary/non-conforming Black individual. Participants were directly contacted using their institutional email and members of the following psychological organizations: the Society of Personality and Social Psychology and the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues.

### **Procedures**

Participants took part in one-hour semi-structured interviews conducted by the first author over Zoom. There was also a research assistant present at each interview in case technology issues occurred and to take notes during the interviews. The interview guide (see Appendix C for interview guide) covered various topics including participants' perceptions of

advisor and department support, sense of belonging, and perceptions that other Black scholars, including faculty and graduate students, work on anti-Black racism is devalued. Sample interview questions included “Have you been labeled as a me-searcher by someone aiming to devalue or minimize your research?” and “Can you describe your sense of belonging in your department and how you these feelings are impacted by your area of research?”

Prior to the interview, participants completed the consent form and a demographics questionnaire. Participants were allowed to participate only if they consented to being audio recorded. Upon completion of the interviews, participants completed the debriefing form and were compensated. Once participants agreed for their data to be used in analysis, research assistants listened to the audio recording ensuring the transcripts were accurate and that identifiable information was redacted.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis involved a thematic coding analysis using a deductive approach. The data were coded and analyzed by two research assistants and the first author. We coded for the following themes: lack of qualitative training, devaluing of research by others within department, and poor sense of belonging. Thus, the following process was used: 1) initial reading through the data, 2) generation of potential themes, 3) review of themes and creation of codebook, and 4) coding. The data were also analyzed using an inductive approach to generate additional themes that emerged based on participant data. This analysis plan was preregistered on the Open Science Framework (accessible here:

[https://osf.io/fsd8e/?view\\_only=e07467f78051400883b810226b7cae31](https://osf.io/fsd8e/?view_only=e07467f78051400883b810226b7cae31)).

## Results

### Deductive Coding Analyses

**Lack of Relevant Coursework.** The deductive thematic coding analysis on courses offered in their department revealed the following themes: lack of qualitative courses, lack of courses on race and racism, outsourcing neglected knowledge, and unequal independent learning burden (See Table 1 in Appendix D). The majority of participants (86.7%) indicated there were a lack of courses needed for their research and graduate training. Specifically, 80% of participants indicated a lack of courses on qualitative methodology, and 40% of participants indicated a lack of courses on race and racism. Most participants (80%) described barriers to learning due a lack of relevant coursework, such that had to outsource neglected knowledge to other departments where the coursework appears to be more valued. Most participants (60%) also noted how such barriers to learning create an environment in which they have to learn more independently than students who do not study race. Inter-rater reliability analyses indicated substantial agreement among raters (all Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) values ranged from .63 to .73: lack of qualitative courses ( $\kappa = .70$ ), lack of courses on race and racism ( $\kappa = .73$ ), outsourcing neglected knowledge ( $\kappa = .72$ ), and unequal independent learning burden ( $\kappa = .63$ )).

**Me-searcher Labeling.** The deductive thematic coding analysis on experiences of me-searcher labeling revealed the following themes: not explicitly being labeled a me-searcher, feeling like one is perceived as a me-searcher, and explicitly being labeled a me-searcher (see Table 2 in Appendix D). Over half of the participants (53.3%) indicated that they had not been explicitly labeled a me-searcher, whereas 20% of participants *had* explicitly been labeled as a me-searcher. Overall, 20% of the participants in the sample indicated feeling perceived as a me-searcher. Inter-rater reliability analyses indicated substantial agreement among raters: Fleiss'

kappa ( $\kappa$ ) values ranged from .64 to 1.00: not explicitly labeled a me-searcher ( $\kappa = .64$ ), explicitly labeled a me-searcher ( $\kappa = 1.00$ ), and feel perceived as a me-searcher ( $\kappa = .66$ ).

Additionally, the deductive thematic coding analysis on experiences of being devalued because of conducting me-search revealed the following themes: explicit devaluation, devalued for centering Blackness, and no experiences of explicit devaluation (see Table 2 in Appendix D). Regardless of experiences being labeled as a me-searcher, over half of the participants (53.3%) indicated that their work was devalued because they are Black people studying Black experiences. Further, 37.5% of participants who indicated their work was devalued also reported being stigmatized for centering Blackness instead of other racial groups, representing 20% of the entire sample. In contrast, 40% of participants had not experienced explicit devaluation of their scholarship. Inter-rater reliability analyses indicated substantial agreement among raters: All Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) values ranged from .61 to .81: no experiences of explicit devaluation ( $\kappa = .81$ ), explicit devaluation ( $\kappa = .73$ ), and devalued for centering Blackness ( $\kappa = .61$ ).

**Sense of Belonging.** Sense of belonging was coded in terms of department belonging, belonging in the field of psychology, and consequences of not belonging. The deductive thematic coding analysis on department belonging revealed the following themes: lack of race research, lack of Black scholars, belonging due to shared race, not belonging due to racial isolation, not belonging due to research being isolated, and research does not fit department culture (see Table 3 in Appendix D). Nearly half of the participants (46.7%) indicated there is a lack of research on race in their department. Additionally, 33.3% of participants indicated that Black scholars are underrepresented on both the faculty and student level in their department. Participants (13.3%) also indicated experiencing belonging in spaces where there were others who shared their racial identity. In contrast, nearly half of the participants (46.7%) indicated not belonging and feeling

isolated racially and in terms of their research. Several participants (40%) indicated feeling their research did not fit into their department culture because their research centers race. Inter-rater reliability analyses indicated substantial agreement among raters: All Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) values ranged from .62 to .69: lack of race research ( $\kappa = .64$ ), lack of Black scholars ( $\kappa = .69$ ), belonging due to shared race ( $\kappa = .62$ ), not belonging due to racial isolation ( $\kappa = .64$ ), not belonging due to research being isolated ( $\kappa = .63$ ), and research does not fit department culture ( $\kappa = .62$ ).

The deductive thematic coding analysis on belonging in the field of psychology as a discipline revealed the following themes: observing epistemic exclusion, observing devaluation of advisor, and no sense of belonging (see Table 3 in Appendix D). The majority of participants (66.7%) indicated having a diminished sense of belonging in the field of psychology due to observing epistemic exclusion of Black scholars studying Black experiences in psychology. Specifically, 33.3% of participants observed their advisor, including Black scholars and other scholars of color, face epistemic exclusion. Unfortunately, 13.3% of participants indicated having no sense of belonging in psychology and academia overall. Inter-rater reliability analyses indicated substantial agreement among raters: All Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) values ranged from .60 to 1.00: observing epistemic exclusion ( $\kappa = .60$ ), observing devaluation of advisor ( $\kappa = .69$ ), and no sense of belonging ( $\kappa = 1.00$ ).

The deductive thematic coding analysis on the consequences of not belonging revealed the following themes: not belonging hurts one's desire to stay in academia and leaving academia (see Table 3 in Appendix D). Two thirds of participants (66.7%) indicated their experiences of not belonging in psychology and academia hurt their desire to stay in academia after graduate school. Moreover, one third (33.3%) of participants indicated they decided to leave academia

post-graduation due to experiences of not belonging. Inter-rater reliability analyses indicated substantial agreement among raters: All Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) values ranged were .62 and .80: not belonging hurts desire to stay in academia ( $\kappa = .80$ ) and leaving academia ( $\kappa = .62$ ).

### **Exploratory Inductive Coding Analyses**

**Advisor Support.** The inductive thematic coding analysis on participants' experiences with advisor support revealed the following themes: feels supported and had to change advisors due to lack of support (see Table 4 in Appendix D). The vast majority of participants (93.3%) indicated that they felt supported by their advisor. Although there was 80% of agreement between coders, the Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) value indicated poor agreement among coders ( $\kappa = .18$ ). Previous research has shown that the Fleiss Kappa value is limited and can produce a paradoxical effect due to an unequal distribution between rating the themes as present versus not present (Dettori & Norvell, 2020; Gwet, 2016). Further, 13.3% of participants indicated needing to change advisors due to lacking adequate support. Inter-rater reliability analyses indicated substantial agreement among raters ( $\kappa = .72$ ).

**Mental Toll of Research.** The inductive thematic coding analysis of the mental toll of conducting research on anti-Black racism as a Black individual revealed the following themes: emotional/psychological toll of research, feeling targeted or devalued due to political climate, and heightened stress and worry due to political climate (see Table 5 in Appendix D). Several participants (40%) noted experiencing an emotional and psychological toll of conducting research on anti-black racism due to its personal relevance to the participants' lived experiences. Even further, participants noted the current political climate under the Trump presidency having a negative impact on them such that 26.7% of participants feel targeted and devalued and 20% feel a heightened sense of stress and worry as a Black person studying Black experiences of

racism. Inter-rater reliability analyses indicated substantial agreement among raters as all Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) values ranged from .72 to .88: emotional/psychological toll of research ( $\kappa = .72$ ), feeling targeted or devalued ( $\kappa = .88$ ), and heightened stress and worry ( $\kappa = .72$ ).

**Resources.** The inductive thematic coding analysis of resources participants indicated during the interview revealed the following themes: increased representation of Black faculty, increased representation of Black students, and funding support (see Table 6 in Appendix D). Many participants (40%) indicated that an essential resource they need is increased representation of Black faculty and students in their department and psychology more generally. Participants (26.7%) also indicated research funding to be a resource needed that will also reflect that their work is valued. Inter-rater reliability analyses indicated substantial agreement among raters as all Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) values ranged from .73 to 1.00: increased representation of Black faculty ( $\kappa = .73$ ), increased representation of Black students ( $\kappa = .73$ ), and funding support ( $\kappa = 1.00$ ).

## Discussion

The current study examined the experiences of Black students, mostly Black women, studying anti-Black racism in U.S. psychology graduate programs and the potential disparities they may face for conducting personally relevant work. Previous research indicates that qualitative methods and analysis are stigmatized as lacking objectivity and often not rewarded in psychology (Kidd, 2020; McKim, 2017; Settles et al., 2021; Torrez et al., 2024). The majority of interviewees indicated a lack of courses on qualitative methods in their department in addition to a lack of courses on race and racism. The interviewees noted how the lack of courses was attributed to qualitative research and research on race not being prioritized in their graduate program. One interviewee stated,

“Whereas other students were in courses, and they could directly apply the things that they were being taught to their projects, I felt like I had to do, you know, a little bit of extra homework, teaching myself different methods and things...I recognize that it's unfair because it's an equity issue, like, I had to spend more time learning things in the background that the other students didn't.”

Doctoral students are often expected to learn independently when they are interested in topics that are not covered in courses in their department. However, it is important to understand whether the devaluation of courses of interest to Black students studying anti-Black racism in psychology forces them to work harder than their peers because their research is seen as a special topic rather than a core focus in their department. The stigmatization and devaluation of qualitative research and research on race signals to students that qualitative research and research on race are not valuable contributions to psychology (Dupree & Kraus, 2022; Durrheim, 2024; Settles et al., 2021; Torrez et al., 2024). The interviewees also reported how the lack of relevant courses in their department forced them to rely on other departments to provide them with courses on diverse methodology, race, and racism. Importantly, the stigmatization of this research could lead to students questioning whether their research counts as psychology not because of its quality but because conducting personally relevant research and qualitative research is devalued and perceived as illegitimate in psychology (Ray, 2016; Torrez et al., 2024).

Most interviewees had not experienced being explicitly labeled as a me-searcher. However, the results show that the interviewees, regardless of being labeled as a me-searcher, felt explicitly devalued for conducting personally relevant work on Black experiences. These experiences led to the interviewees having a diminished sense of belonging that was already negatively impacted by the lack of representation of Black scholars and research on race in their

department. The results showed that these feelings of not belonging were exacerbated when students witnessed the work of other Black scholars conducting research on anti-Black racism, including their academic advisors, be devalued and excluded. For example, one participant stated “I do remember someone asking my advisor where's the psychology in this? This is a question that I have also gotten in my work, which I think is a little offensive...and...a complete devaluation of the work.” The interviewees indicated how questioning how research on anti-Black racism conducted by Black scholars in psychology conveys that the research isn't based in psychological theory and thus, not valuable to the field. Research has shown when individuals of power in psychology hold these attitudes, this can lead to the epistemic exclusion of such research by not rewarding the research (e.g., grant funding, publication) (Buchanan et al., 2021; Settles et al., 2021). Unfortunately, as a result of being devalued, the interviewees reported feelings of not belonging in psychology and academia, more generally, leading to a few of them choosing to leave academia post-graduate school. These results reinforce previous research (Buchanan, 2021; Settles et al; 2021) that this cycle may lead to the filtering out of people who are likely to conduct this scholarship by constantly socializing them to believe their work is not valuable to the discipline, leading them to question their own success.

Fortunately, the exploratory results showed that most interviewees indicated feeling supported by their academic advisor. One interviewee stated, "one of the first things [my advisor] told me is that ‘you don't have to perform with me ever’ and that has stuck with me throughout my time with her and it's safe enough to do so, which I don't really feel honestly with anyone else in academic spaces." This is a reflection of the need for support from ones' advisor as the interviewees acknowledged needing support from their advisors in not only navigating graduate school but the devaluation of Black scholarship on anti-Black racism as well.

Unfortunately, a few interviewees also reported having to change advisors because of not feeling supported. Having support from one's advisor is vital for every student but especially for Black students studying anti-Black racism as they are navigating unique forms of devaluation for their topic studied and their racial identity (Settles et al., 2021; Shelton, 2000; Thai et al., 2021; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008).

In fact, the exploratory results also showed that interviewees experience a mental emotional/psychological toll when conducting their research. The previous literature on Black experiences in psychology have neglected to focus on the potentially traumatizing effects on Black researchers of constantly reading and digesting information about anti-Black racism. The interviewees also indicated that this toll is exacerbated by the political climate at the time this research was conducted, causing them to feel targeted and devalued, and thus, experience heightened worry and stress. One interviewee stated, "since the election, I have really been thinking about what it means to do the kind of work that I do and the kind of target I put on my back." Black students studying anti-Black racism are especially at risk of being more openly excluded and oppressed during the Trump presidency as the president has made intentional legislative efforts, including executive orders, that hinder the development and support of research centering race, racism, and other issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (Trump, 2025). Further, Black students studying anti-Black racism risks of experiencing racial discrimination have been exacerbated during the Trump presidency as longitudinal research has shown that supporters of Donald Trump have engaged in more prejudiced and discriminatory behaviors towards Black people over time (Ruisch & Ferguson, 2023). Thus, there is a clear need for resources that help students as they are navigating disparities not only in academia but

broader systemic inequities that seek to oppress and exclude Black people in psychology and academia, especially when their work centers anti-Black racism.

The exploratory analyses also sought to examine resources Black students feel they need when studying anti-Black racism in psychology. Specifically, the interviewees stated that a clear resource that would improve their graduate experience includes increased representation of Black faculty and students. For instance, one interviewee stated, “seeing myself reflected in the faculty within my department would allow me to feel as though Black scholars are valued.” Increased Black representation, specifically faculty who study race/racism, would serve as a resource by further providing community and the chance to potentially work with like-minded scholars who look like them conducting research similar to theirs (Dupree & Boykin, 2021; Hussain & Jones, 2021; Maton et al., 2006; Neblett Jr., 2019). Additionally, the interviewees also indicated a need for more funding support as resources are limited for individuals studying race as the work is devalued in the field. This support is especially needed now as Donald Trump has called for freezes on and reductions to grant funding that supports research centering race, racism, and diversity, equity, and inclusion more generally (Trump, 2025). Altogether, the current study emphasizes the importance of recognizing challenges related to retention and fostering belonging for Black students choosing to center anti-Black racism in their research program.

### **Limitations**

Although the current study focuses on Black experiences in psychology graduate programs, the current study lacks representation of Black men, Black non-binary/non-conforming individuals, and trans Black individuals. The one Black male participant in this study stated that “It’s few and far between [when] finding a role model that looks like me in this field

and has actually gone through the things I'm going through... I also just feel like I'm not that optimistic about the path of Black men in psychology in general." More research needs to be conducted to center the experiences of Black men in academia, especially in psychology. One such example is a qualitative study that centered the experiences of Black men in psychology doctoral programs and the various protective factors that contribute the well-being of Black men (Stanley Jr, 2023). This study found that Black men in psychology doctoral programs need communities of support, including peers, advisors, and family members, and Black mentors to navigate the stressors of being a doctoral student. Further, scholarship centering the experiences of Black sexual and gender minorities has been undervalued in mainstream psychology (Ghorbanian et al., 2022; Lassiter et al., 2023). Historically, the contributions of Black sexual and gender minorities have been overlooked (Kingsberry, 2022; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), thus, it is important to understand whether these experiences are compounded if choosing to investigate anti-Black racism in their graduate studies.

The demographic makeup of the sample will not be able to represent all experiences of Black graduate students studying anti-Black racism in psychology and, therefore, the results should not be generalized to represent the default Black graduate, race scholar experience in psychology. Rather, this is one of many studies that can be done to understand the uniqueness of the Black graduate experience at the direct intersection of studying anti-Black racism. Future research should dive into the intersectional experiences of Black graduate students in graduate programs as there is within-group variation in histories of oppression in higher education and overall, in the United States, based on other identities that intersect with race (e.g., gender, sexuality, disability, religion) (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

## **Future Directions**

Future research should investigate how minoritized researchers are perceived based on the specific identity or identities they choose to study. Several interviewees shared the same sentiment of being questioned for wanting to solely focus on Black experiences in their research. Specifically, Black women interviewees frequently asked, “why can’t I just focus on Black women [in my research]?” Black women possess dual minoritized racial and gender identities such that Black women who navigate interlocking systems of oppression (i.e., racism and sexism) are likely to be rendered invisible (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Thus, Black women who investigate the experiences of Black women may experience invisibility in relation to their identities and their research. Additionally, there was also a multiracial participant who mentioned facing scrutiny for studying only one of their minoritized racial groups instead of both. Given that multiracial individuals have experiences of navigating within-group discrimination, multiracial Black students investigating anti-Black racism may be scrutinized for solely centering Black racial identity (Franco et al., 2020; Franco et al., 2021; Nadal et al., 2023). Such scrutiny could impact one’s sense of belonging and community within the group of the racial identity they do not center in their research.

Building on the findings of this study, future directions should use a community-based participatory research approach where faculty and Black graduate students studying race can discuss the barriers faced by Black race scholars in graduate programs. Allowing for mutual contributions between faculty and Black graduate students can allow students to advocate for their needs while faculty can 1) indicate whether they have the resources requested by students and 2) acknowledge the barriers contributing to the lack of student access to resources. This could allow for co-creation of resources that provides for Black students without further

burdening faculty, especially Black faculty also investigating anti-Black racism. For example, findings could result in workshops taught by faculty to advance student training, in qualitative methods and theories, whereas teaching a full course could exhaust faculty. Ultimately, the goal of these efforts would be to provide Black students studying race with improved doctoral training while accounting for the reality of current disparities that cause increased workload (e.g., teaching and service) for Black faculty investigating anti-Black racism.

### **Chapter 3: Undergraduate Student Perceptions of Black Instructors Teaching Black Psychology**

The previous study provides evidence that Black scholars who study anti-Black racism are devalued in psychology due to conducting personally relevant research. Black scholars researching Black experiences and anti-Black racism are uniquely positioned to bridge lived experience with psychological scholarship in their research and in the classroom yet are often devalued for doing so. These experiences of devaluation are concerning since faculty research informs teaching, and undergraduate students influence the success of faculty as student course evaluations are considered during the tenure and promotion process (Griffin et al., 2011). However, there is a lack of research investigating how perceptions of scholars conducting personally relevant research may unfold in a teaching context and how these perceptions may influence how undergraduate students evaluate Black faculty teaching about Black experiences. Thus, the current study examines undergraduate students' perceptions of Black faculty who teach Black psychology courses and are motivated to do so based on their own experiences of navigating anti-Black racism.

#### **Biases in Course Evaluations of Black Instructors**

The extent to which teaching, research, and service are weighted in terms of promotion and tenure varies across institutions; however, research productivity is weighed heavily in this process (Baez, 2000). Black faculty have reported their teaching being weighed more heavily than their research during this process whereas their White colleagues are not subjected to this (Arnold et al., 2016). Further research indicated that Black faculty have reported not advancing in the tenure and promotion process due to course evaluation biases (Griffin et al., 2011). Ho and colleagues (2009) conducted a study on course evaluation biases by examining Black and White

students actual course evaluations of Black and White professors at the University of Texas at Austin. The study provided evidence that Black instructors are evaluated more heavily in terms of competency and intelligence compared to White instructors. Previous research also has shown that Black professors, and Black people more generally, are stereotyped as more incompetent, unintelligent, and illegitimate compared to White professors (Aruguete et al., 2017; Bavishi et al., 2010; Chávez & Mitchell, 2020; Fiske, 2018; Ho et al., 2009; Reid, 2010). Black professors being subjected to these biases and stereotypes has even caused faculty to not want their evaluations to be used during decision-making throughout the promotion and tenure process (Carmack & LeFebvre, 2019; Chávez & Mitchell, 2020; Williams, 2019). Importantly, additional research sheds light on how these experiences may vary based on the content of the course taught.

### **Experiences of Black Instructors Teaching Courses on Race**

Bias against Black instructors who teach courses on race and racism is especially concerning as there has been explicit disapproval and erasure of courses centering race in U.S. higher education (Miller et al., 2023; Moody, 2023; Morgan, 2022; Thomason, 2023; Vue et al., 2024). Further, Black faculty have been harshly evaluated and labeled as being racist for teaching about Black experiences in the classroom. This has resulted in students reporting and filing complaints against faculty of color, especially in predominately White student classrooms, because of the instructor teaching about race and racism (Arnold et al., 2016). Arnold and colleagues (2016) also found that Black faculty may have to be observed by their superiors due to being scrutinized in their evaluations while their White colleagues are not subjected to this.

The collective evidence on biases against Black faculty and courses centering race supports previous research that Black scholars studying anti-Black racism face epistemic

exclusion in research and teaching (Settles et al., 2021). Specifically, Settles et al. (2021) found that Black faculty and other faculty of color's intellectual contributions are devalued and perceived as lacking objectivity when such contributions relate to personal experiences.

Interviewees also indicated their courses were devalued by students when the course content focused on race, ethnicity, and gender. These findings suggest that Black instructors who inform their teaching with their own experiences of anti-Black racism may be perceived as subjective and teaching based on experience *not* expertise, and thus, lacking in competence and legitimacy. Together, the devaluation of Black scholars' studying anti-Black racism and the devaluation of courses centering their scholarship emphasizes the need to understand additional barriers that seek to exclude courses on anti-Black racism.

### **Present Study**

The present study examines perceptions of instructor objectivity, vested interest and course legitimacy as a function of instructor race and instructor motivation for teaching a Black Psychology course. I hypothesized that Black instructors motivated by identity-based teaching philosophies will be perceived as less objective and as having higher vested interest in teaching the course compared to similarly motivated White instructors and White and Black instructors motivated by non-identity-related teaching philosophies. Indeed, White instructors may be motivated by a personal desire to dismantle White Supremacy. I also hypothesized that the course will be perceived as less legitimate when taught by Black instructors compared to White instructors, regardless of instructor motivation. Black instructors are perceived as being less legitimate compared to White instructors (Bavishi et al., 2010; Fiske, 2018). Further, Black scholars who conduct scholarship on anti-Black racism are perceived as less legitimate than White scholars studying anti-Black racism (Thai et al., 2021). Lastly, I hypothesized that Black

instructors motivated by identity-based teaching philosophies will be evaluated more negatively compared to White instructors motivated by identity-based teaching philosophies and all instructors motivated by non-identity-related teaching philosophies regardless of instructor race. These hypotheses were preregistered on the Open Science Framework (accessible here: [https://osf.io/seua6/?view\\_only=63876960572d473fbb9000859c5ecad0](https://osf.io/seua6/?view_only=63876960572d473fbb9000859c5ecad0)).

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The study sampled Tufts university undergraduate students ( $n = 195$ ;  $M = 18.7$  years old,  $SD = .94$  year). Participants received course credit. We purposefully sampled from an undergraduate student population of a predominately, White institution (PWI) to match our experimental context examining perceptions of Black instructors at PWIs. A Monte Carlo power analysis was conducted using simulation analyses in R Studio. The analysis indicated that a minimum of 150 participants were needed to achieve .80 power. In the current sample, 47.7% of students identified as White, 27.2% as Asian, 7.2% Hispanic, 6.7% as Biracial/Multiracial, 5.6% as Black, 0.5% as Indigenous, and 1.5% preferred not to answer; 3.6% indicated that their race was not listed. The majority of participants also identified as women (55.9%), 39.5% as men, 2.6% as non-binary/non-conforming, 0.5% as transgender, and 1.5% participants preferred not to answer.

### **Procedures**

Participants completed the study online using the Qualtrics platform. The study lasted approximately 20 minutes. Before the study, all participants consented via an electronic consent form and identified whether they were currently in the United States at the time of study completion. Participants then evaluated the first page of a mock syllabus for a Black psychology

course by providing feedback on a candidate for an instructor position in a psychology department. However, this instructor was not a real person, and the syllabus was created for the purpose of the study.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions varying by instructor race (Black or White) and instructor motivation (motivated by identity-based or non-identity-related teaching philosophies). Black instructors teaching the Black psychology course with identity-based motivations indicated that they were motivated to teach about the psychological processes underlying anti-Black racism because of their own experiences of facing anti-Black racism. However, White instructors teaching the Black psychology course with identity-based motivations indicated that they were motivated their own experiences working to dismantle White supremacy. The instructors with non-identity-related motivations indicated that they taught Black psychology in relation to their research interests on the psychological processes that underlie anti-Black racism. In all scenarios, we indicated that instructors had the appropriate qualifications and research expertise to teach the course. Two pilot-tested photos (one of a man and one of a woman) were used per condition to avoid the possibility of individual features, such as gender or attractiveness, biasing the results and allowing for exploratory analyses involving instructor gender. Upon reviewing the syllabus, participants completed the following measures: perceptions of objectivity, instructor vested interest, and course legitimacy. Then, participants completed a mock course evaluation. Participants also completed three questions to assess whether they understood the experimental manipulations (i.e., instructor race, gender, and motivation). Lastly, participants answered demographic questions, were debriefed, and compensated with Sona course credit.

## Measures

**Instructor Objectivity (Torrez et al., 2024).** The six-item instructor objectivity scale assessed perceptions of whether the instructors would be able to teach objectively. The scale was modified to assess perceptions of the instructor's objectivity, whereas previous research focused on perceptions of journalists' objectivity (Torrez et al., 2024). Participants rated statements ("This professor would be biased toward their racial group in teaching this course") on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Reliability analyses were conducted indicating acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .76$ ).

**Instructor Vested Interest (Thai et al., 2021).** The four-item instructor vested interest scale assessed whether the instructor personally benefits from teaching the course presented. The scale was modified to assess perceptions of the instructor's vested interest since the previous study assessed perceptions of researcher vested interest (Thai et al., 2021). Participants rated statements ("To what extent do you think this professor is teaching this course in a way that benefits them, personally?") on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Reliability analyses were conducted indicating acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

**Course Legitimacy (Thai et al., 2021).** The five-item course legitimacy scale assessed whether the course was considered to be legitimate. The scale was modified to assess perceptions of the legitimacy of the Black psychology course since the previous study assessed perceptions of research legitimacy (Thai et al., 2021). Participants rated statements ("To what extent do you think teaching this course in the department should be prioritized?") on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Reliability analyses were conducted indicating excellent reliability ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

**Course Evaluation (MacNell et al., 2015).** The mock course evaluation scale provided student participant feedback on the instructors. The scale was modified to assess feedback on the

instructors on the syllabus (MacNell et al., 2015). This scale included 10 statements (e.g., “Given what you learned about the course, do you think the professor will be knowledgeable about the subject matter of the course?”) where participants indicated their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree* to 7=*strongly agree*). Reliability analyses were conducted indicating excellent reliability ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Lastly, participants answered the following open response question: “Given what you know about this course and the professor, how would you feel about being in their class and/or interacting with them?”

### **Data Analysis**

The current study involved a 2 (instructor race: Black or White) x 2 (motivation: identity-based or non-identity-related) between-subjects design. Thus, a series of 2 x 2 between-subjects ANOVAs were conducted with the following predictor variables: instructor race and motivation. The predicted variables were instructor objectivity, vested interest, course legitimacy, and the mock course evaluation. An exploratory analysis was also conducted to examine differences in perceptions of the instructors based on the intersection of the instructor’s race and gender identities. This analysis plan was preregistered on the Open Science Framework (accessible here: [https://osf.io/seua6/?view\\_only=63876960572d473fbb9000859c5ecad0](https://osf.io/seua6/?view_only=63876960572d473fbb9000859c5ecad0)). Exploratory analyses were also conducted on the open-ended course evaluation question. Three research assistants read through the open-ended responses to identify reoccurring themes. After completing this initial process, a codebook was developed based on the full set of responses. The research assistants then coded each response, indicating whether each theme was present (0 = theme not present, 1 = theme present).

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses were conducted to evaluate the distributive properties of the outcome variables (i.e., instructor objectivity, vested interest, course legitimacy, and a mock course evaluation) and multivariate outliers. Descriptive analyses show that all outcome variables were approximately normally distributed with indications of slight skewness (values ranging from -1.10 to -.17) and kurtosis (values ranging from -.60 to 120). The Mahalanobis distance test indicated that there were plausible outliers for each outcome variable: instructor objectivity (13 outliers:  $df = 6$ ;  $p = .05$ ), vested interest (7 outliers:  $df = 4$ ;  $p = .05$ ), course legitimacy (22 outliers:  $df = 5$ ;  $p = .05$ ), and mock course evaluation (26 outliers:  $df = 10$ ;  $p = .05$ ). As such, these outliers were not removed.

### Main Analyses

A series of two-way ANOVAs were conducted assessing instructor objectivity and vested interest, course legitimacy, and mock course evaluation ratings as a function of instructor race, instructor motivation, and the interaction between instructor race and instructor motivation. There was a main effect of instructor motivation on instructor objectivity,  $F(1, 194) = 5.47$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .028$ , such that instructors who indicated having an identity-based teaching philosophy ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SE = .10$ ) were perceived as less objective compared to instructors without an identity-based teaching philosophy ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SE = .10$ ) (see Table 1 and Figure 1 in Appendix F). The main effect of instructor race was not significant ( $p = .81$ ), nor was the interaction ( $p = .13$ ).

There was a significant main effect of instructor race on vested interest,  $F(1, 195) = 7.17$ ,  $p = .008$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .036$ , such that Black instructors ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SE = .11$ ) were perceived as having

higher vested interest compared to White instructors ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SE = .11$ ) (see Table 2 and Figure 2 in Appendix F). However, the main effect of instructor motivation was not significant ( $p = .48$ ), nor was the interaction ( $p = .70$ ).

An ANOVA on course legitimacy revealed that neither the main effects of instructor ( $p = .58$ ), instructor motivation, ( $p = .35$ ), nor the interaction ( $p = .53$ ) were significant.

There was a significant main effect of instructor race on course evaluation ratings,  $F(1, 195) = 36.20$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .159$ , such that Black instructors ( $M = 5.99$ ,  $SE = .08$ ) received higher scores on their course evaluations compared to White instructors ( $M = 5.35$ ,  $SE = .08$ ) (see Table 3 and Figure 3 in Appendix F). The main effect of instructor motivation was not significant ( $p = .79$ ), nor was the interaction ( $p = .55$ ).

### Exploratory Analyses

**Instructor Race and Gender.** The following exploratory analyses examined instructor race and gender on the outcome variables. Instructor race and gender was coded as one variable with four levels: Black woman, Black man, White woman, and White man. A two-way ANOVA conducted to examine perceptions of instructor objectivity as a function of instructor race and gender in addition to instructor motivation. There was a main effect of instructor motivation on perceived instructor objectivity,  $F(1, 194) = 5.19$ ,  $p = .024$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .027$ , such that instructors who indicated having an identity-based teaching philosophy ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SE = .10$ ) were perceived as less objective compared to instructors without an identity-based teaching philosophy ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SE = .10$ ) (see Table 4 and Figure 4 in Appendix F). However, there was not a significant main effect of instructor race and gender ( $p = .67$ ) nor was there a significant interaction between instructor race and gender, and motivation ( $p = .40$ ).

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine perceptions of instructor vested interest as a function of instructor race and gender in addition to instructor motivation. There was a main effect of instructor race and gender on perceived instructor vested,  $F(3, 195) = 3.19, p = .025, \eta_p^2 = .049$ , such that participants perceived the Black woman instructor ( $M = 4.57, SE = .16$ ) as having the most vested interest compared to the Black man ( $M = 4.49, SE = .16$ ), White woman ( $M = 4.27, SE = .16$ ), and White man ( $M = 3.93, SE = .16$ ) (see Table 5 and Figure 5 in Appendix F). The Fischer's Least Significant Difference (LSD) post-hoc tests were conducted to understand mean differences in perceptions of vested interest between Black women, Black men, White women, and White men instructors. Post-hoc comparisons using Fisher's LSD test revealed that Black women instructors (mean difference = .63,  $p = .005$ ) were perceived as having higher vested interest than White man instructors. There was not a statistically significant difference in perceptions of vested interest between Black women instructors and Black men instructors (mean difference = .56,  $p = .014$ ) and between Black women instructors and White woman instructors (mean difference = .56,  $p = .014$ ). There was also a statistically significant difference in perceptions of vested interest such that Black men instructors (mean difference = .56,  $p = .014$ ) were also perceived as having higher vested interest than White men instructors. Lastly, there was not a significant main effect of instructor motivation ( $p = .42$ ) nor was there a significant interaction between instructor race and gender, and motivation ( $p = .88$ ).

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine perceptions of course legitimacy as a function of instructor race and gender and instructor motivation. There were no significant main effects of race and gender ( $p = .57$ ), and motivation ( $p = .39$ ), nor was there a significant interaction ( $p = .86$ ).

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine course evaluation scores as a function of instructor race and gender, and instructor motivation. There was a main effect of instructor race and gender on course evaluation scores,  $F(3, 195) = 12.01, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .162$ , such that the Black woman instructor ( $M = 6.01, SE = .11$ ) received higher course evaluation scores compared to the Black man ( $M = 5.98, SE = .11$ ), White woman ( $M = 5.43, SE = .11$ ), and White man ( $M = 5.28, SE = .11$ ) (see Table 6 and Figure 6 in Appendix F). The Fischer's Least Significant Difference (LSD) post-hoc tests were conducted to understand mean differences in course evaluation scores of Black women, Black men, White women, and White men instructors. Post-hoc comparisons using Fisher's LSD test revealed that Black women instructors received a higher course evaluation score than White women instructors (mean difference = .58,  $p = .001$ ) and White men instructors (mean difference = .74,  $p = .001$ ). There was not a statistically significant difference in course evaluation scores between Black women and Black men (mean difference = .03,  $p = .854$ ). Additionally, there was a statistically significant difference in course evaluation scores such that Black men instructors also received higher course evaluation scores than White women (mean difference = .55,  $p = .001$ ) and White men instructors (mean difference = .72,  $p = .001$ ). Lastly, there was not a significant main effect of instructor motivation ( $p = .74$ ) nor was there a significant interaction between instructor race and gender, and motivation ( $p = .77$ ).

**Course Evaluation Open Responses.** The inductive thematic coding analysis revealed that participants had both positive and negative attitudes towards the mock Black psychology course. The analyses revealed the following themes: participants indicating they were interested in taking the course (10.8%), would feel comfortable in the class (11.8%), and would not take the course (5.6%) (see Table 7 in Appendix F). Over 10% ( $n = 21$ ) of the participants indicated they

were interested in taking the course and would feel comfortable in the course. Most participants who indicated they would be interested in taking the course (71.4%) and would feel comfortable in the course (73.9%) were in the Black instructor condition. Over 5% (n= 11) of the participants indicated they would not take the course. Specifically, most participants who indicated they would not be interested in the course were mostly White students (60%) and participants in the White instructor condition (81.8%). Inter-rater reliability analyses were conducted indicating substantial agreement among raters as all Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) values ranged from .70 to .81: interest in taking the course ( $\kappa = .70$ ), would feel comfortable in the course ( $\kappa = .78$ ), and would not take the course ( $\kappa = .81$ ).

Additionally, the analyses revealed the following themes regarding participants' attitudes of the professor: participants indicated they would feel confident in the professor (23.6%), confident in the professor due to their academic background (12.8%), and a lack of confidence in the professor (8.2%) (see Table 7 in Appendix F). Most participants who indicated feeling confident in the professor overall (65.2%) and because of the professor's academic background (60%) were in the Black instructor condition. However, all but one of the participants who felt a lack of confidence in the professor were in the White instructor condition. Inter-rater reliability analyses were conducted indicating substantial agreement among raters as all Fleiss' kappa ( $\kappa$ ) values ranged from .67 to .84: confident in the professor ( $\kappa = .67$ ), confident in the professor's academic background ( $\kappa = .84$ ), and lack of confidence in the professor ( $\kappa = .75$ ).

### **Discussion**

I hypothesized that Black instructors motivated by an identity-based teaching philosophy would be perceived as lacking objectivity and having a vested interest in teaching a Black psychology course. This hypothesis was not supported, as the interactions between instructor

race and motivation on instructor objectivity and vested interest were not significant. The lack of significant results may be attributed to participants automatically considering Black instructors teaching a Black psychology course to be motivated by an identity-based teaching philosophy. These results may also be attributed to 40% of participants incorrectly identifying the instructor motivation condition that they were in when asked the motivation of the instructor indicated in the mock syllabus. Notably, 62.8% of participants who incorrectly identified the instructor's motivation were in the condition where the instructor was White and motivated by an identity-based teaching philosophy. There was an error in the survey such that the sentence from the mock syllabus explaining the specific motivation to dismantle White supremacy was not listed as an option when asked if the participant remembered the instructor's motivation. However, the remaining participants simply incorrectly identified the instructor's motivation. It is possible that, when reviewing a course syllabus, students generally don't pay attention to the initial information about the instructor and rather focus on details related to course structure and grading—elements not included in the current study stimuli. As a result, some of the participants may have responded based on assumptions rather than accurately recalling the specific language used in the syllabus. Thus, future research should consider using a different manipulation, such as embedding a course lecture with details about the instructor's experiences, to effectively convey instructor motivation.

However, there were main effects of teaching philosophy on instructor objectivity and vested interest. Instructors motivated by an identity-based teaching philosophy were considered less objective compared to instructors who indicated being motivated to teach the underlying mechanisms of anti-Black racism. These findings replicate Study 1 and previous research (Settles et al., 2021; Torrez et al., 2024) showcasing how personally relevant intellectual

contributions are perceived as lacking objectivity. Even further, Black instructors were perceived as having more vested interest in teaching the Black psychology course compared to White instructors teaching the Black psychology course. I originally expected the interaction between instructor race and motivation to be significant, reinforcing Thai and colleagues' (2021) findings that Black researchers studying anti-Black racism were perceived to have higher vested interest than White researchers studying anti-Black racism. However, the current study results may be influenced by participants perceiving Black instructors as having vested interest regardless of the instructor's motivation. That is, a Black person teaching about Black experiences may be perceived as invested in teaching that topic, regardless of what they state explicitly. To further understand these results, future research could compare perceptions of Black and White instructors examining how these perceptions vary based on course topic.

I also hypothesized that Black instructors would be perceived as less legitimate compared to White instructors regardless of instructor motivation. This hypothesis was not supported as there was a lack of significant results on instructor race, instructor motivation, and the interaction between the two variables. The lack of results may also be reflective of Black psychology being a course taught at the institution where the participants were recruited from, and thus, participants may generally view the course as legitimate, regardless of instructor race and motivation. Additionally, the course legitimacy scale assessed perceptions of the course itself and not the instructor. Thus, the results for course legitimacy may not reveal accurate perceptions of whether the participants perceived the instructor as illegitimate.

Lastly, I hypothesized that Black instructors motivated by an identity-based teaching philosophy would receive lower course evaluation scores compared to White instructors motivated by an identity-based teaching philosophy and instructors motivated by non-identity-

related teaching philosophies. These hypotheses were not supported as there was not a significant interaction between instructor race and motivation on course evaluation scores. Students may feel more positively towards a Black psychology course when it is taught by a Black instructor compared to a White instructor, regardless of teaching motivation, due to Black instructors appearing to be the more appropriate person to teach the class due to having lived experience as a Black person. This would reflect Thai and colleagues' (2021) previous findings that Black researchers researching anti-Black racism were perceived as being the more appropriate person to conduct research on anti-Black racism compared to White researchers. Indeed, there was a significant effect of instructor race on course evaluation scores such that Black instructors received higher course evaluation scores compared to White instructors regardless of teaching motivation. The exploratory analyses provide context that participants may have favored the Black instructor over the White instructor due to feeling confident in the Black instructor and a lack of confidence in the White instructor of a Black psychology course that centers Black experiences. These results also show that participants who indicated they would feel comfortable and interested in taking the course were referring to when the Black instructor was teaching the Black psychology course more so compared to the White instructor. Thus, teaching motivation may not outweigh race when it comes to whom students consider to be the more appropriate person to teach a course on Black experiences.

I also conducted exploratory analyses to examine the effect of participant gender on perceptions of instructor objectivity and vested interest and course legitimacy. Although there were no significant effects of the independent variables on perceptions of instructor objectivity and course legitimacy, participants perceived Black women and Black men as having more vested interest in teaching the course compared to White man instructors. The lack of a

significant difference in perceptions of vested interest between Black women and Black men may be attributed to the course centering experiences of anti-Black racism and not intersectional forms of anti-Black racism. However, previous research on minoritized researchers shows that Black researchers studying anti-Black racism and women studying sexism are perceived as having higher vested interest in their research and producing less legitimate research compared to dominant group members conducting the same research (Thai et al., 2021). Thus, future research should explore whether Black women and Black men are perceived differently in terms of vested interest in general courses on stereotyping and discrimination as Black women may be motivated to teach the course by experiences of both anti-Black racism and sexism.

The exploratory analyses also showed that Black women and Black men instructors were rated higher on the mock course evaluation than White women and White men instructors. The results reflect the main effect of instructor race found when examining course evaluation scores as a function of instructor race. These results paired with the exploratory results on Black women and Black men having a high vested interest in teaching the course reflect the double-edged sword that Thai and colleagues (2021) discussed. Black women and Black men being viewed as having a personal agenda and receiving the highest scores compared to White women and White men provides further evidence that people hold both positive and negative attitudes towards Black individuals engaging in personally relevant scholarship. Additionally, there was not a significant difference in course evaluation scores between Black woman and Black men instructors. Although research consistently shows that Black instructors receive more biased course evaluations than White instructors, research is conflicting regarding the course evaluations of Black women and Black men instructors (Aruguete et al., 2017; Bavishi et al., 2010; Chávez & Mitchell, 2020; Fiske, 2018; Ho et al., 2009; Reid, 2010). Previous research has

shown that Black men receive more biased and negative course evaluations compared to Black women (Gordon & Alam, 2021; Reid, 2010). There is also previous research indicating that Black women received more biased and negative course evaluations compared to men (Bavishi et al., 2010; Wallace et al., 2019). These mixed findings in previous research may explain the lack of a significant difference in course evaluation scores between Black women and Black men.

### **Limitations**

The current study did not provide evidence for my hypotheses. This may be attributed to the study focusing on a Black psychology course rather than a course that does not solely focus on Black experiences. If the course were changed to a course that can cover a variety of experiences, such as a course on stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, there may have been an interaction between instructor race and motivation. Additionally, only course legitimacy was assessed and not instructor legitimacy. Course legitimacy was assessed as previous research shows that Black scholars studying anti-Black racism are perceived as producing illegitimate scholarship (Thai et al., 2021). As such, the current study assessed whether similar perceptions would extend to perceptions of a course itself, particularly when taught by a Black instructor motivated to teach the course by their own experiences of anti-Black racism. Measuring perceptions of course legitimacy instead of instructor legitimacy may explain a lack of significant results of instructor race and motivation on perceptions of legitimacy. Thus, future research investigates both perceptions of instructor and course legitimacy to understand whether perceptions of legitimacy are more tied to the instructor as a person rather than the course itself.

Another limitation is that the manipulation of instructor motivation was not clear or strong enough for participants as over 30% of participants incorrectly identified the instructor's

teaching philosophy. A potential way to resolve this would be to expose participants to mock class content in addition to the syllabus to make the manipulation more salient. For example, a future study could manipulate whether a professor incorporates their own experiences of anti-Black racism when giving a lecture on racism. Particularly, the lecture could focus on psychology studies depicting White individuals expressing prejudice toward Black people and the psychological consequences for Black individuals experiencing anti-Black racism. A mock course evaluation could then be administered potentially revealing that White students view Black faculty as being harsh and racist when teaching about racism replicating previous research (Arnold et al., 2016).

### **Future Directions**

Future study should compare perceptions of Black and White instructors as a function of the course being taught. For instance, individuals may perceive Black instructors motivated by an identity-based teaching philosophy as having a more vested interest in teaching a Black psychology course—one that centers Black experiences—compared to more general courses on stereotyping, discrimination, or social psychology. This study could unveil whether Black instructors teaching a course that solely covers anti-Blackness are perceived as less objective and having more vested interest than when they teach more general courses on prejudice and discrimination. Additionally, the study could capture difference in perceptions of Black women and Black men instructors, as Black women may be motivated to teach both courses due to their experiences of anti-Black racism and sexism. Study findings would provide a clearer understanding of biases in course evaluation of Black instructors while highlighting whether the personal relevance of the course content contributes to the mixed findings regarding biased course evaluations of Black women and Black men. By focusing on how the race-related content

being taught can influence student evaluations, the study can further unpack how course content can impact student biases of towards Black instructors.

The current research shows that Black individuals may be deemed as the more appropriate individual to teach a course on Black psychology compared to White individuals. Thus, future work should investigate how individuals possessing both Black and White racial identities are perceived when teaching a Black psychology course and the role of skin tone on these perceptions. Harris (2019) interviewed multiracial U.S. faculty across a variety of disciplines—ranging from psychology to art—from historically, White institutions. The interviewees indicated using their research as me-search to evoke social change and reported such work being devalued by their White peers, especially when their research focused on race. Even further, participants with lighter skin tones including, multiracial Black/White and Black/Latine participants, indicated experiencing privileges in the classroom, including appearing as less threatening to White students compared to monoracial faculty of color, especially those with darker skin. Thus, investigating perceptions of Black/White multiracial instructors teaching a Black psychology course and the impact of skin tone is imperative to further understand biases towards Black multiracial instructors and acknowledge skin-tone biases towards multiracial and monoracial Black instructors.

## **Chapter 4: General Discussion**

The present set of studies examined the oppression and epistemic exclusion of Black scholarship on anti-Black racism by assessing perceptions of scholars conducting research and teaching courses in psychology on such personally relevant experiences. Chapters 2 and 3, in particular, center the experiences of Black psychologists studying and teaching about anti-Black racism. Indeed, Chapter 2 sheds light on the experiences of Black graduate students who study anti-Black racism and who report navigating the epistemic exclusion of their research in graduate school. Thus, these studies contribute to evidence of the devaluation of Black scholars centering anti-Black racism in psychology (Buchanan et al., 2021; Ray, 2016; Remedios, 2022; Settles et al., 2020; Thai et al., 2021; Torrez et al., 2024). By focusing on these experiences, I hope to bring to light racial disparities in psychology that are often ignored (Dupree & Kraus, 2022; Durrheim, 2021).

### **Study 1**

Study 1 examined psychology faculty's perceptions of me-search. The results supported my hypothesis that attitudes pertaining to researcher objectivity, vested interest and research legitimacy underlie the me-searcher stereotype. Exploratory analyses indicated that most participants did not identify as a me-searcher; however, faculty of color were more likely to identify as a me-searcher compared to White faculty. Exploratory results showcase how participants perceived me-search as lacking objectivity and legitimacy because of its personal relevance to a researcher. The exploratory findings also showed that perceptions of me-search varied based on whether the faculty member evaluating the research considers their own work to be personally relevant. The results also show that psychology faculty participants reported

encountering the term me-search early on in graduate school emphasizing the need to understand how the me-searcher label may be applied to scholars as early as in their graduate career.

### **Study 2**

Study 2 examined the experiences of Black graduate students studying anti-Black racism in psychology. The study adopted an interview approach examining topics such as graduate training, me-searcher labeling, and sense of belonging. Study findings revealed that participants lacked access to necessary coursework (e.g., qualitative methodology and courses on race) due to their departments' limited prioritization of such topics. Interviewees also indicated that although they had not experienced being labeled a me-searcher, they described how their work is devalued because of its personal relevance—negatively affecting their sense of belonging in psychology and in graduate school. Lastly, the interviewees indicated that low representation of Black faculty and observing the devaluation of research on anti-Black racism produced by Black faculty negatively impacts ones' sense of belonging in the field. The current study reveals how biases that oppress and devalue Black scholarship on anti-Black racism are embedded in psychology programs. The exploratory findings revealed needed resources for Black graduate students studying anti-Black racism in psychology while facing these barriers (e.g., devaluation of their scholarship and the underrepresentation of Black students and faculty) to their learning and belonging in the field. Experiencing devaluation of one's research is especially concerning as one's research typically informs other academic pursuits (e.g., teaching and service) (Griffin et al., 2011). Thus, it is important to examine how Black scholars studying anti-Black racism are devalued in other aspects of their respective academic endeavors, including teaching.

### **Study 3**

Study 3 investigated perceptions of Black instructors teaching a Black psychology course who are motivated by their own experiences of anti-Black racism to teach this particular course material. My hypotheses that Black instructors motivated by an identity-based teaching philosophy would be perceived as lacking objectivity, having a vested interest in teaching this material, and as teaching an illegitimate course were not supported, as the results did not reveal significant interactions between instructor race (Black or White) and motivation (identity-based or neutral) on perceptions of the course and the instructor. However, the results did show that Black instructors teaching a Black psychology course are perceived as having a personal agenda, and that instructors with identity-based teaching philosophies are perceived as lacking objectivity. These results may be attributed to automatic assumptions that Black instructors teaching a Black psychology course are motivated by their own experiences of anti-Black racism, regardless of the motivations they explicitly state. Additionally, in contrast to my hypotheses, Black instructors received higher course evaluations overall than White instructors. The exploratory results showed that participants perceived Black instructors teaching a Black psychology course positively in terms of their expertise. Study 3 provides more evidence on the positive and negative biases of Black scholars studying anti-Black racism in psychology when ones' research is translated into their teaching.

### **Epistemic Exclusion of Black Scholarship on Anti-Black Racism**

Research on anti-Black racism by Black psychologists, regardless of whether their intellectual contributions are labeled as me-search, is devalued in psychology because of the relevance of the research to scholars' personal lives. Although Black psychologists' experiences of being explicitly labeled as a me-searcher vary, the term carries a negative connotation and is predominantly used to discredit research that is perceived to have a personal agenda and to

disparage researchers as producing subjective and illegitimate science. Importantly, there are both perceiver (individuals who disparage) and target (individuals who are marginalized) perspectives that one may consider when investigating epistemic exclusion in the context of Black scholars studying anti-Black racism. Investigating the perceiver's perspective is important, as White perceivers in psychology have the power to shape the systems and institutions that Black scholars studying anti-Black racism must navigate (Buchanan et al., 2021; Remedios, 2022). Equally important, investigating the target's perspective is essential, doing so provides evidence of how Black scholars studying anti-Black racism feel devalued while they simultaneously navigate epistemic exclusion other forms of oppression (e.g., experiences of racial discrimination; Arnold et al., 2016; Allen et al., 2000; Edwards & Ross, 2018; Haizlip, 2012; Hussain & Jones, 2021; Walkington, 2017).

### **Perceiver's Perspective**

The current studies provide evidence that people hold negative and positive biases towards Black scholars centering anti-Black racism. Thus, the present research reflects how the term me-search involves negative and positive stereotypic components and reinforces the “double-edged sword” for minoritized individuals conducting work on minoritized experiences (Thai et al., 2021). Negative stereotypes are unfavorable, harmful beliefs about a social group (Aronson et al., 2005). Me-search may be used as a negative stereotype to devalue personally relevant research. For example, Study 1 reveals that psychology faculty who do not view their work as personally relevant consider work that is personally relevant to the researcher to be me-search and, thus, to be illegitimate and lack objectivity. Psychology faculty in Study 1 categorized identity-based research on minoritized communities produced by minoritized individuals as me-search. These results are concerning as they reflect biased perceptions held by

a sample of individuals (mostly White, tenured faculty) who hold positions of power in the field of psychology today (American Psychological Association, APA Task Force on Inequities in Academic Tenure and Promotion, 2023); Buchanan et al., 2021; Remedios, 2022).

The term me-search may also function as a positive stereotype—stereotypes that, in contrast to negative stereotypes, represent favorable beliefs about a social group but that are nevertheless harmful (Aronson et al., 2005). Study 3 provides evidence that students feel more comfortable and confident in courses on Black psychology when those courses are taught by Black professors. The exploratory analyses showed that students may feel this way because Black professors have lived experience that is relevant to the course material. Although Black professors studying anti-Black racism may be intrinsically motivated to teach a Black psychology course, they may also be expected to teach this course due to their expertise regardless of their motivations (Griffin et al., 2011). Further, if there are fluctuations in recruitment and retention of Black scholars studying anti-Black racism, such fluctuations could result in the course no longer being taught. Given Black scholars, traditionally, have taught Black psychology more than White faculty (Hicks & Ridley, 1979; Jones, 2023), these perceptions of expertise and appropriateness may lead to further burdening Black faculty studying anti-Black racism with teaching responsibilities. Black scholars are already disproportionately burdened with teaching and service requirements compared to their White colleagues, especially when such initiatives focus on diversity equity and inclusion (American Psychological Association, APA Task Force on Inequities in Academic Tenure and Promotion, 2023; Baez, 2000; Griffin et al., 2011; Lin et al., 2018).

### **Target's Perspective**

Study 1 highlights the biases psychologists hold toward individuals conducting research that is personally relevant to their identities. Holding negative attitudes toward Black scholars who study anti-Black racism devalues such research because it is perceived as subjective and lacking legitimacy (Dupree & Kraus, 2022; Remedios, 2022; Settles et al., 2021; Thai et al., 2021; Torrez et al., 2024). Study 2 emphasizes how being marginalized for conducting personally relevant work and observing others who look like you endure the same challenges contributes to low sense of belonging and the filtering out of Black scholars in psychology. Thus, the devaluation of one's scholarship can contribute to low representation and retention of Black scholars in psychology and the continued oppression of research on anti-Black racism in psychology (Dupree & Boykin, 2021; Fox Tree & Vaid, 2022; Griffin et al., 2011; Lin et al., 2018). The findings also revealed a lack of effective training for Black students studying anti-Black racism, such as courses on race and qualitative methodology, as these courses were not prioritized in the participants graduate department. The lack of relevant courses and having ones' research devalued may signal to students that their intellectual contributions are not valuable to psychology, perpetuating the same discrimination the students are investigating (Buchanan, 2021; Dupree & Kraus, 2022; Settles et al., 2021).

Further, interviewees indicated being negatively impacted by explicit efforts by the federal government to minimize research that centers racial discrimination. U.S. President Donald Trump enacted an executive order in January 2025 to eliminate positions and freeze federal funding supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion (or DEI, Trump, 2025). Political acts of discrimination have even resulted in the American Psychological Association removing diversity initiatives and standards as a requirement in the accreditation of psychology programs in the United States (Barry, 2025). Altogether, these concerns alone are enough to push Black

psychologists, including those not studying anti-Black racism, to have concerns about their success.

### **Limitations**

The current set of studies also has its limitations. First, the present research does not examine positive stereotypes of me-searchers. Positive biases found in previous research (Thai et al., 2021) indicate that people consider Black researchers have more expertise than White researchers on anti-Black racism, and that it is more appropriate for Black than White researchers to study anti-Black racism. As such, Study 1 cannot speak to the attitudes underlying positive biases about me-search. However, positive biases emerged in Study 3, in which Black instructors teaching a Black psychology course received higher scores on a mock course evaluation compared to White instructors. The results of exploratory analyses in Study 3 showed that students had concerns about White instructors teaching a Black psychology course due to White instructors lacking relevant lived experience. These results reflect Thai and colleagues' (2021) findings showing that it is more appropriate for Black than White researchers to conduct research on anti-Black racism.

The current set of studies does not cover every stage at which the epistemic exclusion of Black scholarship on anti-Black racism occurs. One stage that future research should center is the postdoctoral research fellow stage. Examining the experiences of Black post-docs is essential as post-docs may be working toward a career in academia but may be marginalized, especially during the job market process. Thus, future research should capture the experiences Black postdocs studying anti-Black racism psychology, especially those pursuing academia as a professional career.

### **Future Directions**

Future work should examine how a lack of racial representation and Black race scholarship in psychology affects undergraduate students. Ragland and Sommers (2024) discovered that Black potential applicants to graduate school had more negative perceptions of graduate programs when there was a lack of racial diversity among the faculty compared to a racially diverse faculty. Black prospective students interested in studying anti-Black racism may not only be negatively impacted by the lack of representation of Black scholars but also the lack of research being conducted on anti-Black racism in graduate programs and the field overall (Hussain & Jones, 2021; Lin et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2020). Thus, it would be necessary to understand how Black prospective students interested in pursuing graduate school to investigate the psychological mechanisms underlying anti-Black racism are impacted by the lack of representation of Black faculty and race scholarship in psychology doctoral programs.

Additionally, it is important to understand how Black students and faculty studying anti-Black racism are perceived when they confront discrimination in academic spaces. Confronting requires individuals to explicitly express disagreement with or disapproval of racial disparities in academic spaces (Kaiser & Miller, 2004). Evidence shows that Black individuals are perceived as complainers when they confront racial discrimination and/or injustices (Copeland & Dickter, 2022; Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Dickter et al., 2012; Rasinski & Czopp, 2010; Zou & Dickter, 2013). As such, Black scholars studying anti-Black racism who choose to confront racial disparities in psychology may be deemed as complaining and not taken seriously which can negatively impact their perceived support. Investigating the experiences of Black scholars confronting the epistemic exclusion of racial scholarship in psychology is imperative because it

reveals how the suppression of student concerns and experiences functions to further oppress Black racial scholarship in the field.

### **Conclusion**

The current studies provide evidence of perceiver's and target's perspectives on the epistemic exclusion of Black scholars studying anti-Black racism in psychology. The results emphasize the need for simultaneous, multi-level systemic and structural changes in psychology, rather than the treatment of treating systemic racism at the faculty, graduate, and undergraduate stages as separate and unrelated issues. Treating the epistemic exclusion of Black scholars' intellectual contributions on anti-Black racism as a problem that can be solved one step at a time can cause efforts for change to be ineffective. Moreover, at the time this dissertation is being written, research and education on anti-Black racism are clearly under attack (Barry, 2025; Miller et al., 2023; Moody, 2023; Morgan, 2022; Thomason, 2023; Vue et al., 2024; Trump, 2025). This is not a problem of the past and is actively being fueled by discriminatory efforts by individuals (ranging from faculty to the person holding the highest office in the United States government), groups, and organizations, including the American Psychological Association (Barry, 2025; Trump, 2025). Thus, research must continue to center the experiences of Black scholars studying anti-Black racism, especially as anti-Black racism persists in academia to prevent Black scholars from investigating anti-Black racism.

## Appendices A-F

### Appendix A

#### Study 1 Measures

##### Open-ended Questions

Had you heard of the term *me-searcher* before participating in this study?

If YES, explain how you heard of the term *me-searcher*?

If YES, in what contexts have you heard of the term *me-searcher*?

Had you used the term *me-searcher* before participating in this study?

If YES, explain how you used the term *me-searcher*?

If YES, in what contexts have you used the term *me-searcher*?

Define what the term *me-searcher* means to you.

Provide ONE example of a *me-searcher*.

Do you consider yourself to be a *me-searcher*?

If YES, please explain why you consider yourself to be a *me-searcher*.

If NO, please explain why you do NOT consider yourself to be a *me-searcher*.

##### Perceptions of Researcher Objectivity (Torrez et al., 2024) (modified)

A *me-searcher* is objective in conducting their research.

A *me-searcher* is biased in conducting their research.

A *me-searcher* is impartial in conducting their research.

A *me-searcher* can detach their personal views from conducting their research.

A *me-searcher* is neutral in conducting their research.

A *me-searcher* is biased toward their racial group in conducting their research.

##### Researcher Vested Interest (Thai et al., 2021) (modified)

To what extent do you think a *me-searcher* conducts their research because it benefits them, personally?

How much do you think a *me-searcher* has to gain from conducting their research?

To what extent do you think a *me-searcher* has a vested interest in their research?

To what extent do you think *me-searchers* are motivated by a personal agenda in their research?

##### Legitimacy of Research (Thai et al., 2021) (modified)

To what extent do you think the research conducted by *me-searchers* is important?

To what extent do you think the research conducted by *me-searchers* contributes to advancing scientific knowledge?

To what extent do you think the research conducted by a *me-searcher* could better society?

To what extent do you think the research conducted by a *me-searcher* should be funded?

To what extent do you think the department should pay attention to the results of research conducted by a *me-searcher*?

## Appendix B

### Study 1 Preliminary Analyses and Results

**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics of objectivity perceptions, researcher vested interest, and legitimacy of research*

|   | N   | Mean | SD   | Skew | Kurtosis |
|---|-----|------|------|------|----------|
| <b>Objectivity Perceptions</b>  |     |      |      |      |          |
| O1. A me-searcher is objective in conducting their research.                        | 148 | 4.48 | 1.43 | .08  | -.59     |
| O2. A me-searcher is biased in conducting their research.                           | 150 | 4.50 | 1.41 | .09  | -.85     |
| O3. A me-searcher is impartial in conducting their research.                        | 149 | 3.95 | 1.43 | .42  | -.27     |
| O4. A me-searcher can detach their personal views from conducting their research.   | 148 | 4.30 | 1.57 | .06  | -.96     |
| O5. A me-searcher is neutral in conducting their research.                          | 149 | 3.86 | 1.39 | .40  | -.10     |
| O6. A me-searcher is biased toward their racial group in conducting their research. | 148 | 4.80 | 1.50 | .18  | -1.19    |

**Researcher Vested Interest**

|  |     |      |      |      |      |
|--|-----|------|------|------|------|
| VI1. To what extent do you think a me-searcher conducts their research because it benefits them, personally? | 149 | 4.04 | 1.42 | .06  | -.69 |
| VI2. How much do you think a me-searcher has to gain from conducting their research?                         | 147 | 4.39 | 1.44 | -.32 | -.21 |
| VI3. To what extent do you think a me-searcher has a vested interest in their research?                      | 150 | 5.49 | 1.34 | -.76 | .30  |
| VI4. To what extent do you think me-searchers are motivated by a personal agenda in their research?          | 150 | 4.44 | 1.59 | -.06 | -.71 |

#### Legitimacy of Research

|  |     |      |      |      |      |
|--|-----|------|------|------|------|
| LR1. To what extent do you think the research conducted by me-searchers is important?                                  | 149 | 5.55 | 1.37 | -.69 | -.10 |
| LR2. To what extent do you think the research conducted by me-searchers contributes to advancing scientific knowledge? | 148 | 5.63 | 1.38 | -.84 | .13  |
| LR3. To what extent do you think the research conducted by a me-searcher could better society?                         | 147 | 5.76 | 1.38 | -.97 | .25  |

|   |     |      |      |      |      |
|---|-----|------|------|------|------|
| LR4. To what extent do you think the research conducted by a me-searcher should be funded?                                  | 147 | 5.50 | 1.48 | -.63 | -.49 |
| LR5. To what extent do you think the department should pay attention to the results of research conducted by a me-searcher? | 148 | 5.47 | 1.47 | -.65 | -.30 |

---

SD: Standard Deviation

**Table 2**

*Correlations among the perceptions of objectivity scale items*

|    | O1     | O2     | O3     | O4     | O5     | O6   |
|----|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| O1 | ----   |        |        |        |        |      |
| O2 | .79*** | ----   |        |        |        |      |
| O3 | .72*** | .62*** | ----   |        |        |      |
| O4 | .66*** | .51*** | .58*** | ----   |        |      |
| O5 | .69*** | .56*** | .72*** | .60*** | ----   |      |
| O6 | .54*** | .49*** | .43*** | .40*** | .44*** | ---- |

---

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 3**

*Correlations among the researcher vested interest scale items*

|  | VI1 | VI2 | VI3 | VI4 |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|

|     |        |        |        |      |
|-----|--------|--------|--------|------|
| VI1 | ----   |        |        |      |
| VI2 | .58*** | ----   |        |      |
| VI3 | .36*** | .48*** | ----   |      |
| VI4 | .42*** | .34*** | .46*** | ---- |

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Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 4**

*Correlations among the researcher vested interest scale items*

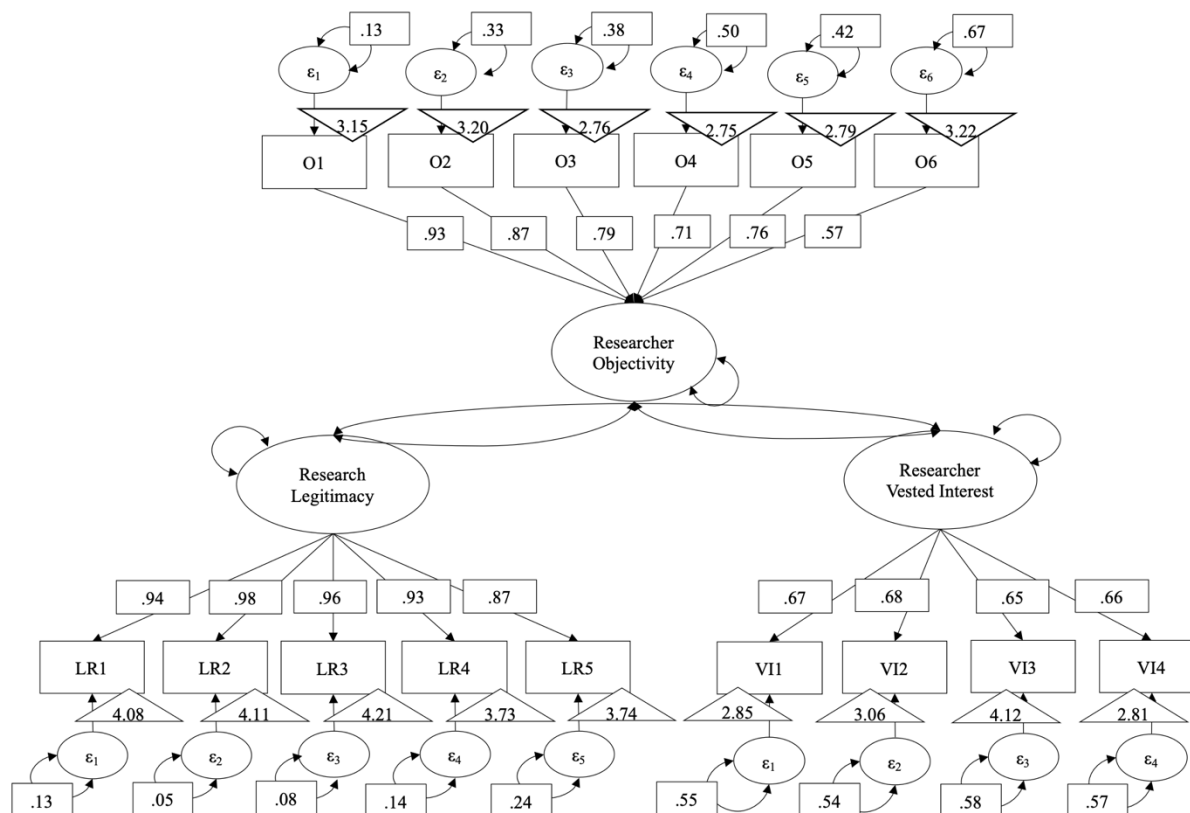
|     | LR1    | LR2    | LR3    | LR4    | LR5  |
|-----|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| LR1 | ----   |        |        |        |      |
| LR2 | .91*** | ----   |        |        |      |
| LR3 | .88*** | .95*** | ----   |        |      |
| LR4 | .89*** | .90*** | .89*** | ----   |      |
| LR5 | .84*** | .84*** | .83*** | .84*** | ---- |

---

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Figure 1**

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Me-searcher Stereotype*

**Table 5**

*Perceptions of Me-search as a Function of Identifying as a Me-searcher*

|                            | Identify as a Me-searcher            |                                | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------|-----------|
|                            | Did Not Identify<br>as a Me-searcher | Identified as a<br>Me-searcher |          |           |
| Researcher Objectivity     | 4.16<br>(1.27)                       | 4.64<br>(1.18)                 | -2.04*   | 111       |
| Researcher Vested Interest | 4.67<br>(1.19)                       | 4.44<br>(1.01)                 | 1.03     | 111       |
| Research Legitimacy        | 5.28<br>(1.54)                       | 6.05<br>(1.04)                 | -3.16**  | 110       |

*Note.* \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ . Standard deviations are listed in parentheses under the means.

**Table 6**

*Perceptions of Me-search as a Function of Whether Participants Heard of the Term Me-search*

|                            | Heard of the Term Me-search |                | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|----------|-----------|
|                            | No                          | Yes            |          |           |
| Researcher Objectivity     | 3.82<br>(1.08)              | 4.48<br>(1.18) | -2.91**  | 142       |
| Researcher Vested Interest | 4.64<br>(1.10)              | 4.58<br>(1.12) | .31      | 142       |
| Research Legitimacy        | 4.82<br>(1.46)              | 5.81<br>(1.22) | .001***  | 141       |

*Note.* \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ . Standard deviations are listed in parentheses under the means.

**Table 7**

*Perceptions of Me-search as a Function of Whether Participants Used the Term Me-search*

|                            | Used the Term Me-search |                | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|----------|-----------|
|                            | No                      | Yes            |          |           |
| Researcher Objectivity     | 4.18<br>(1.15)          | 4.46<br>(1.18) | -1.49    | 145       |
| Researcher Vested Interest | 4.57<br>(1.20)          | 4.63<br>(1.03) | -.35     | 145       |
| Research Legitimacy        | 5.32<br>(1.42)          | 5.83<br>(1.22) | -2.33*   | 144       |

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ . Standard deviations are listed in parentheses under the means.

**Table 8**

*Perceptions of Me-search as a Function of Participant Gender*

|  | Participant Gender |       | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> |
|--|--------------------|-------|----------|-----------|
|  | Men                | Women |          |           |

|                            |                |                |          |     |
|----------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------|-----|
| Researcher Objectivity     | 3.98<br>(1.20) | 4.51<br>(1.12) | -2.61**  | 145 |
| Researcher Vested Interest | 4.92<br>(1.08) | 4.45<br>(1.11) | 2.42**   | 145 |
| Research Legitimacy        | 4.97<br>(1.43) | 5.84<br>(1.21) | -3.87*** | 144 |

*Note.* \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ . Standard deviations are listed in parentheses under the means.

**Table 9**

*Thematic Coding Analysis of Participant Definitions and Examples of Me-search*

| Themes                | Sub-themes             | Prevalence* | Representative Quotes   |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------|---|
| Defining Me-search    |                        |             |   |
| Personal<br>Relevance |                        | 85.3%       | “Someone whose purpose for researching a particular topic is related to personal and vested interest in the topic.” |
| Examples of Me-search |                        |             |   |
| Listed<br>Themselves  |                        | 11.3%       | “I am an example of a me-searcher.”   |
| Identity<br>Research  |                        | 52.0%       |   |
|                       | Disability<br>Research | 32.0%       | “Someone whose research focuses on ADHD in the workplace who, themselves, has ADHD.”                                |
|                       | Race<br>Research       | 6.7%        | “A Black woman studying mental health of Black women informed by her lived experiences.”                            |
|                       | Gender<br>Research     | 6.7%        | “Female scientists who study abortion.”   |
|                       | Sexuality<br>Research  | 6.0%        | “Someone who identifies as lesbian doing research on same sex couples.”   |

---

\*Note. Prevalence among the entire sample.

**Table 10**

*Thematic Coding Analysis of Participant's Who Identify as a Me-searcher*

| Theme              | Prevalence* | Representative Quotes   |
|--------------------|-------------|---|
| Personal Relevance | 86.4%       | "I am a woman of color studying experiences of women of color, including faculty women of color." |

---

\*Note. Prevalence among the 44 participants who self-identified as a me-searcher.

**Table 11**

*Thematic Coding Analysis of Participant's Who Do Not Identify as a Me-searcher*

| Theme                    | Prevalence* | Representative Quotes  |
|--------------------------|-------------|--|
| Lacks Personal Relevance | 62.3%       | "I am a White woman studying the experiences of Black populations in the United States." |

---

\*Note. Prevalence among the 69 participants who do not self-identify as a me-searcher.

**Table 12**

*Thematic Coding Analysis of Participant's Who Heard of the Term Me-search*

| Themes                   | Sub-themes           | Prevalence* | Representative Quotes   |
|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------|---|
| Heard the term Me-search |                      |             |   |
| Academic                 |                      | 59.6%       |   |
| Contexts                 |                      |             |   |
|                          | Faculty & Colleagues | 28.4%       | "A colleague introduced me to the term in a lecture she gave to my class."  |
|                          | Graduate School      | 27.5%       | "Some time in grad school, in reference to people who do research on topics personally relevant to them (often used in a somewhat derogatory way)." |

|                         |             |       |  |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------|--|
|                         | Conferences | 11.9% | “I heard people talking about it in professional contexts (conferences, lab meetings).”  |
| Negative<br>Connotation |             | 12.8% | “Often derogatory, but usually to describe work where the researcher's personal experiences align with the research question.” |

\*Note. Prevalence among the 109 participants who previously heard of the term me-search.

**Table 13**

*Thematic Coding Analysis of Participant Prior Use of the Term Me-search*

| Themes                   | Sub-themes              | Prevalence* | Representative Quotes   |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|---|
| Academic<br>Spaces       |                         | 55.5%       |   |
|                          | Casual<br>Conversations | 39.2%       | “In casual conversation with colleagues.”   |
|                          | Classes                 | 20.3%       | “In my class on diversity science to introduce students to the term and to discuss the perception of marginalized scholars not be biased in the study of intergroup studies.” |
| Describe a<br>researcher |                         | 23.0%       |   |
|                          | Different<br>researcher | 13.5%       | “When talking about other faculty / students (when I was a student).”   |
|                          | Describe<br>themselves  | 12.2%       | “When talking to other academic friends about how my research is connected to my own experiences.”  |

\*Note. Prevalence among the 74 participants who previously used the term me-search.

## Appendix C

### Study 2 Interview Guide

*Introduction:* Hi [Interviewee], my name is Jada Copeland-Hayes, thank you so much for volunteering to speak with us. We are so excited to hear about your experiences as a graduate student of color studying race and to learn from you. I would also like to introduce my research assistant, [Research Assistant], who will be here taking notes and in case if I have any technical difficulties with Zoom.

Before we dive into our conversation, we have a couple of housekeeping notes that we're sharing with all of our participants so that everyone has the same information, these were covered in the consent form, but thank you for your patience as I read through these:

- The interview will last about an hour and your participation is voluntary. Participants may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. We plan to audio record this Zoom meeting and keep your responses confidential. Please note that is a condition for participation for data collection and analysis purposes. If you do not want to show your camera, you can turn your camera off during the session.
- Recordings will be deleted after they have been transcribed and will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team. We hope to use your responses to acknowledge your experiences navigating academic spaces. Do we have your consent to begin recording?

Interview Questions:

#### **Departmental Courses and Support**

Thank you so much! Now to the conversation, the first set of questions around departmental resources, support, and overall culture. These questions are related to your overall experience navigating and interacting with your graduate department as a whole. Let's begin.

1. When considering your research interests, are there courses and trainings not currently offered in your department that would benefit your research?
  - a. If so, how has not having this training impacted you and your research?
2. I want you to think about your department and the general culture it has in place for graduate students studying race.
  - a. When you think about this, how do you see yourself fitting into this culture or not fitting into this culture? How does this impact your graduate studies and research?
3. Have you experienced being labeled as a me-searcher in your department and how did that impact your understanding of the general culture of your department?

#### **Advisor Support**

Thank you for sharing your perspectives on your graduate program. Next, we will cover topics related to your grad school advisor.

4. Reflecting on your relationship with your advisor, how do you feel about their ability to support you and your research?
5. Several conversations about when and how we should do our research come up in meetings with our advisors. In these meetings, how does your advisor respond to your research ideas, it could be positive or negative. Please elaborate on how these conversations go.

### **Sense of Belonging and Community**

I want us to think about belonging and community for this next part.

6. Depending on your department and what they do to foster community and belonging, you might have a stronger or weaker sense of community and belonging. Can you describe your sense of belonging in your department and how might these feelings be impacted by your area of research?
7. Thank you for sharing your experiences. I appreciate your openness and transparency. I'd like to get a little deeper into those experiences. Based on what we just discussed, did these instances and/or situations have any impact on your choice to continue with your grad program or academia, generally?"

### **Observed Epistemic Exclusion**

Thank you so much for sharing these experiences. Next, we will focus on your experiences of observing the experiences of other individuals of color studying race in psychology.

8. Have you experienced having your research be devalued or questioned?
  - a. Have you experienced being labeled as a me-searcher to devalue or minimize your research?
9. Depending on your personal experiences, have you observed your advisor, colleagues, and/or other race scholars work being devalued? If so, how did this make you feel?
10. Have any of these observed experiences impact your own sense of belonging in academic spaces?

### **Remaining Questions**

Thank you for participating in this interview and sharing your experiences. Let's go ahead and end the session with one last question.

11. I'd like us to close the session with anything else you'd like to share as it relates to departmental support for students of color studying race. Please share what types of resources you think would best support you and your studies.
12. Is there anything else that you would like to share that we have not covered?

Thank you very much for your response. We hope to use them to acknowledge your experiences navigating disparities in academic spaces. After this Zoom, I will be sending you your Amazon gift card to the email provided. Do you have any questions before we end?

Well, that's all for today, thank you so much for your time, and we hope you have an amazing rest of your day!

## Appendix D

### Study 2 Results

**Table 1**

*Deductive Thematic Coding Analysis- Lack of Relevant Coursework*

| Themes               | Sub-themes                          | Prevalence | Representative Quotes  |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|--|
| Lack of Courses      | Lack of Qualitative Courses         | 80%        | "I mean, I'm about to be taking a qualitative policy class but like for example if you want to take a qual methods class like, it's not happening in the department."  |
|                      | Lack of Courses on Race and Racism  | 40%        | "We had courses about social psychology generally and stats courses, but for the most part there was nothing that was specifically related to race or collecting data with specific populations."  |
| Barriers to Learning | Outsourcing Neglected Knowledge     | 60%        | "I would have liked more courses surrounding equity, inclusion, something in our department about qualitative methods would have been really great. We had to go to another department to get that."   |
|                      | Unequal Independent Learning Burden | 60%        | "I will say that I've been told I'm intimidating, and I think the reason why is because, in order to pursue diversity science, you have to want it more than other people do. You're not going to get the training unless you're willing to go out and find that training for yourself. It |

means like looking and reading in other places than what is traditionally offered you."

**Table 2**

*Deductive Thematic Coding Analysis- Me-searcher Labeling*

| Themes                              | Sub-themes                             | Prevalence | Representative Quotes  |
|-------------------------------------|--|------------|--|
| Experiences of Me-searcher Labeling | Not Explicitly Labeled a Me-searcher   | 53.3%      | "Yeah, I would say, I don't think anyone explicitly, at least not to my face, ever referred to me as a me-searcher. "  |
|                                     | Feel Perceived as a Me-searcher        | 26.7%      | "People [don't] come out and say you're a me-searcher...[Rather], they try to say that your work is unnecessary or [question whether] you considered...XYZ thing that's not about race and racism."              |
|                                     | Explicitly Labeled a Me-searcher       | 20%        | " I was explaining to one faculty my ideas [because] I want to look at black women. And he said, 'Oh, you want to do this instead?' And [after I said] no, he said 'Oh, okay, you know, research is me-search;'" |
| Experiences of Being Devalued       | No Experiences of Explicit Devaluation | 40%        | "I can say, luckily I don't think I've had my research devalued or I don't think I've processed it enough."  |

|  |       |   |
|--|-------|---|
| Explicit<br>Devaluation                | 53.5% | “Yeah, I have been devalued...I get questions about like what about white people [and] what do you think about their experiences. I feel like that's devaluing my work and saying that studying Black women is not informative enough.” |
| Devalued for<br>Centering<br>Blackness | 20%   | "[My research] has definitely been questioned... [in terms of] why are you studying just black people [and] why don't you study other races.”   |

**Table 3***Deductive Thematic Coding Analysis- Sense of Belonging*

| Themes                                  | Sub-themes                   | Prevalence | Representative Quotes   |
|---|------------------------------|------------|---|
| Department Belonging                    |                              |            |   |
| Lack of<br>Department<br>Representation | Lack of Race<br>Research     | 46.7%      | "My PI is the first...professor that was hired into this department to study race at all...and so I think we are a bit of an oddball lab."  |
|   | Lack of<br>Black<br>Scholars | 33.3%      | "When I first came into the department, the social psych area specifically, I was the only Black person period, so just on that I did not feel like I fit into said department. " |
| Belonging                               |                              |            |   |

|               |   |       |   |
|---------------|---|-------|---|
|               | Belonging<br>due to<br>Shared Race                  | 13.3% | “Being a Black man, I’ve naturally gravitated towards people that share similar identities to me...I think they also just wanted to be friends and welcomed me into the department seeing that there was another person of color joining the department.” |
| Not Belonging | Racially<br>Isolated                                | 46.7% | “All of the Black students in my department are in my lab, so that alone makes it clear I’m always one of the only ones. It’s very noticeable.”   |
|               | Research is<br>Isolated                             | 46.7% | "I'll say, as a whole, belonging in my department is not great and that's partly because of my research and also because of the culture."   |
|               | Research<br>Doesn't fit in<br>Department<br>Culture | 40%   | " I just felt like my work was an outlier. It was you know, at the margins and wasn't the main focus, or seen as integral to social psychology."  |

#### Belonging in the Field of Psychology

Poor Sense of  
Belonging in the  
field

|  |                                     |       |   |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------|---|
|  | Observing<br>Epistemic<br>Exclusion | 66.7% | “I think it's disheartening [and] emphasizes the fact that, people don't respect you and your work because of your identity...It definitely just feels like another thing that compounds onto the dynamics of pursuing a PhD [with] a |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------|---|

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>Observing      33.3%<br/>Devaluation<br/>of Advisor</p>                               | <p>marginalized identity in a predominantly White space and career.”</p> <p>“I can speak to my advisor. I consider her to be an incredibly accomplished woman... and even with all her accolades, she still struggles to get grants, that other PI's are able to get so easily simply because of what they are studying. It bothers and frustrates me on her behalf because she deserves better. And it also definitely makes me a bit nervous of if that is going to be me if I were to go into this position as well.”</p> |
| <p>No Sense of      13.3%<br/>Belonging</p>  | <p>"I can't see myself in academia because I see I don't really see myself in it now. I don't really have a sense of belonging in it now. And so I yeah, I just think like a lot of the values that I have just don't match up with what academia values. And so that alone, to be like, yeah, this is not the place for me, um at the core."</p>  |
| <p>Consequences of Not Belonging</p>   |  |
| <p>Not              66.7%<br/>Belonging<br/>Hurts Desire<br/>to Stay in<br/>Academia</p> | <p>“My biggest complaint about being in this program is I'm not seeing myself in these spaces. So, I feel like if I leave and never come back are there going to be some students who the cycle just repeats where they don't see themselves within the faculty. They don't see, you know, a teacher with a sleeve tattoo and like big hoop earrings and constantly wearing</p>  |

|                     |       |   |
|---------------------|-------|---|
| Leaving<br>Academia | 33.3% | noise, making bangles wherever she goes, and head wraps. Are they going to have that opportunity to see this and how important is that for somebody who looks like me, who may not feel like one of the good ones?"<br>"I definitely think it's not made me feel welcome and made me realize that maybe I'm correct that academia is not the place for me." |
|---------------------|-------|---|

**Table 4***Exploratory Inductive Thematic Coding Analysis- Advisor Support*

| Themes  | Prevalence | Representative Quotes   |
|---|------------|---|
| Feels Supported                               | 93.3%      | "I feel like she's rooting for me 12 times out of 10 and is very supportive."   |
| Had to Change Advisors Due to Lack of Support | 13.3%      | My first advisor, I felt, lacked the skills necessary to support me...However, after I made a switch, [my second advisor] was very, very supportive." |

**Table 5***Exploratory Inductive Thematic Coding Analysis- Mental Toll of Research*

| Themes     | Sub-themes | Prevalence | Representative Quotes  |
|------------|------------|------------|--|
| Emotional/ |            | 40%        | "Recently, the drain of my work is becoming worse and worse because of outside things...I love my work, but it reinforces the structures |

|   |                              |       |   |
|---|------------------------------|-------|---|
| Psychological<br>Toll of<br>Research<br>Current<br>Political<br>Climate |                              |       | of oppression that I live in, and it's hard not to feel apathy that anything is going to change."   |
|   | Feeling Targeted or Devalued | 26.7% | "Since the election, I have really been thinking about what it means to do the kind of work that I do and the kind of target I put on my back."                 |
|   | Heightened Stress and Worry  | 20%   | "[I have been] hearing these conversations of, 'oh, we are frightened and scared,' [and] we should be [because] of what's happening in the Federal government." |

**Table 6***Exploratory Inductive Thematic Coding Analysis- Resources*

| Themes                   | Sub-themes     | Prevalence | Representative Quotes  |
|--------------------------|----------------|------------|--|
| Increased Representation | Black Faculty  | 40%        | "First, seeing myself reflected in the faculty within my department would allow me to feel as though Black scholars are valued." |
|                          | Black Students | 40%        | "Having more Black faculty [and] the retention of Black faculty and Black students... would be helpful."                         |
| Funding Support          |                | 26.7%      | "At this point, and in this state of the world, the best support would be funds for the  |

students, especially the students of color and Black students in the department."

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## Appendix E

### Study 3 Stimuli

Black Instructor | Identity-based Motivation



#### Black Psychology PSY 0051 – Tufts University – Fall 2025

Instructor: Professor Latonya Wood  
Email: l.wood@gmail.com

Virtual Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm  
(See Canvas for Zoom link)

Meeting Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1:30 pm – 2:45 pm  
Location: Pearson Hall, Room 104

Course Website: <http://canvas.tufts.edu>

Required Textbook: African American Psychology: From Africa to America  
Faye Z. Belgrave & Kevin Wendell Allison (4<sup>th</sup> Edition)



#### Welcome to Black Psychology

Black psychology is the scientific study of Black experiences through a psychological lens. In this course, we will explore theories, paradigms, and research developed to understand the attitudes, behaviors, and psychological experiences of Black Americans. Example topics will include the history of anti-Black racism in psychology, measuring racial identity among Black individuals, and the adequacy of psychological models in accounting for Black experiences and perspectives. I am particularly motivated to teach this course because of my own experiences with anti-Black racism, which drives my commitment to understanding and addressing the psychological processes behind it.

I have three main goals for the course:

1. Introduce key questions and issues in Black psychology.
2. Explore research methods, findings, and principles centered on Black psychology.
3. Encourage critical thinking on applying Black psychology research to social issues.

This class will consist of lectures, in-class activities, discussion posts, and exams. You will need to both attend lectures and complete the readings to learn all of the examinable material. Your success in this class depends on attending lectures, taking notes, and studying regularly.



**Black Psychology**  
**PSY 0051 – Tufts University – Fall 2025**

Instructor: Professor Darnell Williams  
 Email: [d.williams@gmail.com](mailto:d.williams@gmail.com)

Virtual Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm  
 (See Canvas for Zoom link)

Meeting Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1:30 pm – 2:45 pm  
 Location: Pearson Hall, Room 104

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Required Textbook: African American Psychology: From Africa to America  
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1. Introduce key questions and issues in Black psychology.
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3. Encourage critical thinking on applying Black psychology research to social issues.

This class will consist of lectures, in-class activities, discussion posts, and exams. You will need to both attend lectures and complete the readings to learn all of the examinable material. Your success in this class depends on attending lectures, taking notes, and studying regularly.

## Black Instructor | Not Identity-based Motivation (Control)



**Black Psychology**  
**PSY 0051 – Tufts University – Fall 2025**

Instructor: Professor Latonya Wood  
 Email: [l.wood@gmail.com](mailto:l.wood@gmail.com)

Virtual Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm  
 (See Canvas for Zoom link)

Meeting Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1:30 pm – 2:45 pm  
 Location: Pearson Hall, Room 104

Course Website: <http://canvas.tufts.edu>

Required Textbook: African American Psychology: From Africa to America  
 Faye Z. Belgrave & Kevin Wendell Allison (4<sup>th</sup> Edition)



**Welcome to Black Psychology**

Black psychology is the scientific study of Black experiences through a psychological lens. In this course, we will explore theories, paradigms, and research developed to understand the attitudes, behaviors, and psychological experiences of Black Americans. Example topics will include the history of anti-Black racism in psychology, measuring racial identity among Black individuals, and the adequacy of psychological models in accounting for Black experiences and perspectives. I am particularly motivated to teach this course on the psychology processes that underlie anti-Black racism.

I have three main goals for the course:

1. Introduce key questions and issues in Black psychology.
2. Explore research methods, findings, and principles centered on Black psychology.
3. Encourage critical thinking on applying Black psychology research to social issues.

This class will consist of lectures, in-class activities, discussion posts, and exams. You will need to both attend lectures and complete the readings to learn all of the examinable material. Your success in this class depends on attending lectures, taking notes, and studying regularly.



**Black Psychology**  
**PSY 0051 – Tufts University – Fall 2025**

Instructor: Professor Darnell Williams  
 Email: [d.williams@gmail.com](mailto:d.williams@gmail.com)

Virtual Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm  
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**Black Psychology**  
**PSY 0051 – Tufts University – Fall 2025**

Instructor: Professor Mary Larson  
 Email: [m.larson@gmail.com](mailto:m.larson@gmail.com)

Virtual Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm  
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 Email: r.hoffman@gmail.com

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White Instructor | Not Identity-based Motivation (Control)



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### Study 3 Measures

#### **Instructor Objectivity (Torrez et al., 2024) (modified)**

- This professor would be objective in teaching this course.
- This professor would be biased in teaching this course.
- This professor would be impartial in teaching this course.
- This professor could detach their personal views from teaching this course.
- This professor would be neutral in teaching this course.
- This professor would be biased toward their racial group in teaching this course.

#### **Instructor Vested Interest (Thai et al., 2021) (modified)**

- To what extent do you think this professor is teaching this course in a way that benefits them, personally?
- How much do you think this professor has to gain from teaching this course using their specific approach/philosophy?
- To what extent do you think this professor has a vested interest in their teaching?
- To what extent do you think this professor is motivated by a personal agenda in teaching this course?

#### **Course Legitimacy (Thai et al., 2021) (modified)**

- To what extent do you think that it's important that this particular course is being taught?
- To what extent do you think this course is designed to advance students' scientific knowledge?
- To what extent do you think that this course could better society?
- To what extent do you think teaching this course in the department should be prioritized?
- To what extent do you think similar topics to this Black psychology course should be taught, such as an Anti-Black Racism in Education course?

#### **Course Evaluation (MacNell et al., 2015) (modified)**

- Given what you learned about the course, do you think the professor will conduct themselves in a professional manner?
- Given what you learned about the course, do you think the professor treats students' with respect?
- Given what you learned about the course, do you think the professor cares about the students' learning and success?
- Given what you learned about the course, do you think the professor will be enthusiastic about the course?
- Given what you learned about the course, do you think the professor will provide valuable feedback?
- Given what you learned about the course, do you think the professor will be prompt in giving feedback/grades?
- Given what you learned about the course, do you think the professor will be consistent in their grading?
- Given what you learned about the course, do you think the professor will fairly apply the grading rubrics?

Given what you learned about the course, do you think the professor will be responsive when a student has a question about their grade?

Given what you learned about the course, do you think the professor will be knowledgeable about the subject matter of the course?

Open Response: Given what you know about this course and the professor, how would you feel about being in their class and/or interacting with them?

### **Manipulation Checks**

Based on your memory of the photo provided, what was the race of the professor? (open-ended)

Based on your memory of the photo provided, what was the gender of the professor? (open-ended)

Which of the following is true of the syllabus that you read?

## Appendix F

### Study 3 Results

**Table 1**

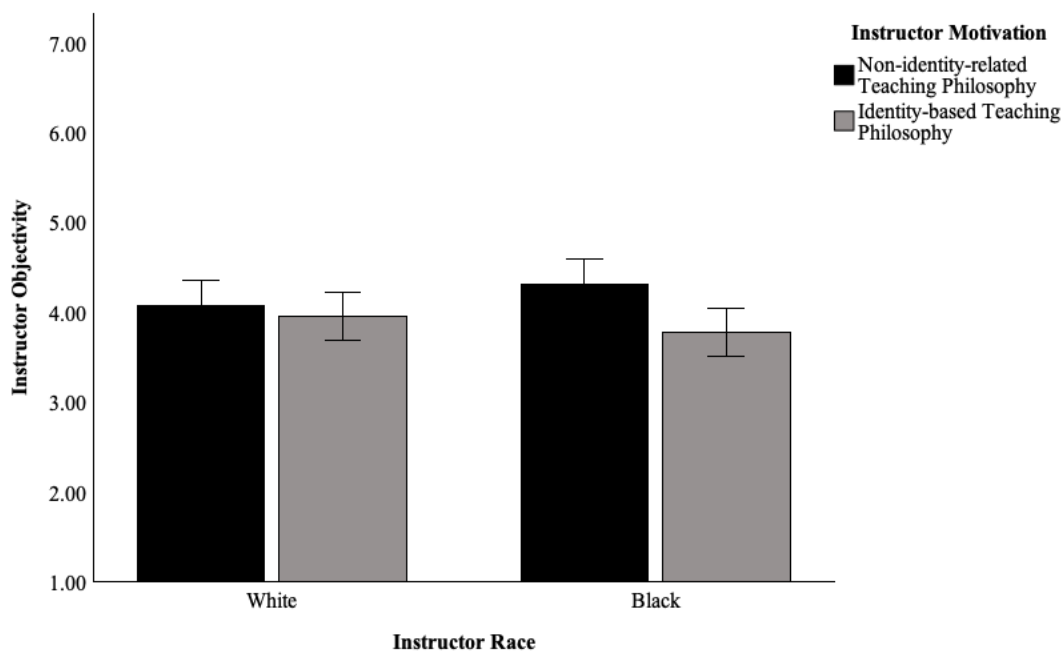
*Instructor Objectivity as a Function of Instructor Race and Motivation*

|   | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | $\eta_p^2$ |
|---|-----------|----------|----------|------------|
| Instructor Race                         | 1         | .06      | .81      | .000       |
| Instructor Motivation                   | 1         | 5.47     | .02*     | .028       |
| Instructor Race x Instructor Motivation | 1         | 2.27     | .13      | .012       |
| Total                                   | 194       |          |          |            |

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ .

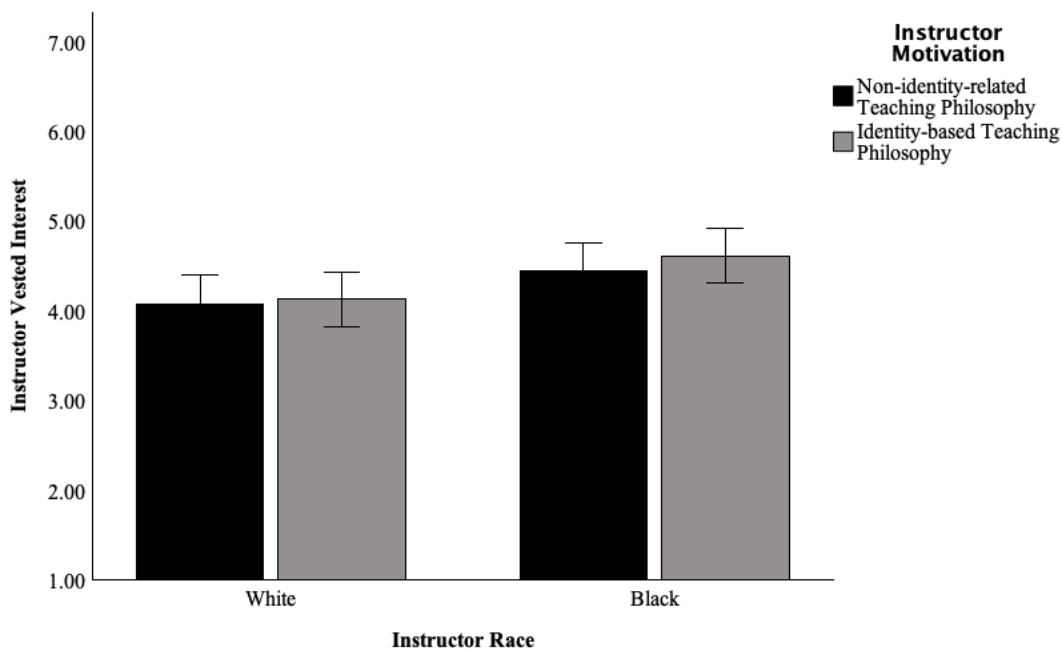
**Figure 1**

*Instructor Objectivity as a Function of Instructor Race and Motivation*



**Table 2***Instructor Vested Interest as a Function of Instructor Race and Motivation*

|   | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | $\eta_p^2$ |
|---|-----------|----------|----------|------------|
| Instructor Race                         | 1         | 7.17     | .01**    | .036       |
| Instructor Motivation                   | 1         | .50      | .48      | .003       |
| Instructor Race x Instructor Motivation | 1         | .15      | .70      | .001       |
| Total                                   | 195       |          |          |            |

*Note.* \*\* $p < .01$ .**Figure 2***Instructor Vested Interest as a Function of Instructor Race and Motivation***Table 3**

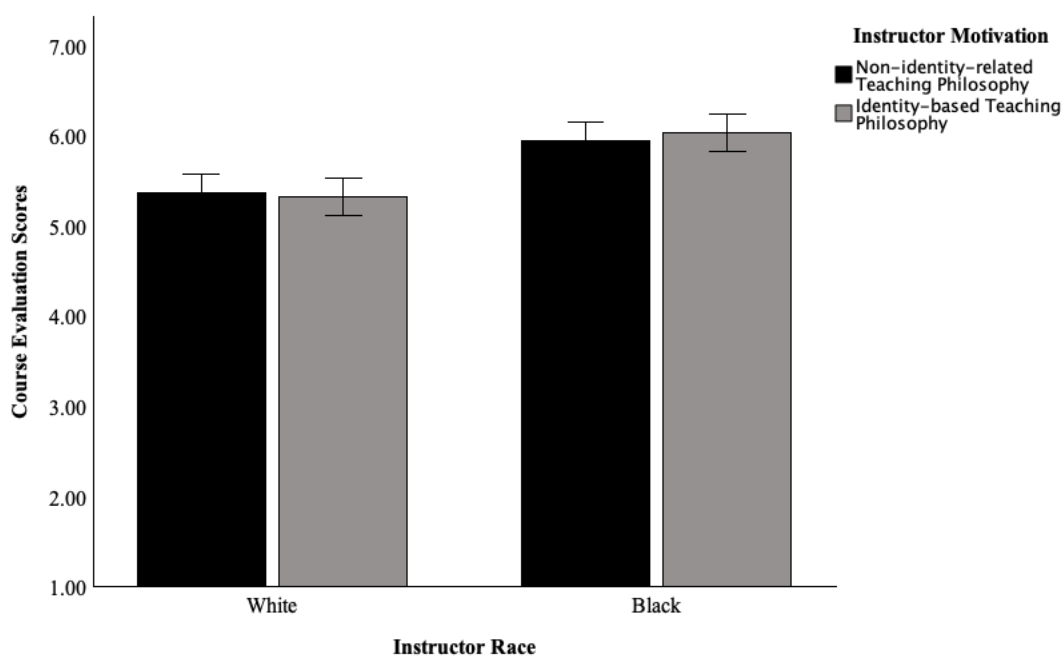
*Course Evaluation Scores as a Function of Instructor Race and Motivation*

|   | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | $\eta_p^2$ |
|---|-----------|----------|----------|------------|
| Instructor Race                         | 1         | 36.20    | .001***  | .159       |
| Instructor Motivation                   | 1         | .07      | .79      | .000       |
| Instructor Race x Instructor Motivation | 1         | .36      | .55      | .002       |
| Total                                   | 195       |          |          |            |

*Note.* \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Figure 3**

*Course Evaluation Scores as a Function of Instructor Race and Motivation*



**Table 4**

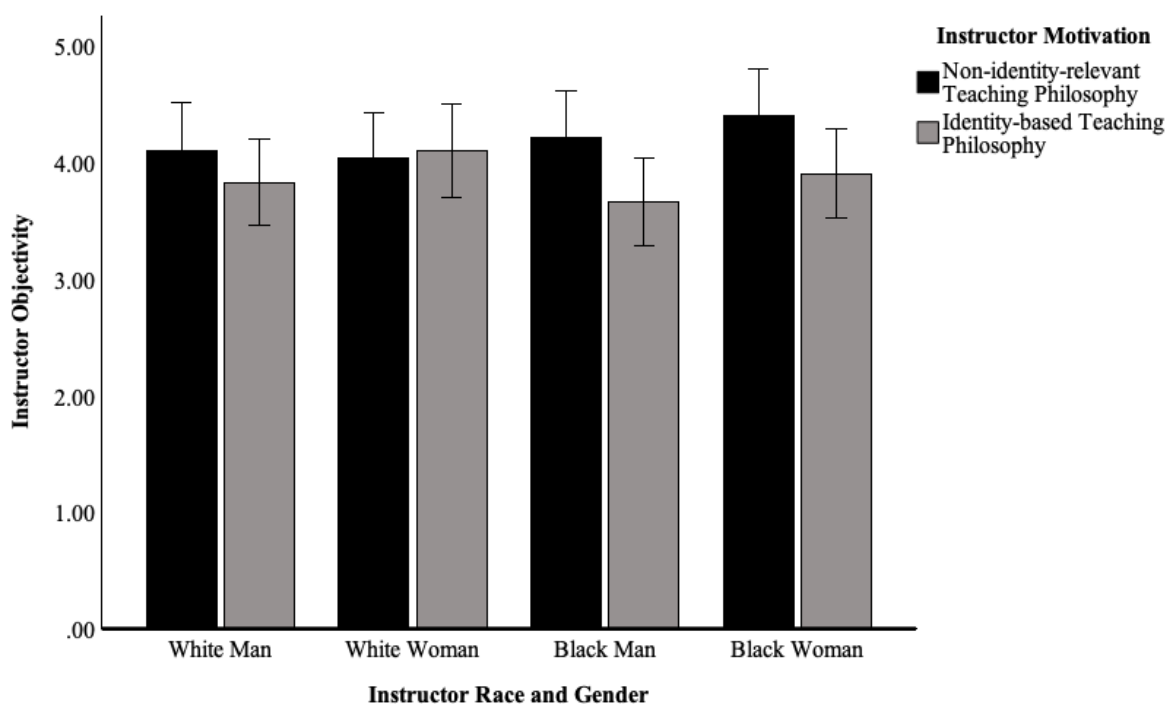
*Instructor Objectivity as a Function of Instructor Race, Gender, and Motivation*

|  | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | $\eta_p^2$ |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|------------|
| Instructor Race and Gender                         | 3         | .52      | .67      | .008       |
| Instructor Motivation                              | 1         | 5.19     | .02*     | .027       |
| Instructor Race and Gender x Instructor Motivation | 3         | .99      | .40      | .016       |
| Total  | 194       |          |          |            |

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ .

**Figure 4**

*Instructor Objectivity as a Function of Instructor Race, Gender, and Motivation*



**Table 5**

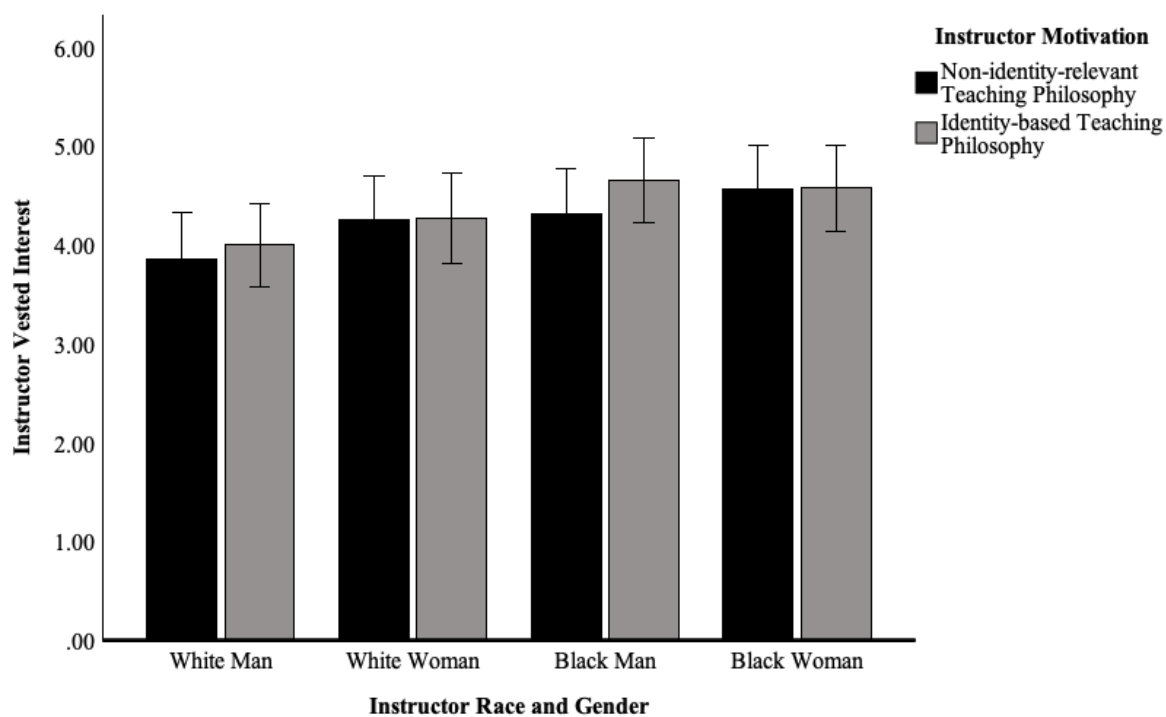
*Instructor Vested Interest as a Function of Instructor Race, Gender, and Motivation*

|  | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | $\eta_p^2$ |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|------------|
| Instructor Race and Gender                         | 3         | 3.19     | .03*     | .049       |
| Instructor Motivation                              | 1         | .65      | .42      | .003       |
| Instructor Race and Gender x Instructor Motivation | 3         | .23      | .88      | .004       |
| Total  | 195       |          |          |            |

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ .

**Figure 5**

*Instructor Vested Interest as a Function of Instructor Race, Gender, and Motivation*



**Table 6**

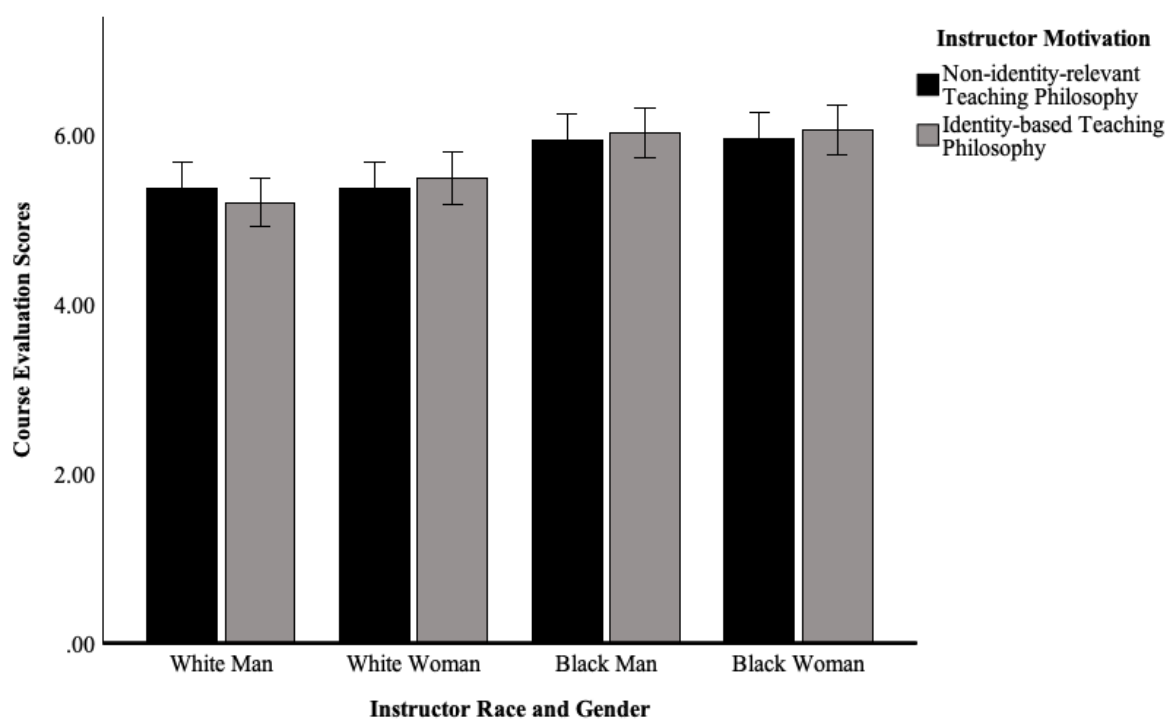
*Course Evaluations as a Function of Instructor Race, Gender, and Motivation*

|  | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | $\eta_p^2$ |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|------------|
| Instructor Race and Gender                         | 3         | 12.01    | .001***  | .162       |
| Instructor Motivation                              | 1         | .11      | .74      | .001       |
| Instructor Race and Gender x Instructor Motivation | 3         | .38      | .77      | .006       |
| Total  | 146       |          |          |            |

*Note.* \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Figure 6**

*Course Evaluations as a Function of Instructor Race, Gender, and Motivation*



**Table 7**

*Course Evaluation Open Responses Inductive Thematic Coding Analysis*

| Themes | Sub-themes | Prevalence | Representative Quotes |
|--------|------------|------------|-----------------------|
|--------|------------|------------|-----------------------|

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 Attitudes Towards the Course
 

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 Positive  
 Attitudes
 

---

|                               |       |   |
|-------------------------------|-------|---|
| Interest in taking the course | 10.8% | “I think to teach a course like this, you need to be an empathic individual to begin with, and in my opinion, those are the best types of teachers. I think I would really enjoy this class, especially as a civically-involved prospective psych major.” |
|-------------------------------|-------|---|

|                                  |       |  |
|----------------------------------|-------|--|
| Would feel comfortable in course | 11.8% | “I would feel comfortable in this class because the objectives in the class seem cover interesting topics and the teacher seems determined to engage and educate the students taking the class. I would feel confident knowing that the teacher is well educated on the topics as well.” |
|----------------------------------|-------|--|

 Negative  
 Attitudes
 

---

|                           |      |  |
|---------------------------|------|--|
| Would not take the course | 5.6% | “Given my own interests, I don't think I would be very interested in taking this class.” |
|---------------------------|------|--|

 Attitudes Towards the Professor
 

---

 Positive  
 Attitudes
 

---

|                        |       |  |
|------------------------|-------|--|
| Confident in Professor | 23.6% | “I would feel very confident in my professor's abilities. Although I cannot guarantee my professor will be unbiased, there is a component of good learning that stems from a professor's personal experiences that is highly necessary in my developmental benefit.” |
|------------------------|-------|--|

---

|  |       |   |
|--|-------|---|
| Confident in<br>Professors<br>Academic<br>Background | 12.8% | “I would be excited to be in their class as they seem very educated on the topic and their personal agenda would make it more of an interesting class.”   |
| <hr/>  |       |   |
| Negative<br>Attitudes                                |       |   |
| <hr/>  |       |   |
| Lack of<br>Confidence in<br>Professor                | 8.2%  | “I think the professor seems very knowledgeable and like they would be very professional, but the question then becomes whether a non-Black professor should be able to teach about the Black experience (a question I don't feel I can answer as a non-Black individual).” |

*Note.* Sample size is 195.

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