"Say it Loud, I'm Black and Proud:" The Effectiveness of Racial Acknowledgments at Work

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"SAY IT LOUD, I'M BLACK AND PROUD:" THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RACIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AT WORK

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ABSTRACT

Research underscores engagement in identity management strategies as an effective way to reduce workplace discrimination, particularly subtle forms of discrimination. The aim of the current study is to examine the use and effectiveness of different methods of the specific identity management strategy of acknowledging race as a way to reduce workplace discrimination and lead to other positive outcomes for Black individuals. A sample of Black and White individuals with professional work experience participated in an online vignette-based survey. Participants read four short vignettes involving race in the workplace and responded to a series of questions assessing usage of various acknowledgment strategies, affective outcomes, and perceptions of effectiveness. Results revealed that Black individuals reported acknowledging their race to a greater extent than did White individuals, and Black people reported positive benefits of affirming race and using humor to discuss their race. Finally, Black participants found racial acknowledgments to be more effective than White participants. Implications and future directions are discussed.

People with stigmatized identities may use identity management strategies to reduce and combat workplace discrimination (see Lyons et al., 2018; Singletary & Hebl, 2009). Goffman (1963) describes "stigma" as an attribute creating "undesired differentness" that is "discredited" (immediately evident) or "discreditable" (not immediately perceived) by society. Identity management strategies influence how others perceive this stigma and the stigma bearer. Such strategies involve various approaches such as calling attention to one's stigmatized identity, concealing one's stigmatized identity, or changing one's behavior when interacting with others. Although targets of workplace discrimination should not be held responsible as the sole or primary combatants of discrimination (Ruggs, Martinez, & Hebl, 2011), research shows that engaging in identity management strategies is an effective way to reduce workplace discrimination, particularly subtle forms of discrimination (Jones, Peddie, Gilrane, King, & Gray, 2016).

In the current study, we examine acknowledgment (i.e., openly addressing one's marginalized stigma characteristic) as an identity management strategy for racial minorities,

particularly Black people. Given the continued displays of discrimination against racial minorities in the U.S., it is clear that being Black in the U.S. still invokes a tremendous amount of negativity in certain contexts, including the workplace. Indeed, a recent meta-analysis examining hiring discrimination against racial minorities showed that although there appears to be some decline in hiring discrimination against Hispanic job applicants over the past 25 years, there has been no significant change in levels of hiring discrimination against Black job applicants during this time period (Quillian, Pager, Hexel, & Midtbøen, 2017). According to these meta-analytic findings, both Black and Hispanic job applicants experienced hiring discrimination over the past 25 years compared to White job applicants; however, the levels of discrimination are somewhat more

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severe for Black job applicants. Acknowledgment of race is a strategy that can be used by a person of any race; however, for this study we focus on the experiences and perceptions of Black people who acknowledge their race. We examine this racial minority group because Black–White interactions are most often examined in the literature, and it provides a good starting point for developing an understanding of acknowledgment applied to race. We believe that the perceived effectiveness of acknowledgment may vary by the race of the acknowledger; thus, we first want to establish its potential utility with a single target group before attempting to examine cross-race effects.

Our research explores the perceived effectiveness of acknowledgment strategies for visible stigmatized social identities. In particular, we examine the extent to which different methods of racial acknowledgment are effective at reducing negative consequences (e.g., discrimination) and increasing positive consequences (e.g., easing interactions and getting one's point across) in interview contexts. This is of value because much of the current literature on identity management focuses on invisible identities (Clair, Beatty, & Maclean, 2005; King, Mohr, Peddie, Jones, & Kendra, 2017; Lidderdale, Croteau, & Anderson, 2007; Lynch & Rodell, 2018; Sabat et al., 2019). This is inarguably important research, yet individuals with visible identities are faced with different challenges (e.g., increased perceptions of discrimination due to prior discrimination; Davidson & Friedman, 1998), which may influence how they navigate identity management. In the current study, we experimentally test different ways of acknowledging race. The findings can inform current and future research on identity management through its focus on extending the understanding of using racial acknowledgment and its perceived effectiveness by both ingroup (i.e., Black individuals) and outgroup (i.e., White individuals) members.

Acknowledgment

Acknowledgment can be effective at improving evaluations of individuals with stigmatized identities in interview settings (Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Johnson, Sitzmann, & Nguyen, 2014; Lyons et al., 2018). Past research has shown that interviewers (and perceivers of interactions) rate applicants with various stigmatized identities (e.g., people with disabilities, Hebl & Kleck, 2002; stutterers, Mills, Belgrave, & Boyer, 1984; obese individuals, Hebl & Kleck, 2002) who acknowledge versus those who do not acknowledge higher on measures of likeability, hireability, and other positive aspects. Additionally, research shows that acknowledgment can help direct attention away from a stigma characteristic (Madera & Hebl, 2012), counteract negative stereotypes, lead to more positive evaluations (Johnson et al., 2014; Lyons et al., 2018), and decrease displays of interpersonal forms of discrimination toward applicants with a stigma characteristic (Singletary & Hebl, 2009). Despite these doc-

umented benefits, acknowledgment is not a one-size-fits-all identity management strategy. Indeed, acknowledgment has been shown to vary in effectiveness based on stigma characteristics and types of acknowledgment. For instance, Hebl and Kleck (2002) found that acknowledgments were perceived to be more beneficial (by perceivers of an interview) when the applicant mentioned a stigma that was perceived as uncontrollable (e.g., physical disability) rather than one perceived as controllable (e.g., obesity) by the stigma bearer. Additionally, Lyons et al. (2018) found that the way in which one discusses a stigma characteristic can influence the effectiveness of the acknowledgment on improving perceptions of the stigma bearer.

In the current study, we examine the effectiveness of acknowledging race for people who are Black. Because race is an uncontrollable stigma characteristic, one might anticipate favorable reactions when Black individuals acknowledge their race in workplace settings. Indeed, a study examining racial acknowledgment via visual cues (i.e., hats labeled "Black and Proud" or "Black Student Association") showed decreases in interpersonal discrimination by White (but not Black) store personnel (Barron, Hebl, & King, 2011). However, another study examining racial acknowledgments made by Barack Obama during the 2008 presidential election found that participants who viewed a video in which Obama explicitly acknowledged his race reported more negative perceptions of him than participants who viewed a video in which he did not acknowledge race (Hagiwara, Wessel, & Ryan, 2012). Thus, although race is a stigma characteristic that is perceived as uncontrollable, the use of acknowledgment may not always function in the same fashion as it does for other visible, uncontrollable stigmas.

One factor that may influence the perceived effectiveness of racial acknowledgment is the way in which the acknowledgment is presented. People may discuss their race in different ways, and some ways may be perceived more positively than others. Indeed, Lyons et al. (2018) found that for job applicants with a visible disability, acknowledging one's disability by highlighting positive aspects of the identity, known as an affirming acknowledgment, was perceived as more effective than using a strategy intended to distance one's identity from the stigma characteristic, known as downplaying.

Following Lyons et al. (2018), we examine the effectiveness of acknowledging one's racial identity by both affirming and downplaying one's race. Additionally, we explore the use of humor as a racial acknowledgment strategy. Although research on the use of humor to manage one's identity at work is limited, research has shown that employee humor is related to positive workplace outcomes such as increased workgroup cohesion, health, and coping effectiveness (Mesmer-Magnus, Glew, & Viswesvaran, 2012). Further, a qualitative study examining the use of humor in

discussing race at work found that the majority of participants interviewed (10 of 12) reported using racial humor at work and that humor led to positive outcomes for cross-race relationships (Foxworth, 2008).

To set the stage for examining the effectiveness of racial acknowledgments, we first examine the extent to which such acknowledgments are used. We posit that Black people may be motivated to acknowledge their stigmatized identity in a workplace context, given (a) the existence of stereotypes that they are, compared to White people, occupationally less competent and capable (e.g., Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008); and (b) their greater likelihood of perceiving workplace discrimination (e.g., Avery, McKay, & Wilson, 2008). Thus, we expect:

Hypothesis 1: Black participants will report affirming race, downplaying race, and using humor as a way to acknowledge race more than White participants.

We believe that acknowledgment can lead to positive psychological outcomes for the person who engages in the behavior. Acknowledgment allows an individual to reaffirm their self-identity and how they are perceived by others. The use and psychological outcomes of acknowledgment for the target can be understood in part through the lens of self-verification theory (Swann, 1983), which states that people engage in behaviors that allow them to verify and confirm their self-concept to the self and others. That is, people may engage in identity management strategies that ensure that others perceive them in the way that they perceive themselves. Such strategies enable individuals to have smooth interactions and may include displaying identity cues that signal one's sense of self or engaging in interaction strategies that highlight portions of one's identity that an individual wants others to recognize and confirm (Swann, 1987).

Based on self-verification theory, we posit that Black employees will report positive emotions after engaging in racial acknowledgments. The use of racial acknowledgment allows one to signal to others how their racial identity is incorporated in their self-concept, and it allows them to solicit self-confirming feedback either explicitly or subtly (e.g., observing others' reactions) about this identity. As such, it should lead to positive affective outcomes. Additionally, this prediction is supported by previous literature on identity disclosure, which is a similar process to acknowledgment and involves verbally discussing a nonvisible stigma characteristic (see Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007). This research reveals positive benefits of disclosing a stigmatized identity. A recent review (Winkler, 2018) identifies a variety of contexts that can trigger an emotional response to identity management (e.g., mothers coming back to work, navigating professional and personal identities). The review examined felt emotions in a variety of contexts that may

be related to the various aspects of identity management. Results revealed that identity-threatening situations elicit both positive (e.g., excitement, enjoyment) and negative (e.g., self-doubt, insecurity, fear, confusion) emotions (Winkler, 2018). We draw upon this research and adopt a broad approach when examining felt emotions. Specifically, we measure diffuse affective mood states (e.g., positive, negative), and we explore three of the five discrete emotion categories identified by Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, and O'Connor (1987): joy, fear, and anger. We exclude sadness and love as a result of their lack of relevance to the racial acknowledgment context used in this study. We supplement the emotions we examine with one additional category: authenticity. Disclosure research has demonstrated that people are motivated to be authentic in their interactions for the purpose of upholding their sense of self (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1996) and fostering honest relationships with others (Creed & Scully, 2000). Similar to previous research, we group these emotions based upon their positive or negative valence. Thus, we expect:

Hypothesis 2: Black participants will report more positive (joy, authenticity) than negative (fear, anger) emotions after acknowledging race.

There are numerous reasons why people engage in identity management strategies. Some reasons include a desire to distance oneself from negative stereotypes associated with one's stigmatized identity (Kaiser & Miller, 2001), to prevent negative evaluations (e.g., Shelton, Richeson, & Salvatore, 2005), to experience higher job satisfaction and lower job anxiety (Griffith & Hebl, 2002), to uphold one's self-concept (Griffith & Hebl, 2002), to build closer relationships with colleagues and supervisors (Ragins, 2008), and to help others who are also stigmatized (Ragins, 2008).

Previous research has shown that acknowledgment of stigma characteristics that are perceived to be uncontrollable (e.g., disability) has been viewed more positively than no acknowledgment (Hebl & Kleck, 2002). However, other research has shown that acknowledging race can lead to negative consequences, particularly if those evaluating the individual who acknowledged are highly prejudiced (Hagiwara et al., 2012). This could be due to a choice between emphasizing identity differences between targets and perceivers (a multicultural perspective) rather than emphasizing similarities (a colorblind perspective; Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004). If a target chooses to acknowledge and draw attention to the difference, there may be instances in which this is rewarded. However, there may be other instances in which it is more strategic to not acknowledge a visible stigma. Despite potential negative outcomes, there may be times when individuals feel the need to acknowledge race due to the benefits to the self. We contend that acknowledging race may be more nuanced and contingent upon how

one acknowledges as opposed to simply acknowledging versus not acknowledging. Based on previous research, it seems that racial acknowledgment may be perceived less favorably than not bringing up the stigma (Hagiwara et al., 2012). However, in times when people do acknowledge, we believe that the way in which it is done will be important to how it is received. As stated previously, when acknowledgment is used, affirming appears to have more positive benefits than downplaying (Lyons et al., 2018). Employee humor also been shown to lead to positive workplace outcomes (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). Thus, we hypothesize:

> **Hypothesis 3:** No acknowledgment will be evaluated more positively than any acknowledgment of race (H3a). However, affirming race and use of humor will be evaluated more positively than downplaying (H3b).

Despite benefits of identity management strategies, the effectiveness of racial acknowledgment may depend upon the race of the perceiver. Indeed, prior research examining interracial interactions suggests a disconnect between perceptions held by Black people and White people regarding the same interaction. For instance, Dovidio, Kawakami, and Gaertner (2002) found a weak relation between White individuals' perceptions of their own racial biases and their Black interaction partners' perceptions of the White individuals' racial biases. The authors assert that this difference is attributable to the interaction partners' different perspectives, access to different information (e.g., verbal vs. nonverbal behaviors), and differential emphasis on these various pieces of information. Additional research has shown that White individuals exhibit greater anxiety than Black individuals during interracial discussions with Black and White partners (Trawalter & Richeson, 2008). Further, Trawalter and Richeson (2008) found that during interracial interactions, Black individuals were less anxious when discussing race-related topics than when discussing other topics.

Much of the current acknowledgment literature focuses on nonstigmatized individuals' perceptions of stigma acknowledgment (e.g., Hagiwara et al., 2012); however, research on disclosure of an invisible stigma has been shown to be related to positive outcomes for those with the stigmatized identity (e.g., Clair et al., 2005; Corrigan & Matthews, 2003; Legate, Ryan, & Weinstein, 2011; Lynch & Rodell, 2018; Ragins, 2008). Black individuals may be more likely to understand the need to engage in identity management strategies as a way to counteract the experiences of workplace discrimination that they frequently encounter. Additionally, they and members of other stigmatized groups are likely to have a greater sense of connection to the experience of managing their stigmatized identity than the individual who is acknowledging, even if they use

different strategies. As such, it is likely that those within the stigmatized group (e.g., Black people) perceive racial acknowledgment more positively than those without the stigmatized identity (e.g., White people). Therefore, we expect:

> **Hypothesis 4:** The perception of the effectiveness of racial acknowledgments will vary as a function of race with Black participants perceiving racial acknowledgments as more effective than their White counterparts.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 147 Black and White individuals with work experience were recruited via Amazon MTurk to participate in this study. Participants were employed an average of 8 years ($SD = 7.9$) in various industries including but not limited to accounting, retail, technology, and telecommunications. Forty-seven percent of the sample identified as Black, and 53% identified as White. Additionally, 52% identified as male, 48% identified as female, and the age of participants ranged from 20 to 68 years ($M = 34$, $SD = 9$).

Procedure

Participants completed a survey asking them to read four vignettes and then respond to questions. The vignettes were created by two of the authors for the purpose of this study. Each vignette was a brief description of a Black job applicant talking with a White interviewer. In each vignette, the interviewer told the applicant to "tell me about a quality or qualities that you possess that will be useful for this job." The applicant responded by using one of four responses (see Appendix A for all): (a) affirming their race (i.e., mentioning a sense of pride associated with being "a strong Black person"), (b) downplaying their race (i.e., discussing how they have overcome, despite historical disadvantages associated with being Black), (c) using humor to bring up their race (i.e., smilingly asserting "I'm Black," as if race were not a visible characteristic), or (d) not mentioning their race at all (i.e., not acknowledging). After reading each vignette, participants reported the extent to which they believed the acknowledgment strategy used would lead to various positive outcomes. To ensure that participants understood what each acknowledgment strategy entails, we provided a definition immediately following the vignette (see Appendix B for all definitions).[1] For example, in the downplaying condition, we stated, "To downplay one's race is to attempt to minimize the impact of race in a social context. It often involves demonstrating one's ability to perform well despite race." Next, participants reported the extent to which they have used each acknowledgment strategy and the emotions they felt when using each strategy and when hearing each strategy used by others. Participants also provided demographic information.

Measures

Strategy effectiveness. After reading each vignette, participants were asked about their perceptions of effectiveness of the strategy in terms of various outcomes. Specifically, participants were asked, "To what extent do you believe the applicant's response is a successful way to: (a) ease tension, (b) reduce discrimination, (c) make it easier to interact with the interviewer, (d) get a point across, (e) lead to positive outcomes in a workplace context (i.e., getting the job), and (f) serve as an icebreaker?" Ratings were made on a 1–5 scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *a great deal*. For each strategy, most of the outcomes were significantly correlated to each other, and exploratory factor analyses showed that all items loaded onto a single factor for each strategy. Therefore, a single effectiveness variable was created for each strategy (affirming effectiveness, α = .86; using humor effectiveness, α = .89; downplaying effectiveness α = .91; not acknowledging effectiveness; α = .86).

Use of strategy and emotional response. After reading each vignette, participants were asked, "Have you ever used [each strategy]?" and responded either "yes" or "no." If participants responded "yes," they were asked to rate the extent to which they felt 12 emotions using a 5-point Likert-type rating scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*). Nine items were selected from the Shaver et al. (1989) emotion prototype measure. These items represented three emotion prototypes Shaver et al. (1989) identified: joy (three items: relief, satisfaction, and pride), fear (three items: nervousness, uneasiness, and anxiety), and anger (three items: anger, irritation, and frustration, α = .90-.95). Three additional emotions were examined, representing authenticity: authentic, empowered, and offended. Exploratory factor analyses showed that across the four strategies, items consistently loaded on two factors as opposed to four. Specifically, the joy items along with "authentic" and "empowered" loaded on one factor, and the fear items, anger items, and "offended" loaded on a second factor. As such, emotions were collapsed into positive and negative emotions for each acknowledgment strategy. Reliabilities for each composite variable were as follows: affirming positive, α = .79, negative, α = .95; using humor positive, α = .89, negative, α = .96; downplaying positive, α = .86, negative, α = .94; not acknowledging positive, α = .94, negative, α = .94.

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1   To ensure that participants perceived the vignettes as an example of the intended acknowledgment strategy based on the definitions provided, we asked participants to rate the extent to which the applicant's response in the vignette was a type of acknowledgment that corresponded with the specific strategy. Responses ranged from 1= *not at all*, 3 = *somewhat*, to 5 = *very much* for humor, downplaying, and no acknowledgment, and 1 = *not at all*, 4 = *somewhat*, 7 = *very much* for affirming. The response for each strategy was above the mean. These results suggest that participants viewed the vignettes as an example of the intended strategy.

RESULTS

In Hypothesis 1, we predicted that Black participants would report greater incidents of using racial acknowledgment in the workplace than would White individuals. Results of a logistic regression showed significant racial differences in affirming, $B = 1.60$, $p < .001$, odds ratio (OR) = 4.97 (OR CI = 2.46, 10.06) and using humor, $B = .76$, $p = .03$, OR = 2.14 (OR CI = 1.09, 4.21) with more Black participants than White participants reporting the use of both strategies. Specifically, there was an 83% probability that Black participants were more likely to indicate having affirmed race than White participants and a 68% probability that Black participants were more likely than their White counterparts to report acknowledging race through humor. The frequency of use of each strategy reported by Black and White participants is reported in Table 1. No significant racial differences were seen in downplaying, $B = .37$, $p = .41$, OR = 1.44 (OR CI = .60, 3.48) or not acknowledging race, $B = .62$, $p = .07$, OR = 1.86 (OR CI = .96, 3.62). Although no racial differences were seen for downplaying or not acknowledging race, an examination of frequencies shown in Table 1 shows that relatively few Black and White participants reported the use of downplaying (19.4% Black, 14.3% White); whereas, a much larger portion of participants from both races reported not acknowledging their race (62.3% Black, 48.1% White). Overall, results provide partial support for H1.

To test Hypothesis 2, we examined whether Black participants reported feeling more positive or negative emotions when using each acknowledgment strategy. Given the low frequency of reported downplaying (only 13 Black participants reported using this strategy), this strategy was not included in analyses. Results from paired samples *t*-tests (Bonferroni adjusted) showed that Black participants reported significantly more positive emotions than negative emotions when affirming, $t(49) = 5.18$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = .94$, using humor, $t(35) = 3.07$, $p = .004$, Cohen's $d = .47$ and not acknowledging, $t(43) = 2.34$, $p = .02$, Cohen's $d = .28$ (see Figure 1). Overall, H2 was supported.

To examine Hypotheses 3 and 4, we conducted a 2 (Black, White) x 4 (affirming, using humor, downplaying, not acknowledging) ANOVA with strategy as a within-subjects variable and race as a between-subjects variable. Results showed a significant main effect of strategy, Wilk's λ = .78, $F(3, 143) = 13.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .22$. Planned contrasts showed that not acknowledging ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .95$) was perceived as significantly more effective than each of the acknowledgment strategies (affirming: $M = 2.88$, $SD = .93$, $F(1, 145) = 9.61$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$; using humor: $M = 2.83$, $SD = .99$, $F(1, 145) = 9.78$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$; downplaying: $M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.03$, $F(1, 145) = 32.87$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$). Additionally, a planned contrast comparing affirming

to other strategies showed that affirming was perceived as significantly more effective than downplaying, $F(1, 145) = 16.72$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, but no differences were seen in the effectiveness of affirming versus using humor, $F(1, 145) = .006$, ns. Finally, a contrast showed that using humor was perceived as significantly more effective than downplaying, $F(1, 145) = 16.87$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$. Mean differences are displayed in Figure 2. Based on these results, H3 was supported.

We examined the interaction of strategy and race to test Hypothesis 4. Findings showed no significant race × strategy interaction, Wilk's $\lambda = .98$, $F(3, 143) = 1.19$, ns. However, a significant main effect of race was seen, $F(1, 145) = 4.74$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, such that Black participants ($M = 2.98$, $SE = .09$) provided higher overall ratings of effective-

ness across strategies than White participants ($M = 2.71$, $SE = .08$). These results suggest that overall Black participants perceived acknowledgment strategies as more effective than White participants; however, Black participants and White participants did not differ in how they rated these strategies relative to each other. The means and standard deviations for the perceived effectiveness of each strategy broken down by race are presented in Table 1. Overall, partial support for H4 was seen.

DISCUSSION

Though anecdotal evidence suggests that individuals belonging to racial and/or ethnic minority groups report acknowledging their race in the workplace, there is a paucity

TABLE 1.
Means and Standard Deviations for Perceived Effectiveness of Strategy and Frequency of Strategy Use by Race

	Black			White		
	Mean	SD	% reported use	Mean	SD	% reported use
Affirming	3.04	.96	72.5%	2.62	.85	34.6%
Humor	2.96	1.05	50.7%	2.71	.93	32.5%
Downplaying	2.73	1.11	19.4%	2.40	.93	14.3%
Not acknowledging	3.17	.95	62.3%	3.12	.96	48.1%

Note. % Reported Use = the frequency of participants in each race who have reported ever using each strategy to acknowledge race.

FIGURE 1.
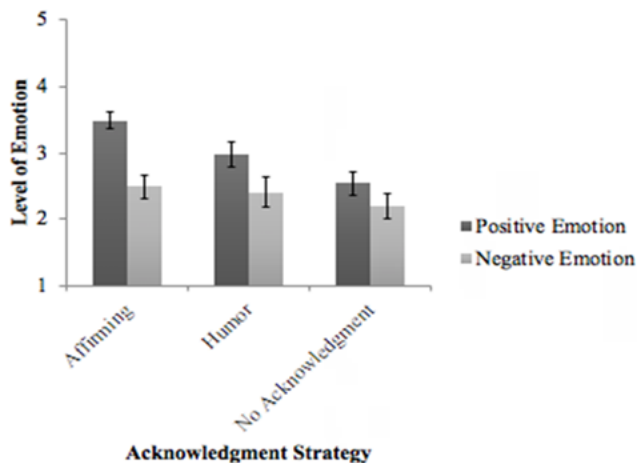Black participants' emotions when engaging in various acknowledgment strategies.
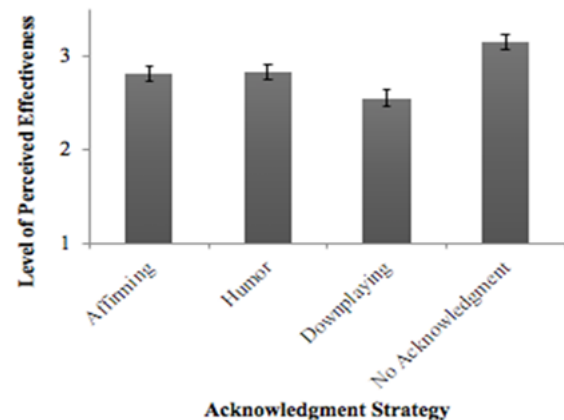

FIGURE 2.
Perceived effectiveness of racial acknowledgments (*note, the scale for perceived effectiveness ranged from 1-5).

of research that explicitly examines racial acknowledgments. Thus, there is little empirical evidence that examines the relative efficacy of racial acknowledgment strategies in organizational contexts. Moreover, little is known about why individuals choose to acknowledge their race at work. The current study extends previous research on acknowledgments by examining the use and resulting perceptions of racial acknowledgments.

Overall, the study reveals both similarities and differences in the use of racial acknowledgments as a function of race. Specifically, Black individuals reported greater use of both racial affirmations and humor to acknowledge race in a workplace context. However, Black and White participants reported similar use of the other acknowledgment strategies: downplaying and not acknowledging. It is worth noting that very few Black and White participants (in both demographic groups, less than 20% of respondents) reported the use of downplaying as an acknowledgment strategy. Conversely, a majority of participants (both Black and White) reported that they did not acknowledge their race in at least some instances. In line with previous research (King et al., 2017), our results show within-person variations with the use of revealing (e.g., acknowledgment) versus concealing (e.g., no acknowledgment) identity management strategies. That is, in this study, there were individuals who indicated that they used multiple forms of acknowledgment, and even that they avoided discussing their race (i.e., not acknowledging) in workplace contexts. Though not explicitly examined in this study, we believe that this occurrence may be related to situational and/or contextual variables, which have an influence on the extent to which individuals are likely to use various impression management strategies. Future research should explore the boundary conditions, including context, under which various racial acknowledgment strategies are enacted and perceived to be effective.

As expected, our findings also suggest that Black participants experienced more positive than negative emotions when acknowledging their race. Specifically, Black participants reported positive emotions when affirming, using humor, and even during instances in which they did not acknowledge their race in workplace settings. These findings suggest that Black individuals receive some benefits from acknowledging; however, acknowledgment is complex. Not acknowledging also led to more positive emotions, which may signal a sense of relief when people feel that they are in situations in which they do not have to actively manage their stigmatized identity. The positive emotions expressed when not acknowledging may be a sign that people feel comfortable in the interaction. From a self-verification perspective, it is likely that people do not acknowledge race in situations in which they feel that other people's perceptions about how their race influences their identity already aligns with their own sense of self. Likewise, individuals may elect to employ a different identity management strategy in

order to ensure favorable interactions with other people. Finally, Black participants perceived racial acknowledgment overall as more effective than their White counterparts. It is important to note that there was no race × strategy interaction with respect to the overall effectiveness of racial acknowledgments; however, on the whole people within the target group perceived the use of acknowledgment as more effective than those outside of the target group. This may be because Black participants identified with two of the strategies more, as they reported greater use of affirming and humor than White participants.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study provides a first step toward understanding the effectiveness of racial acknowledgments in workplace contexts. Additional research is needed, however, in order to gain a more complete understanding of the use and overall utility of racial acknowledgments in organizational settings. For instance, our data examine individuals' perceptions regarding the extent to which they perceived the various racial acknowledgment strategies as effective. Our data do not show, however, whether or not the strategy is effective from the perspective of the individual who is interacting with the person who acknowledged. As a way to explore this question and increase the fidelity of the situation in an experimental context, future research may involve actual interactions during which individuals use various racial acknowledgments and afterwards examine the perceptions of both targets and perceivers. Relatedly, in the current study, we relied upon retrospective reporting of emotions. There is evidence that supports the notion that long-term retrieval of emotional events can be accurate (Heuer & Reisberg, 1990; LaBar & Cabeza, 2006), and other research has used a similar retrospective approach to this (e.g., Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001); however, future research may examine immediate reactions to the use of acknowledgment by the target.

In addition, future research should also examine whether there are more (or less) appropriate methods for acknowledging race at work. Specifically, future research should examine different variations of the strategies explored in the current research in addition to those not explored in the current research. Moreover, future research should examine the utility of acknowledging race for individuals from different races, as the perception of this identity management strategy may vary by race. An examination of cultural differences may shed light on how the use of this strategy and perceptions of its effectiveness vary by race. For instance, individuals from cultures that support speaking up (e.g., individualistic) may be more likely to engage in acknowledgment than those who are from cultures in which greater value is placed on deference and modesty (e.g., collectivist). Additionally, differences in the nature of cultural stereotypes may influence how acknowledgments are perceived by

others. Finally, one aspect of our study that may be considered a limitation is the small effect sizes for some results; however, research has shown that "small" effect sizes have the potential to produce profound real-world consequences because of their cumulative impact (e.g., by affecting many individuals at once or one person continually; e.g., Eagly, 1995; Greenwald, Banaji, & Nosek, 2015; Martell, Lane, & Emrich, 1996). Additionally, the information we asked of participants is quite nuanced. Thus, small effect sizes are reasonable considering the types of slight differences in behavior we attempted to detect.

Conclusion

The current study examined the use and perceived effectiveness of racial acknowledgment as an identity management strategy in the workplace. Although the onus of reducing discrimination and easing racial tension should not be placed on individual employees alone (Ruggs et al., 2011), these findings suggest that the use of racial acknowledgment may be an effective identity management strategy for Black employees in some situations. Racial acknowledgment may provide individuals with a greater sense that others are perceiving them in ways that are consistent with how they want to be perceived. Our findings show that Black participants reported acknowledging their race to a greater extent than did White participants, and Black participants reported positive emotional benefits of affirming race and using humor to discuss their race. Responses from both Black and White participants, however, also suggest that the decision to acknowledge race may be strategic, as a high percentage of participants noted not acknowledging race at times and greater effectiveness of not acknowledging over any acknowledgment strategy in the interview setting. Given that people are using acknowledgment as an identity management strategy related to race, future research should continue to examine the effectiveness of racial acknowledgment in creating a more positive workplace climate for all employees.

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Appendix A

Affirming Vignette

Imagine observing the following: A job applicant walks in for an interview. The applicant is Black and the interviewer is White. The interviewer tells the applicant, "Tell me about a quality or qualities that you possess that will be useful for this job." The applicant responds, "My family instilled a strong sense of pride in making good ethical decisions and the value of my culture and heritage. I believe that this exposure has helped me to develop into the strong Black person I am today, ready to challenge and lead others to success." They continued the interview for another 20 minutes. At the conclusion of the interview, the interviewer promised the applicant a response within 1 week.

Downplaying Vignette

Imagine observing the following: A job applicant walks in for an interview. The applicant is Black and the interviewer is White. The interviewer tells the applicant, "Tell me about a quality or qualities that you possess that will be useful for this job." The applicant responds "Although my heritage has deep historical roots that have led many Blacks to be disadvantaged; I have been able to overcome challenges and accomplish my goals." They continued the interview for another 20 minutes. At the conclusion of the interview, the interviewer promised the applicant a response within 1 week.

Using Humor Vignette

Imagine observing the following: A job applicant walks in for an interview. The applicant is Black and the interviewer is White. The interviewer tells the applicant, "Tell me about a quality or qualities that you possess that will be useful for this job." The applicant responds "Well, this may shock you as much as it shocked me to learn this, I'm Black." The applicant then smiles and says "I get along well with people, and I can adapt well to any situation." They continued the interview for another 20 minutes. At the conclusion of the interview, the interviewer promised the applicant a response within 1 week.

Not Acknowledging Vignette

Imagine observing the following: A job applicant walks in for an interview. The applicant is Black and the interviewer is White. The interviewer tells the applicant, "Tell me about a quality or qualities that you possess that will be useful for this job." The applicant responds "I am a highly motivated individual, and I work well independently and in groups." They continued the interview for another 20 minutes. At the conclusion of the interview, the interviewer promised the applicant a response within 1 week.

Appendix B

Below are the definitions of each acknowledgment strategy that were provided to participants.

Affirming: Affirming one's race refers to discussing one's race with pride or accentuating positive aspects of one's race.

Downplaying: To downplay one's race is to attempt to minimize the impact of race in a social context. It often involves demonstrating one's ability to perform well despite race.

Humor: A comical approach to acknowledging one's race involves discussing one's race using humor.

Not acknowledging: Avoiding one's race involves not discussing one's race or avoiding discussions of race.