
Dissertation

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Abstract

Instances of everyday discrimination are a significant stressor in the lives of ethnic minorities. Support from family and friends helps individuals cope with the emotional hurt caused by everyday discrimination experiences. This dissertation investigated the effectiveness of emotional support and social identity affirmation support in coping with everyday racial discrimination. In a pre-study 24 participated in an online open-ended questionnaire about their experiences with everyday discrimination and relevant support messages. Guided by prior literature, and employing grounded theory procedures three types of discrimination scenarios emerged from recalled discrimination incidents: avoidance, derogation, and categorization. Analysis of helpful recalled messages led to six categories: validating feelings, externalizing the cause of the problem, finding solutions, sharing similar experiences, reaffirming self-worth, and eliciting empathy and expanding perspectives. Analysis of the unhelpful messages clustered around a single thematic category: delegitimization of individual’s perspectives and emotions. The findings of the pre-study were used in the construction of role-play discrimination scenarios and support messages used in Study1.

In Study 1, 785 adults participated in an online message perception study testing the effectiveness of two theoretically relevant message dimensions: person-centeredness and social-identity affirmation. Findings of this study indicated that across message
types, participants perceived high quality messages as being more effective generally, more effective in achieving multiple goals, and in facilitating emotional improvement and collective esteem enhancement. Also, for person-centered messages reappraisal and empathy mediated the influence of message quality on message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement and affect change. While in the case of social identity affirmation messages, reattribution mediated the influence of message quality on message evaluation. Finally, source ethnicity and participants’ reported number of inter-ethnic friends emerged as significant moderators. The theoretical and practical implications of the study are discussed.
Dedicated to my parents Neela and Shashikant
First, I would like to thank my parents for always encouraging me to follow my dreams and being supportive of all my decisions. I’d also like to thank my husband Rohit, who has been my biggest supporter in this journey. Words cannot describe how thankful I am for his presence in my life. I am also thankful to all my teachers who instilled a love for education in me. A special word of thanks for professor Ruchi Kher Jaggi, who taught me to believe in my abilities.

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Publications

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Racial discrimination continues to be an everyday reality for many people in the United States. Apart from overt and criminal manifestations, subtle racial discrimination can also occur in everyday interpersonal interactions. Studies document that incidents of subtle racial discrimination occur every day in the lives of many African Americans, Asian Americans, American Indians, as well as Hispanics and Latinos (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003). Books, blogs, and podcasts continue to document the experience of everyday racial discrimination (e.g., Rankine, 2014; Thurston, Cepeda, & Colby, 2015). These everyday incidents of discrimination can have significant negative consequences on the overall well-being of those who experience discrimination (Chakraborty & McKenzie, 2002; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Therefore, it is important to study how individuals cope with everyday experiences of racial discrimination.

Social support from friends and family members has been identified as an effective way to cope with everyday racial discrimination. Public health researchers have noted that seeking social support can reduce the stress induced by discrimination and help to maintain a positive overall well-being (Clark, 2003; Clark & Gochett, 2006; Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Noh & Kaspar, 2003; Sanders Thompson, 2006). However, existing studies of support and racial discrimination typically conceptualize and operationalize social
support in terms of its presence or absence alone (e.g., Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Noh & Kaspar, 2003; Sanders Thompson, 2006). What constitutes effective or good social support for targets of everyday racial discrimination remains unclear.

The aim of the dissertation is to conceptualize and test a framework of theoretically relevant support messages for coping with everyday racial discrimination. In proposing such a framework two initial tasks are identified: conceptualizing everyday discrimination as a communication activity, and identifying theoretically relevant message features of effective support in this context.

Conceptualizations of everyday racial discrimination are varied and lack a consistent theoretical structure. For example Essed’s (1990, 1991) findings on everyday discrimination, or Van Dijk’s (1987, 1993) research on prejudice in everyday discourse, provide insight into how racial prejudice is manifested in social interaction. While these descriptions are perceptive, they do not provide a consistent typology that could be applied to understand the distinct communicative functions of discriminatory behaviors. On the other hand, typologies such as the one provided by Sue and colleagues (Sue et al., 2008) present a relatively static conceptualization of everyday discrimination. Sue’s conceptualization does not identify how or why certain actions could be interpreted as being discriminatory. Therefore this dissertation proposes a communication-focused conceptualization of everyday discrimination. Prior literature is synthesized and a typology of discrimination events is proposed: avoidance, derogation, and
categorization. The typology explicates the core communicative functions of everyday discriminatory incidents and the socio-cultural context in which discriminatory acts are interpreted.

Secondly, social support has been largely studied in terms of the number of people in a person’s social network, and the frequency with which they engage in supportive behaviors such as listening, caring, providing advice, etc. (for a review see Pascoe & Smart Richards, 2009). None of the studies to date have explicated what constitutes effective social support for dealing with everyday racial discrimination. Therefore, a communication-focused framework is proposed. In this framework communication is conceptualized as “a complex, situated social process in which people who have established a communicative relationship exchange messages in an effort to generate shared meanings and accomplish social goals” (Burleson, 2010, p.151). Therefore, communication is not seen as a linear message transmission process but is a complex activity involving message production, message processing, interaction coordination and social perception (Delia & Grossberg, 1977; Delia, O’Keefe, & O’Keefe, 1982). A functional perspective of communication also outlines the various goals that are accomplished through communication: instrumental goals, relational goals, and identity goals (Clark & Delia, 1979).

Supportive communication has been studied as a form of communication designed to provide and seek help in various interaction contexts (MacGeorge, Feng, &
Burleson, 2011). Communication scholars have concerned themselves with the study of enacted support or support messages, that focuses on identifying effective message features in a given interpersonal interaction context (Goldsmith, 2006). Studies of support have investigated the effectiveness of emotional support (Burleson, 2003, 2008), esteem support (Holmstrom & Burleson, 2011), and informational support (e.g., Feng & MacGeorge, 2010) in various interpersonal contexts. The perceived availability of emotional and informational support has been examined in some studies of racial discrimination (e.g., Arjouch, Reisine, Lim, Sohn, & Ismail, 2010). However, no studies have investigated actual support messages in the context of everyday racial discrimination. Therefore, a supportive communication perspective can help identify and test features of effective support messages in the context of everyday racial discrimination.

Researchers have documented that experiences of everyday discrimination are associated with psychological stress as well as emotional hurt (Lowe et al., 2012; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Sanders Thompson, 2006; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008). Therefore, emotional support is recognized as a theoretically relevant feature in the study of racial discrimination. Being the most extensively validated message feature for delivering sophisticated emotional support, person-centeredness is identified as the first relevant message feature. Additionally research in social psychology suggests that experiences of everyday discrimination might negatively influence an individual’s
collective self-esteem more so than their individual self-esteem (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Crocker & Major, 1989; Quinn & Crocker, 1999). A new dimension of support messages is proposed to address the social identity threats posed by experiences of racial discrimination: social identity affirmation.

This dissertation tests the claim that sophisticated support messages that are scaled along the two message dimension can facilitate effective coping in the context of everyday racial discrimination. This study will focus on the everyday discrimination experiences of African Americans and Asian Americans. A major critique of the existing studies of racial or ethnic prejudice is that they tend to be confined to the Black-White paradigm of race (Perea, 2000). Prior literature posits that racial and ethnic groups differ in the way they interpret and cope with problematic situations (Burleson & Mortenson, 2003; Constantine, Wilton, & Caldwell, 2003). The current investigation responds to this critique by focusing on experiences of two ethnic groups.

Overall, this dissertation forwards a supportive communication framework for the study of effective support in the context of everyday racial discrimination. In this framework, everyday discrimination experiences are conceptualized as speech-events that signify avoidance, derogation, and categorization of individuals who belong to ethnic minority groups. Reviewing the psychological and emotional consequences of everyday discrimination, supportive communication is identified as a useful but understudied process relevant for coping with everyday racial discrimination. Adapting a message-
centered approach (Burleson, 2010) to the study of supportive communication, two theoretically relevant message dimensions in the context of discrimination are identified: 

*person-centeredness*, and *social identity affirmation*. Effectiveness of messages scaled along the two dimensions were tested for general effectiveness as well as effectiveness in accomplishing instrumental, relational, identity and face goals (Clark & Delia, 1979; Goldsmith, 2000). The theoretical framework also proposed and tested the role of three mediators (*reappraisal, empathy, reattribution*) and three moderators (*source ethnicity, number of inter-ethnic friendships, and scenario severity*).

**Chapter Organization**

In addition to the introduction chapter, this dissertation includes six chapters. Chapter two reviews and synthesizes four lines of research on the theoretical conceptualizations of everyday racial discrimination. Everyday discrimination is conceptualized as discriminatory speech acts with three core communicative functions: *avoidance, derogation*, and *categorization*. This conceptualization is followed by a literature review that summarizes the appraisal and consequences of everyday racial discrimination.

Chapter three provides an overview of existing research on racial discrimination and social support and identifies key shortcomings. This is followed by a section on conceptualization of communication. A review of supportive communication and the message perception paradigm culminates in the proposal of a supportive communication
framework for studying support messages for dealing with everyday racial discrimination. The framework identifies two theoretically relevant support message dimensions: person-centeredness and social identity affirmation. Hypotheses and research questions are proposed about the two message dimensions and three other factors that can influence the evaluation of support messages: ethnicity of support provider, number of inter-ethnic friendships, and perceived severity of discrimination incident.

Chapter four begins with a report on the finding of the pre-study. This is followed by a description of the research method employed in the main study. The method section describes the characteristics of the participants, design of the study, development of stimuli (scenarios and messages), and the instruments used.

Chapter five describes results of the statistical analyses performed for testing the proposed hypotheses and research questions.

Chapter six constitutes the discussion section that summarizes the findings of the current study and the implications of these findings. The discussion chapter ends by outlining the strengths and limitations of the current study and direction for future research.
Chapter 2: Everyday Racial Discrimination and its Consequences

The aim of this chapter is two-fold: to conceptualize what constitutes everyday racial discrimination, and to explicate how individuals experience and appraise everyday racial discrimination. The first part of the chapter reviews four existing conceptions of everyday discrimination, and forwards a communication-focused conceptualization of everyday racial discrimination. A typology of everyday racial discrimination incidents is proposed that includes three types of incidents: avoidance, derogation, and categorization. The second part of this chapter then explicates the primary and secondary appraisal of everyday racial discrimination and the factors that influence these appraisal processes. The chapter concludes by summarizing the emotional, psychological, and physical consequences of experiencing everyday racial discrimination.

Literature Review: Everyday Racial Discrimination

Black slavery in North America started in the seventeenth century, which became the basis for racism (Jordan, 1968). The American constitution sustained slavery from 1787 to 1865 (Wilson, 1996). However, since its conception, the American Constitution has undergone several amendments that abolished slavery, abolished racial segregation, and provided increased protection of individual liberties. The Bill of Rights, which comprises the first ten amendments, was written to afford greater constitutional
protection for individual liberties (Levy, 1986). However, it was the reconstruction amendments that focused on abolishing slavery and racial discrimination. The reconstruction amendments include the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and the Fifteenth Amendments. The Thirteenth Amendment prohibited slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed equal rights, privileges and immunities for all, and the Fifteenth Amendment prohibited the use of racial criteria for limiting the right to vote (Richards, 1993). However, these amendments were followed by the “Jim Crow” era, which refers to the time period between 1877 and 1965, in which segregation based on race, gender, religion, and class was legalized (Tischauser, 2012). The 1954 ruling by the Supreme Court in the Brown v. Board case recognized that segregation amounted to inequality and hence desegregated public schools (Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004). This ruling provided an impetus to the civil rights movement that eventuated, in part, in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, gender, or national origin (Levy, 1998). In sum, the American society has been concerned with the elimination of racism and continues to strive for equality.

However, despite these efforts, strained race relations have continued to be a concern in the United States (Pettigrew, 2008). While overt expressions of racism are illegal, a substantial amount of research documents that racial prejudice continues to exist in subtle or covert forms (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Pettigrew, 2008). In addition to the historically discriminated racial groups, immigrant groups such as individuals of Asian
and Latin American origin also experience subtle forms of prejudice (Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001). The history of Asian American communities in the United States has documented several instances of prejudice and discrimination. The model minority status afforded to Asian Americans is often accompanied by prejudiced views that cast Asians as hostile and unfriendly (Kitano & Daniels, 1995). The history of Asian immigration documents strong prejudiced sentiments as well as brutal manifestations of these biases in the form of physical violence. Many Asian Americans continue to experience discrimination in their everyday life (Lee & Mac, 2008).

Existing research has dealt with the study of blatant and subtle forms of racial discrimination. Physical assault and hate crimes are examples of overt racism. Subtle forms of racism are verbal or non-verbal communication forms that express disrespect, hostility, and rejection towards minority racial or ethnic groups. Four bodies of research have specifically dealt with discrimination incidents that are subtle and that occur frequently. These are reviewed next.

A first line of research, conducted by sociologists Feagin and Eckberg (1980), has produced a typology of discrimination that is based on two features: the extent to which discriminatory behavior is embedded in the larger social context and the motivations behind discriminatory behavior. Feagin and Eckberg synthesized quantitative and qualitative research on discrimination experiences and conceptualized four types of discrimination: isolate discrimination, small group discrimination, direct institutionalized
discrimination, and indirect institutionalized discrimination. Isolate discrimination is “an intentionally harmful action by a dominant group against members of a subordinate group when the action is not embedded in a large-scale institutional or organizational setting” (Feagin et al., 1980, p.11). Feagin (1991) identified five types of isolate discrimination experienced by Black middle-class adults in public spaces: avoidance, rejection, verbal harassment, physical assault, and police mistreatment. Avoidance includes actions intended to increase physical distance and or limit eye contact. Rejection involves disrespectful or poor service in public accommodations such as restaurants or stores. Verbal harassment includes the use of racial epithets and vulgar language intended to disrespect or demean a person. Physical assault includes actions intended to cause physical harm or injury. Police mistreatment includes discriminatory behaviors intended to intimidate or allege legal culpability of individuals based on their race.

Overall Feagin and his colleagues (Feagin, 1991; Feagin & Eckberg, 1980) have argued that micro-level or individual level discrimination is independent from macro-level or institutional level discrimination. By contrast, Essed (1991) has argued that everyday racism is the linkage between institutional (macro) and individual (micro) level racism. Essed (1991) defined everyday racism as a process in which racial biases are deeply integrated into everyday practices in ways that are socially recognized and repeated. Through in-depth interviews with 55 Black women from the Netherlands and the United States, Essed (1991) discovered that personal accounts of racism includes
shared knowledge structures about how racism is manifested in everyday situations. These accounts revealed the repeated patterns or scripts he called *scenarios of racism* and led Essed to derive five elements that constituted a Black woman’s representation of everyday racism: the context including the setting and participants involved in the incident; the occurrence of racist actions; evaluation of these actions as racist based on commonly shared knowledge about racism; argumentation to support that the act constitutes racism, and the response to the incident. Essed’s work recognizes that people seem to have a shared understanding about how racial discrimination occurs in everyday interactions.

While Essed’s work focused on the target’s accounts of everyday discrimination, Van Dijk’s work has focused on acts of everyday discrimination from the perspective of the perpetrators. According to Van Dijk (1993), racism involves the enactment of negative opinions, attitudes, and ideologies through the seemingly subtle acts of discrimination against minorities. These social cognitions, acts, processes, structures, or institutions directly or indirectly contribute to the dominance of the white group and the subordinate position of minorities. Van Dijk’s research (1987, 1993) has focused on analyzing the discourse that communicates and perpetuates racism, and proposes that reproduction is the process in which social members contribute to the “perpetuation of a social structure or cultural norms and values” (1993, p.26). Van Dijk (1993) further contends that the social system of racism is sustained because ethnic prejudice is
reproduced in two specific ways that connect the micro and macro levels of racism. First, dominant group members share ethnic prejudices and engage in everyday discriminatory discourse practices, which collectively create a macro level system of racial discrimination. Second, members of the dominant group continue to learn and repeat discriminatory practices that they acquire through their knowledge about the macro level system of racism. Van Dijk’s discourse analysis was carried out in Amsterdam, Netherlands and Southern California, and used interview data and media representations to find that dominant elite groups (comprised of politicians, academicians, national leaders and media producers) provided prejudiced perspectives about ethnic minorities that were implicitly accepted and replicated in the everyday talk of the dominant group.

Instances of everyday racism have also been studied by Sue and his colleagues in counseling psychology, which they call racial microaggressions (Sue, 2010; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007). Sue and colleagues (2007) defined racial microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (p.273). Sue’s (2010) taxonomy of microaggressions identifies three distinct types: microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations. Microinsults are “interpersonal communications or environmental communications that convey stereotypes, rudeness, and insensitivity and that demean a person’s racial heritage” (Sue,
Microinsults include behavior such as making statements against affirmative action to a person of color, non-verbal gestures that indicate avoidance, or failure to acknowledge a person of color. Microinvalidations are messages that invalidate or exclude the psychological experiential reality of individuals who belong to minority groups. Examples of micro invalidations include complimentsing an Asian American (born and raised in the United States) for speaking fluent English or telling a Black person that you don’t see color. Microassaults are deliberate verbal or non-verbal messages that convey racially biased attitudes and beliefs to individuals who belong to minority racial/ethnic groups. Examples of microassaults include the use of racial epithets, discouraging interracial interactions, or deliberately serving a White patron before someone of color.

Sue and colleagues (Sue et al., 2007) also identify three dilemmas associated with responding to racial microaggressions. The first dilemma of racial microaggressions is the disparities in the perceptions of ethnic minorities and Whites about what constitutes discrimination or microaggressions. Sue noted that while many ethnic minorities interpret several acts as racially insensitive and disrespectful, many Whites might be unaware of these perceptions. Secondly, several microaggressions are subjective experiences of ethnic minority individuals who might find it difficult to prove that a particular action is racially discriminatory. Several examples such as poor service in restaurants, or being asked to switch seats in an airplane, might not necessarily come across as clear instances
of racial discrimination. Finally, microaggressions are often thought of as harmless or minor incidents. Therefore, people experiencing microaggressions often fear that their reactions might be perceived as unnecessary, overly sensitive or even petty.

The four lines of research outlined here present distinct theoretical predictions about what constitutes everyday racism and how individuals make sense of and respond to instances of everyday racial discrimination. Feagin’s research describes everyday racial discrimination as isolate discrimination that involves a range of behaviors including avoidance, rejection, verbal harassment, physical assault, and police mistreatment. Essed identifies the recurring scripts of everyday discrimination in terms of the interaction context that leads to racist actions, and the individual evaluation and responses to racist actions. Van Dijk’s discourse analyses highlights how everyday discourse practices perpetuate ethnic prejudice, and collectively contribute to a macro level system of racial discrimination. Finally, Sue’s typology of microaggressions describes three types of everyday discrimination behaviors. While microinsults and microinvalidations are seen as unconscious or tacit acts that demean or invalidate people’s racial identities, microassaults are conscious acts that convey explicit racial bias. Building on these existing bodies of literature, a communication-focused conceptualization of everyday discrimination is proposed.
Communication-focused Conceptualization of Everyday Racial Discrimination

A communication-focused conceptualization of discrimination aims to identify and explicate the communicative acts that constitute discrimination, and the social context that allows individuals to interpret these actions as discrimination. The speech acts theory framework would be relevant in this context to conceptualize everyday discrimination incidents as discriminatory speech acts. Derived from Austin’s theory of performatives (1962), speech acts are illocutionary acts whose meaning is situated in the performance of the utterance itself (Searle, 1991). By performing speech acts participants not only convey the explicit locution of the utterances but also convey their intentions and the context/background against which utterances are to be interpreted. According to Austin’s (1962) typology of speech acts, exercitive speech is a type of speech act that “confers or takes away rights or privileges” (p.121). Exercitive speech acts indicate permissibility for or against a certain course of action. Permissibility content refers to the course of action that the speech act advocates for or against. Graumann and Winteman (1989) contend that the permissibility content of discriminatory speech acts is to maintain the dominance of privileged racial groups over racial minority groups. The illocutionary force in discriminatory speech acts is to cast an individual as inferior based on their race/ethnicity.

Expanding on Austin’s conception, McGowan (2003) has proposed a broader paradigm for conceptualizing the felicity conditions of exercitive speech acts. Two
important felicity conditions of exercitive speech acts are recognized. First, exercitive speech acts enact permissibility content either by verbally stating it in the locutionary content or through contextual implicatures. Therefore, discriminatory speech acts enact what can be conventionally recognized as a differential negative treatment of ethnic minority members. Also, negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities may be verbalized directly but also indirectly expressed through conversational implicatures. Second, exercitive speech acts include presuppositions about the intention of the speakers in the given context. In the case of discriminatory speech acts, the perpetrators’ negative differential treatment presupposes the existence of negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities.

Thus, instances of everyday racial discrimination are conceptualized as exercitive speech acts that function to convey the dominance of privileged racial groups over minority racial groups. It is proposed that everyday discriminatory speech acts can include verbal utterances or non-verbal gestures and conversational implicatures that can be conventionally interpreted as discriminatory. Lastly, everyday discrimination incidents presuppose the existence of negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities. Therefore, whether or not a person intended to discriminate is inconsequential for the conception of everyday discriminatory speech acts.

In addition to understanding the nature of discriminatory speech acts, it is also important to understand the features of the communication situations in which everyday
racial discrimination is enacted. From a communication perspective, these situations are speech events recognized by ethnic minority members as recurring acts of discrimination in everyday life. Speech events are “activities or aspects of activities that are directly governed by rules for the use of speech” (Hymes, 1967, p. 19). Prior research has documented that members of discriminated racial groups recognize and recollect distinct types of situations that involve acts of discrimination (e.g., Essed, 1991; Sue, 2010). However, in order to understand why these events cause emotional hurt and stress, it is important to understand the specific communicative functions that are accomplished through discriminatory speech events. Synthesizing the four lines of literature reviewed earlier, a typology of three discrimination situations explicating three aims of these speech events is proposed: avoidance, derogation, and categorization.

Avoidance has been identified as one of the communicative activities that constitute everyday discrimination in the acts described in prior literature. Avoidance is a distinct type of discrimination event, in which the core communicative aim is to avoid verbal and non-verbal interaction with ethnic minority individuals. For the purpose of this dissertation, avoidance events are defined as events including actions that conventionally signify an intent to maintain physical and/or social distance from an individual.

For example, Feagin (1991) identified avoidance as a type of isolate discrimination that was enacted through non-verbal behaviors such as increasing physical distance and limiting eye contact. Similarly, Sue (2010) also observed behaviors that
indicated avoidance of physical as well as social contact from individuals belonging to ethnic minorities. In addition to non-verbal gestures, avoidance examples can also include behaviors that discourage inter-racial interactions or inter-racial relationships (Sue, 2010). The communication of avoidance can be considered as being driven by and as a producer of the identities of the participants in the situation. Allport (1954) proposes that exclusion behaviors represent the enactment of prejudice in which perpetrators imply through their behavior that they wish to maintain a distance from those who belong to the disliked ethnic/racial groups.

Avoidance events can include a range of communicative actions such as avoiding sitting next to someone, physically moving away from someone, as well as the use of speech that directly or indirectly excludes an individual. However, it is important to acknowledge that these actions may have different illocutionary forces in different settings. Some existing studies of discrimination provide empirical evidence for actions that can be conventionally recognized as actions signifying avoidance. Experiments investigating non-verbal displays of racial bias have found that participants who reported negative attitudes towards racial minority groups avoided contact and/or maintained physical distance from racial minorities (Crosby, Bromley & Saxe, 1980; Fernandez, 1982). Personal accounts from diary studies and interview studies have shown that avoidance actions (e.g., switching seats to move away from someone, refusal to shake
hands) make ethnic minority individuals feel excluded (Dixon & Durrheim, 2003; Durrheim & Dixon, 2004; Mellor, 2003; Swim et al., 2003).

Existing literature has documented recurring examples of avoidance activities that constitute racial discrimination. However, studying these activities from a speech act perspective can help us understand the discursive features of avoidance activities. According to Graumann (1998) the act of avoiding reinforces negative attitudes but also solidifies the racial boundaries of “us” versus “them”. In their study of discriminatory speech acts Graumann and colleagues (Graumann, 1995; Graumann et al., 1989) found that speech could accomplish the task of distancing oneself from members of ethnic minorities by the use of distance demonstrating pronouns like we/they (Graumann, 1995).

Derogation is another communicative activity that constitutes everyday racial discrimination. Derogation events are defined as events that include actions that conventionally signify the superiority of privileged social group members over members who belong to a discriminated social group. For example, Feagin’s (1991) research provides several examples in which Black participants reported being treated in a derogatory manner. Examples of derogatory behaviors included the use of disrespectful language, being treated less favorably than White individuals, and given poor service in public accommodations. Similarly Sue’s (2010) examples of microassaults included instances where preferential treatment was given to White individuals while racial/ethnic minority individuals were derogated. Sue (2010) described these incidents as involving
actions which signify that that certain racial/ethnic groups are “less worthy, less important, and less deserving and are inferior beings who deserve discriminatory treatment” (p.35).

Examples of actions that constitute derogatory events include verbal and non-verbal communicative acts that reinforce the superiority of a privileged racial group over the discriminated racial group. Interpretation of an action or an utterance can vary with different contexts, and different people. However some examples of recurring derogatory actions have been recognized in existing studies of racial discrimination. Data from Swim and colleagues’ diary study (2003) indicated that differential treatment or rude handling of service in retail stores, restaurants, classrooms, or other public establishments characterized 18% of the reported racist incidents. Common examples of derogatory treatment for racial minorities includes “being served, seated, waited on, or assisted after European American customers received service, even if the African American participant had preceded them in line” (Swim et al., 2003, p.52). Other examples include incidents involving ethnic minority members being mistaken as subordinates to privileged members who are mistaken as superiors (McCabe, 2009; Sue et al, 2007).

Discriminatory speech events involving derogatory behaviors cast ethnic minority individuals as being inferior to White individuals. Graumann’s study (1995) of discriminatory speech shows that derogation is manifested through disparaging comments as well as pejorative and condescending speech about members of minority
racial/ethnic groups. Therefore, derogation activities imply a racial or ethnic hierarchy in which individuals belonging to ethnic/racial minorities such as African Americans or Asian Americans are treated less respectfully than individuals from privileged racial groups such as Caucasians.

*Categorization* is a third communicative action that constitutes everyday racial discrimination. Therefore, categorization events are defined as events including actions that make salient an individual’s racial/ethnic identity and cast it in a generalized positive or negative light. For instance, Feagin’s (1991) examples of categorization included instances of racial profiling in which individuals reported that the police assumed they were dangerous and criminal because they were Black. Sue’s (2010) research also notes several examples such as categorizing individuals by making stereotypical assumptions about someone based on their ethnicity/race.

Examples of categorization scenarios include verbal and non-verbal communication that ascribes racially stereotypical traits to an individual. A single action or utterance may not be always interpreted as discrimination by all ethnic minorities. However, prior literature has identified some recurring examples of categorization actions. For example, Constantine and Sue (2007) note that conversational implicatures that convey racial stereotypes should be identified as instances of subtle racial discrimination. Common assumptions about African Americans can include people assuming that African Americans are not very intelligent, are very loud and are
violent/criminal (Watkins, LaBarrie, & Appio, 2010). Common assumptions about Asian Americans can include people assuming that Asian Americans are intelligent, and are not ‘real’ Americans (Lin, 2010). Therefore, examples of dehumanization or categorization behaviors in everyday life are actions or utterances that explicitly state or imply assumptions about an individual based on their race/ethnicity.

Discriminatory speech events can include categorization actions that ascribe a fixed set of characteristics to an individual, solely based on their race/ethnicity. Membership categorization devices have been identified by sociologist Harvey Sacks (1972) as collections of various categories that people use to refer to their conversation partners. According to Tracy (2002), membership categorizations can highlight or downplay specific features of a communication situation and allow speakers to cast each other positively or negatively. Thus, categorization actions imply that an individual is not perceived as a unique individual but only a typical representative of an ethnic/racial group.

Overall, this dissertation synthesizes the existing literature of everyday discrimination and applies a speech act perspective to understand the communication processes constituting discrimination. Therefore, everyday racial discrimination incidents are conceptualized as exercitive speech acts that conventionally signify avoidance, derogation, and categorization of individuals who belong to dispreferred ethnic minorities. Having established the conceptualization of everyday racial discrimination,
the next part of this chapter reviews how individuals appraise and experience these discriminatory acts.

**Appraising and Experiencing Everyday Racial Discrimination**

This section outlines the cognitive and emotional processes involved in the way that individuals interpret, respond to, and cope with experiences of discrimination. Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) cognitive appraisal theory defines coping as “the cognitive and behavioral efforts made to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts among them” (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980, p. 223). According to Lazarus and Folkman’s model of stress, there are two steps involved in the coping process: the primary appraisal and the secondary appraisal. This section summarizes the existing literature that explains how individuals make primary and secondary appraisals about acts of everyday racial discrimination.

**Primary Appraisals of Racial Discrimination**

Primary appraisals of racial discrimination involve making initial assessments about whether or not the given situation poses a significant threat that needs to be addressed (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). An incident can be appraised as a relevant threat when a person infers that their mistreatment was motivated by racial prejudice. According to Miller (2006), targets can either make an inference on their own that prejudice has occurred, or another person can draw this inference for them by observing the incident.
While making a primary appraisal about the situation, targets establish whether a stressor conveys a threat or a challenge to them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When an individual appraises an act of discrimination as a threat, he/she experiences anxiety and is concerned with avoiding the stressor (Swim & Thomas, 2006). However, when an act of discrimination is seen as a challenge, the target is more likely to experience anger rather than anxiety, and will be concerned with seeking the challenged goals (Swim et al., 2006). When individuals appraise acts of everyday discrimination, they also make inferences about what the act means. For example, appraising an incident as an instance of racial discrimination involves acknowledging that one’s social identity is devalued by members of the society (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002a, 2002b). Understanding that one’s social group is devalued affects individual’s self-worth because their social identity is closely tied to their perceptions of self (Cartwright, 1950; Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998).

People’s emotional and cognitive reactions to experiences of everyday discrimination are largely dependent on whether they make internal (intropunitive) or external (extropunitive) attributions about acts of everyday discrimination (Allport, 1954). Allport proposed that individuals who make internal attributions tend to react to prejudice with self-hate, passivity, and denial of membership in the stigmatized group, while those who make external attributions tend to respond to discrimination with suspicion, aggression, and increased identification with the stigmatized group (Allport,
Internal and external attributions of discrimination also influence the individual’s self-esteem. Individuals who can attribute the cause of their mistreatment to external causes (e.g., the perpetrator, the broader system) are able to maintain a positive self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989; Crocker et al., 1998). However, making internal attributions about discrimination leads to lower self-esteem (Crosby, 1974; Major, Kaiser & McCoy, 2001; Schmitt et al., 2002b; Olson & Hafer, 2001).

**Factors that affect the primary appraisal of everyday discrimination.**

Scholars have found that three factors can influence primary appraisals of everyday discrimination: the target’s prior experience with everyday discrimination, the target’s racial/ethnic identification, and the target’s relational closeness to the perpetrators. Many recipients of everyday discrimination have considerable prior experience with recurring everyday discrimination and tend to develop cognitive scripts about interpreting and responding to these situations in various social and personal environments (Myers et al., 2003). Owing to their frequent experiences, targets are also likely to develop race-based rejection expectations. Race based rejection expectations are defined as anticipatory beliefs that discrimination can and will occur in certain social settings (Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis & Pietrzak, 2002). Three cross-sectional and longitudinal studies by Mendoza-Denton et al (2002) have found that individuals who have higher race-based rejection expectations are more likely to perceive racial discrimination, and report higher levels of rejection and alienation following a negative race-related experience.
The target’s racial/ethnic identification can also influence appraisals of everyday racial discrimination. Historically issues of racism and race related prejudice have involved the African American population. However, racism directed towards other ethnic groups such as Latinos and Asians is relatively understudied (Lin, 2010; Rivera, Forquer, & Rangel, 2010). Studies have shown that African American individuals are more likely to notice and acknowledge racial prejudice than individuals of other ethnicities (Mendes, Major, McCoy, & Blascovich, 2008; Myers, Lewis, & Parker-Dominguez, 2003; Solorzano et al., 2000). In addition to identifying oneself as belonging to a particular racial/ethnic group, the level of identification can also influence appraisals of everyday racial discrimination. Racial or ethnic identification can be defined as the extent to which race or ethnicity is central to an individual’s self-concept (Phinney, 1992). A greater level of racial/ethnic identification is associated with a higher tendency to identify prejudice (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Miller & Major, 2000).

Finally, relational closeness is also an important factor that influences appraisals of everyday discrimination. Everyday discriminatory acts can involve strangers, but also acquaintances, co-workers, teachers, students, and friends. Interview studies by Lowe, Okubo and Reilly (2012) found that when racism experiences involved a close relationship partner, targets’ emotional reactions were stronger. Semi-structured interviews with Asian American participants have also found that participants reported
being more hurt and disappointed when their friends and peers committed the discriminatory acts (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torrino, 2009).

**Consequences of primary appraisals of everyday discrimination.** Everyday incidents of racial discrimination seem relatively harmless when compared to criminal manifestations of racism. However, everyday racism can significantly influence the psychological, emotional and physical well-being of people who experience it. The next section summarizes these effects.

**Psychological consequences.** Psychological stress is a very common consequence of experiencing everyday racial discrimination, and is known to occur when the demands of a given situation exceed a person’s resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A substantial number of quantitative and qualitative studies have shown that experiencing racial discrimination is associated with increased psychological stress (Ajrouch, Reisine, Lim, Sohn, & Ismail, 2010; Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999; Taylor & Turner, 2002, Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Sanders Thompson, 2006).

Researchers in counseling psychology find also that everyday discrimination leads to a specific type of stress they call racism-related stress (Harrell, 2000; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996). Racism related stress is defined as “the race-related transactions between individuals or groups and their environment that emerge from the dynamics of racism and that are perceived to tax or exceed existing individual and collective resources or threaten well-being” (Harrell, 2000, p. 44). A number of studies have found that
experiencing everyday discrimination is associated with increased race-related stress (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010; Utsey, Chae, Brown & Kelly, 2002; Utsey, Giesbrecht, Hook, Stanard, 2008; Utsey, Payne, Jackson, & Jones, 2002).

In addition to psychological and race related stress, experiences of everyday discrimination can negatively affect a person’s collective self-esteem, which is the value an individual places on their social group membership (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Swim, Pearson, & Johnston, 2007; Verkuyten, 1998). Branscombe and Wann (1994) contend that threats to one’s social identity impact an individual’s collective self-esteem rather than their individual self-esteem. Everyday instances of racial stereotyping can impact individuals’ collective self-esteem if individuals internalize the negative stereotypes associated with their social group. Acceptance of negative stereotypes can lead people to believe that they are responsible for their reduced social-status and deserving of the discriminatory practices (e.g., Biernat, Vescio, & Green, 1996; Quinn & Crocker, 1999). In addition to the effects on collective self-esteem, it seems plausible that experiencing racial discrimination can also affect one’s individual self-esteem. However, meta-analytic reviews have found that Black targets of discrimination possess higher self-esteem than Whites (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Twenge & Crocker, 2002).

According to Crocker and Major (1989), experiencing racial discrimination might not result in lower individual self-esteem because people who experience discrimination engage in specific cognitive processes to protect their self-esteem. Crocker and Major
(1989) propose that members who belong to racial/ethnic minority groups learn to protect their self-esteem by engaging in three processes: (a) associating negative evaluations to external attributions of prejudice; (b) selectively comparing themselves only with in-group members (as opposed to out-group members), and (c) selectively valuing attributes that the group excels at, and devaluing the attributes that the group fairs poorly on. Whether or not people employ self-esteem protecting strategies depends on several factors. These include concealability of one’s racial identity, acceptance of negative attitudes about one’s ethnic/racial group, attribution of responsibility for the discrimination to others versus self, and the level of identification with the ethnic/racial group (Crocker & Major, 1989). For example, Branscombe, Schmidt and Harvey (1999) found that racial discrimination negatively impacts self-esteem, only for individuals who have a lower level of identification with their racial group. In a longitudinal study LaVeist, Sellers and Neighbors (2001) found that African Americans who held the social system responsible for racial discrimination had better overall health and lived longer than individuals who blamed themselves for discrimination.

**Emotional consequences.** Everyday experiences of racism can cause emotional hurt. These emotional consequences include experiencing short-term and long-term negative emotions, as well as lowered happiness, and well-being. Targets of everyday discrimination may experience a range of negative emotions including confusion, guilt, shame, anger, isolation, difficulty in articulating thoughts, powerlessness, and humiliation
Brondolo and colleagues (Brondolo et al., 2008) found that individuals who experienced everyday racism developed long-term negative affect and experienced anger, nervousness, and sadness. Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder’s (2008) interviews with Black Americans further revealed that experiencing racial microaggressions led to feelings of powerlessness, invisibility, an inability to be themselves, and an increased pressure about making mistakes. Branscombe and colleagues (1999) also found that individuals who perceived pervasive discrimination felt hopeless and resigned.

Using survey data from an American corporation (n=327) and the United States Navy (n=5483), Deitch, Barsky, Butz, Chan, Brief, and Bradley (2003) found that experiences of everyday racial discrimination were associated with decreased emotional well-being, such as feeling felt down-hearted or unhappy. Experiences of racial discrimination also influence one’s eudemonic well-being (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010; Ryff, Keyes, & Hughes, 2003). Eudemonic well-being is defined as an individual’s level of self-acceptance, autonomy, personal growth, positive relations with others, environmental mastery and their purpose in life (Ryff, 1989).

**Physical consequences.** The psychological and emotional consequences of everyday racism can also cumulatively impact people’s physical health (Brondolo, Rieppi, Kelly, & Green, 2003). Existing research has shown that experiences of everyday racism are associated with increased cardiovascular activity and stress (Clark, 2003;
Brown, Matthews, Bromberger, & Chang, 2006). Research has also documented that the influence of race or ethnicity on one’s physical well-being is mediated by the frequency of discrimination experiences. Deitch and colleagues’ (2003) survey of 327 first-line US workers found that the association of race to physical well-being was mediated by the frequency of mistreatments. Black workers reported having experienced mistreatment more often, which led to reduced physical well-being.

Overall, existing research demonstrates that the primary appraisal of everyday discrimination as a stressor has serious consequences for the targets’ psychological, emotional, and physical wellbeing.

**Secondary Appraisals of Racial Discrimination**

After an act of racial discrimination is appraised as a stressor, the target engages in secondary appraisal to identify the coping strategies that might be available to deal with the situation. During secondary appraisals individuals assess whether they have the necessary resources for coping with the stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) further contend that people’s choice of coping responses depends on whether they believe they are able to engage in a response strategy and whether they believe the selected strategy can be effective in achieving the desired goals. Swim and Thomas (2006) also concur that the choice of coping strategies in dealing with experiences of racial discrimination is based on a person’s interpersonal and intrapersonal
goals in the given context. They identified three types of coping strategies for dealing with discrimination: inhibitory strategies, proactive strategies, and approach strategies.

Inhibitory coping responses include responses that aim to change oneself in order to fit the situation (Swim et al., 2006). Examples of inhibitory coping strategies include denial of racism, self-silencing, avoiding intergroup situations and dis-identification with their racial group. Proactive coping involves being prepared for a discriminatory act. Mallett and Swim (2009) posit that proactive coping strategies involve anticipating a potential stressor, which significantly reduces the level of psychological distress caused by the stressful incident.

Finally, approach strategies include coping responses that aim to change the situation in order to align with one’s social and interpersonal goals. For example, attempting to convince others about your perspective, confrontation, or expression of moral outrage, anger and revenge might be examples of approach based coping responses. Seeking social support is also an approach strategy for dealing with racial discrimination (Brondolo et al. 2009). The next chapter reviews existing studies of social support in the context of racial discrimination, and then presents a supportive communication framework for studying effective support for targets of everyday racial discrimination.
Chapter 3: Social Support for Coping with Everyday Racial Discrimination

Seeking social support has been identified as a useful coping mechanism to deal with the emotional distress resulting from experiencing racial discrimination (Fischer & Shaw 1999, Noh & Kaspar 2003, Sanders Thompson 2006). However, most studies conceptualize support in terms of either the perceived availability of support, frequency of support seeking, size of one’s support network, or satisfaction with the support network. For example, in a meta-analysis investigating the link between racial discrimination and mental health, Pascoe and Smart Richards (2009) found fifteen studies that examined the moderating role of social support. In all fifteen studies social support was conceptualized as, “an individual’s perception of having one person or multiple people available to provide assistance when needed” (Pascoe et al., 2009, p.541). Perceived support for racial discrimination was operationalized by asking participants how often their support providers engage in supportive behaviors such as talking to them about discrimination incidents, listening, comforting, caring for them, helping them, opening up to them, understanding, and proving advice (e.g., Chung & Epstein, 2014; Hayward & Krause, 2015; Jackson et al, 2003; Noh & Kasper, 2003; Tummala-Narra, Algeria & Chen, 2012). However, none of these studies explicated how these supportive behaviors were enacted.
Support seeking subscales from the COPE scale (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1987; Carver, 1997) have also been used to assess the frequency with which targets of racial discrimination seek support from friends and family members (e.g., Clark, 2006). Another instrument frequently used to assess perceived support is the Social Provisions Scale (Cutrona & Russell, 1987). This instrument includes six subscales: reliable alliance, attachment, guidance, nurturance, social integration, and reassurance of worth. Several studies have used this scale to assess participants’ perceptions about the frequency with which they experience the six support behaviors (e.g., Prelow, Mosher, & Bowman, 2006). In addition to these scales, some studies have also focused on perceived availability of specific types of support. Perceived availability of emotional and instrumental support has been examined in the context of racial discrimination (e.g., Arjouch, Reisine, Lim, Sohn, & Ismail, 2010; Finch, Hummer, Kolody, & Vega, 2001; Finch, Kolody, & Vega, 2000). The perceived availability measures focus on the quantity or frequency of support rather than examining what constitutes the quality of support.

Several racial discrimination studies also conceptualize social support as the size of a person’s social network and their satisfaction with the support network. For example, Boyce’s (1996) social support scale for racial events is designed to assess an individual’s perception about the availability of social support that specifically addresses race-related stress. The scale includes five items to assess the size of a person’s social network and their satisfaction with the support network. Participants are asked to list number of
friends/relatives that they can talk to about racial events, and evaluate their satisfaction with the level of support provided by each individual. Overall, these studies provide insight into what type of support behaviors might be most frequently provided and appreciated in the context of racial discrimination. However, these findings do not elucidate how social support is enacted, or why the enacted support might be perceived to be most effective.

One recent study has dealt with explicating the nature of social support messages provided in the context of racial discrimination. Ayres and Leaper (2013) examined how adolescent girls cope with discrimination. They found that 69% of the girls in their study reported talking to their parents, friends or siblings to seek support after experiencing discrimination. European American girls were more likely than Latina, Asian American, and African American girls to seek support after experiencing discrimination. An analysis of support messages recalled by these girls indicated the following themes: messages about coping with discrimination, emotional reassurance, discussion of discrimination, sharing a similar story, and derogation of the perpetrator. Ayers and Leaper’s study provides insights about support messages in this context, but it lacks a theoretical framework for identifying and examining features of effective support messages for dealing with everyday discrimination.

Thus, a lack of focus on enacted support is the biggest theoretical gap in the study of everyday discrimination and social support. Yet two other shortcomings also exist.
First, existing studies of racial discrimination lump a wide variety of discrimination experiences under the category of ‘perceived discrimination’. A study of effective social support needs to acknowledge and address specific types of discrimination. Everyday covert forms of racial discrimination represent a distinct type of racial discrimination that is subtle, yet more frequent. Therefore, focusing on support provision for everyday discrimination requires that support providers address the nuanced dilemmas and hurts caused by everyday discrimination. Second, racial discrimination has been less frequently studied from the perspective of the perpetrators (Swim & Stagnor, 1998; Wright & Taylor, 2003). Essed (1991) has pointed out that understanding racial discrimination through personal accounts of individuals who have lived these experiences will allow systematic knowledge building about the topic.

In an effort to address these theoretical and empirical gaps, this dissertation proposes a study of enacted support as a communication phenomenon for dealing with everyday racial discrimination. The next section outlines a theoretical framework and a message-focused design for studying supportive communication in the discrimination context.

**Conceptualization of Communication**

The conception of communication in this investigation is shaped by an interpretive perspective of communication, in which communication is an ongoing, emergent and interpretive process in which social actors produce taken as shared meaning
Communication is seen as an “emergent creative activity through which human social reality is constantly being recreated, affirmed, repaired and changed” (Delia & Grossberg, 1977, p.36). Communication is conceptualized as a process of meaning making that involves the processes of codifying meaning, coordinating interaction, and cooperating with one another.

The process of codifying meaning indicates that communication activities are influenced by and lead to the production of the cultural context that they are situated in. Speech codes are observable patterns of speech that are created, modified and skillfully employed by members of a speech community in everyday life (Philipsen, 1997). According to Philipsen, speech codes symbolize the way of life as conceptualized and practiced by a given community, exemplifying what is celebrated and what is frowned upon in a given community. “Taken as shared” speech codes allow interaction partners to create meaning.

A second communication process involves coordination activities that focus on achieving synchrony and alignment between interaction partners. One example of coordination are the alignment practices in everyday conversation. Nofsinger (1999) describes alignment practices in everyday conversation as “activities through which participants achieve interaction by aligning their individual actions” (p.112). He identifies three categories of linguistic devices that individuals use to align with each other in
everyday talk: response, repair, and pre-positioned alignment devices. Alignment practices demonstrate the ways in which individuals co-create meaning by coordinating utterances in conversations. Similarly, the theory of coordinated management of meaning (Pearce & Cronen, 1989) posits that conversation partners co-create meaning by coordinating with one another. In the context of this dissertation, coordination is described as individuals engaging in proactive and reactive actions to co-create patterns of communication that they want (Pearce & Pearce, 2000).

Finally, a third group of communication processes are the cooperative processes that allow interaction partners to identify and achieve shared goals. One type of cooperation process in communication is the cooperative principle (Grice, 1975). Grice’s cooperative principle (1975) states that talk exchanges are cooperative efforts between communicators, which are based on and shaped by a shared, implicit understanding of the purpose/direction of the conversation. Grice proposes that in conversation people assume an implicit understanding of some general maxims. The implications of abiding by and flouting these maxims can both convey meaning. The four maxims are: maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. The maxim of quantity asserts that people contribute the right amount of information and description that would enable understanding. The maxim of quality asserts that people make contributions that are true. The maxim of relation asserts that people make contributions that are relevant to the
ongoing conversation. The maxim of manner asserts that people make contributions that are clear and unambiguous.

An underlying philosophical assumption of Grice’s cooperative principle is that in any given conversation people have an implicit understanding of the conversational contract, which guides their conversation. Thus, from this perspective human beings are conceptualized as cooperative beings trying to build meaning based on the implications of the spoken words in order to ascertain what is expected (and not expected) of them to take the conversation forward. Language is conceptualized as possessing two layers of meanings, one that is the literal meaning of utterances and the other, which is implied. Thus the success of interpersonal communication in not just based on understanding the literal meaning of language but also the implied meanings intended by the speaker.

Finally, another cooperation process comprises of perspective taking, role taking and empathy. The possibility of coordinated interpersonal communication depends on a person’s ability to engage in perspective taking (Burleson, 1982). Perspective taking or role taking has been identified as an important socio-cognitive skill that involves coordination of other people’s perspectives of an event with one’s own perspective (Selman, 1975). Social perspective taking refers to one’s “ability to represent another’s understanding of a situation even when that understanding differs from one’s own” (Burleson, Delia, Applegate, 1992, p.265). Selman’s (1975) research has outlines how children progress along the five stages of perspective taking: ego-centric, subjective
perspective taking, third person perspective taking, qualitative systems level of social perspective taking, and symbolic interactionist perspective taking. According to Selman (1975) throughout these stages of socio-cognitive development children progress from egocentrism to perspectivism.

In addition to understanding different communication processes, it is also important to identify the functions of communication that are most relevant to this investigation. Clark and Delia (1979) synthesized perspectives from symbolic interactionist theory and general communication theory to propose that any interaction comprises of three types of tasks or goals that the interaction partners wish to achieve through coordination. According to this perspective communicative behaviors in any given context can be examined as a response to three general types of goals: instrumental, interpersonal goals, and identity goals. Instrumental goals are concerns about a specific task in the given situation (e.g., to persuade someone, to comfort someone, etc.). Interpersonal goals are relational goals that concern with the relationships in a given interaction context. Finally, identity goals are concerned with issues of self-presentation or the way one’s identity is negotiated through communication.

Thus far, a conceptualization of communication that is assumed in this dissertation is explicated. The next section focuses exclusively on communication that functions to provide support, or supportive communication. The next section forwards a
supportive communication framework for the study of effective support in the context of everyday racial discrimination.

**Supportive Communication Framework**

This investigation adopts a message-centered conception of interpersonal communication proposed by Burleson (2010). The message centered conception focuses on messages, which are defined as “sets of behavioral expressions, typically consisting of shared symbols, which are produced in an effort to convey some internal state” (Burleson, 2010, p.151). Interpersonal communication as conceptualized from the message-centered approach involves the processes of message production, message processing, interaction coordination, and social perception. Message production involves generation of behaviors that are designed to accomplish interpersonal goals. Message processing involves interpretation of other’s communicative behavior to understand the implied meanings and goals. Interaction coordination is the process of aligning the message production and processing activities to create shared understanding. Finally, social perception includes the process through which individuals make sense of the social world.

The constructivist theory of communication has outlined what constitutes skillful message production, message reception and social perception (Burleson, 2007). The message reception processes are of particular interest in the proposed investigation. Effective message reception is defined as “the ability to fully comprehend the meaning of
others’ messages and, when appropriate, go beyond those messages to understand the source’s intentions and motives” (Burleson, 2007, p.109). There are two ways in which people can engage message processing: a) surface level processing or b) depth processing. While engaging in surface level processing receivers assume that a message can be accepted at face value, depth processing involves a greater scrutiny about the message, its source and the communication context in which the message was produced (Burleson, 2007).

Deeply processed messages are more likely to be remembered (Neulip & Hazelton, 1986; Stacks & Murphy, 1993), and are more likely to be effective at accomplishing the intended goals of sophisticated messages (Burleson & Caplan, 1998). While depth processing is a cognitively demanding process, one is likely to engage in depth processing when the topic in the message is of personal relevance. Existing research highlights several factors that influence individuals’ ability to engage in depth processing. Existing knowledge about a topic allows individuals to process related messages more easily (Hewes, 1995; O’Keefe, 2002). Similarly, higher interpersonal cognitive complexity allows individuals to perceive a broader range of information and facilitates depth processing.

Studies of supportive communication often examine the influence of support messages on two types of dependent variables: message evaluations or judgments about the message, and message outcomes or cognitive, affective or behavioral effects of
messages (Bodie, Burleson, & Jones, 2012). Supportive communication, which is a subset of this overarching perspective of communication, is discussed in the next section.

**Supportive Communication**

Having outlined the general conception of communication for the current investigation, this section defines supportive communication and explicates the message perception paradigm that will be employed in the current study. In the current investigation supportive communication is conceptualized as a form of interpersonal communication defined as, “verbal and non-verbal behavior produced with the intention of providing assistance to others perceived as needing that aid” (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002, p.386). The study of social support focusing on communication involves the study of support provided through support messages. Among its goals, supportive communication research focuses on examining how different types of support messages influence message evaluations and message outcomes (Bodie, Burleson, & Jones, 2012).

While general theories of social support have helped establish the importance of support in reducing stress, the study of supportive communication has focused on explicating how support is sought, provided, and evaluated in contextualized interpersonal interactions. Goldsmith (2006) contends that by studying enacted support as a communication phenomenon, “it is possible to derive some baselines predictions about the types of behaviors support recipients are most likely to consider positive under various condition, and develop general principles that can help individuals understand
supportive interactions and improve their abilities to enact and negotiate social support in their close relationships” (p. 25). In order to understand effective social support in the context of racial discrimination, there are three important factors that need to be addressed: theoretically relevant type of support (e.g., emotional support, esteem support, etc.), message features (person-centeredness, politeness, induction-focus, etc.) and appropriate indicators of message effectiveness (e.g., general effectiveness, goal achievement, etc.).

**Socio-cognitive foundations of support.** Existing research on supportive communication has documented a wide range of socio-cognitive skills that enable individuals to engage in effective support practices. First, motivation to help, or engage in pro-social behaviors is an important characteristic that precedes enactment of effective social support. Prior research has demonstrated that individuals with a greater degree of pro-social orientation, and emotional empathy are more likely to engage in helping behaviors such as provision of support (Burleson, 1983). Another important factor is cognitive complexity, which can be described as an individual’s ability to represent and process social information in interpersonal interactions (Burleson & Caplan, 1998; Burleson & Samter, 1985). Scholars from the constructivist perspective propose that cognitive complexity is an important precursor to effective and sophisticated forms of support provision (for a review see Burleson & Caplan, 1998). These socio-cognitive skills can influence an individual’s ability and motivation to craft effective support.
messages that accomplish various support functions. The functional types of support are described next.

**Functional support types.** Various types of support have been conceptualized and defined in the existing literature. Five types of social support have generally been identified: emotional support, network support, esteem support, informational support and tangible aid (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Emotional support, or support focusing on the distressed individual’s feelings, has been consistently noted as helpful support in a wide variety of interpersonal contexts (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1994). Burleson (2003) defines emotional support as ‘‘specific lines of communicative behavior enacted by one party with the intent of helping another cope effectively with emotional distress’’ (p. 552). Network support is defined as “communicating belonging to a group of persons with similar interests and concerns” (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992, p.159). Esteem support, also known as ego support, functions to assure and reaffirm people’s confidence in their own abilities and helps them appraise their problems in a way that enhances their self-esteem (Holmstrom & Burleson, 2011). Informational support involves the provision of information or advice and is most effective when it is accompanied by politeness strategies that can address positive and negative face needs of the target (Goldsmith, 1994). Finally, tangible aid is defined as the provision of goods or services required in the stressful situation (Cutrona, Hessling, & Suhr, 1997). Communication researchers also recognize that different types of support are not always provided one type at a time.
Therefore, scholarship in supportive communication has investigated effective strategies for combining and sequencing different types of support (e.g., Feng, 2009; Goldsmith, 2000).

The theory of optimal matching (Cutrona & Russell, 1990) and the stressor-support specificity model (Cohen & McKay, 1980), have both proposed that in order to be effective, the support provided through interpersonal relationships must meet the specific needs or be correctly ‘matched’ with the needs presented by the stressful condition. However, Goldsmith (2004) proposed that communicating social support is a matter of coherence between the support provider and the recipient rather than simple matching. According to Goldsmith, support can facilitate coping when there is coherence between “the support a provider’s and recipient’s view of the situation and its coping potential, and coherence between what is co-constructed in troubles talk and demands external to the conversation” (p.113). Therefore, supportive communication is seen as a coordination and cooperative process in which the support provider and recipient shape a helpful response to the situation.

**Message features.** Investigations of supportive communication seek to identify the feature of messages that generate the desirable outcomes in various communication contexts (Burleson, Albrecht, Goldsmith, & Sarason, 1994). According to Burleson (2009), message features can constitute the overall focus of the message (e.g., problem-focus versus emotion-focus), or the quality of the message (e.g., sophisticated versus
unsophisticated ways of providing a specific type of support) or the manner in which messages are constructed (e.g., use of facework or politeness strategies). For example, Barbee and Cunningham (1995) differentiated between support messages that were emotion-focused versus problem-focused. While emotion focused messages tend to focus and elaborate on the emotions of an individual, the problem-focused messages tend to focus on the problem or the stressor that is bothering the individual. Existing research finds that emotion-focused messages are evaluated as more effective than problem-focused messages (e.g., Barbee & Cunningham, 1995; Holmstrom & Burelson, 2011).

Research has also examined the role of politeness in providing support. The use of politeness strategies or ‘facework’ in supportive communication is rooted in Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory (1978). The theory outlines four strategies for dealing with face threatening acts that have their own share of payoffs. Bald-on-record strategy means doing the face-threatening act without any redress. Positive politeness strategies are approach based and they attempt to acknowledge the receiver’s face wants, complement them or highlight one’s similarity with the receiver. Negative politeness strategies are avoidance based and address the individual’s negative face wants by expressing restraint, self-effacement or formality. Off-record strategies involve being indirect and ambiguous so as to have the option of denial. Existing research has demonstrated that the use of politeness strategies and facework mitigates the face-threatening aspects of providing
advice (Goldsmith, 1994; Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2004; MacGeorge, Lichtman, & Pressey, 2002).

Finally, message quality is an important message feature that differentiates between sophisticated and unsophisticated ways of support provision. According to Burleson (2009), “Sophisticated forms of support do a better job than alternatives of instantiating theoretical principles that characterize helpful, sensitive, and effective support in a given domain” (p. 24). For instance the cognitive-emotional theory of esteem support messages (Holmstrom & Burleson, 2011) contends that emotion-focused inductive messages are more effective in dealing with esteem threats than problem-focused and assertive messages.

Therefore, in order to be effective, supportive communication must employ effective and relevant message features. The most researched message feature of emotional support has been person-centeredness. Person-centeredness represents a communication quality that reflects an ability to align oneself with the goals and needs of the interaction partner and produce communication that acknowledges and explicates their cognitive and emotional states and encourages self-reflection (Applegate, 1980; Applegate, Burleson, Burke, Delia, & Kline, 1985). The concept of person-centeredness is rooted in Bernstein’s (1962) conception of restricted and elaborated codes. According to Bernstein (1962, 1964) the restricted code is a speech system that is centered on
people’s social status or social roles while the elaborated code is personal, and focuses on the unique perspectives of the participants in the situational context.

Applegate (1980) originally proposed a nine-level hierarchy of person-centeredness to assess the level of person-centeredness in messages. According to Burleson (1987, p.305) the level of person-centeredness can be defined as the extent to which it “reflects an awareness of and adaptation to the subjective, affective, and relational aspects of communicative contexts”. Messages that are low in person-centeredness (levels 1-3) condemn or deny the other person’s feelings, dismiss their perspective and tell them what they should do or how they should feel. Moderate person-centered messages (levels 4-6) display an implicit recognition of others’ feelings and might attempt to divert attention, express a conventionally appropriate sympathizing response or attempt to provide a truncated explanation for the situation. High person-centeredness is represented through levels 7-9, which explicitly acknowledges, legitimizes and explicates the other person’s feelings in a wider context.

In a meta-analysis of 23 studies High and Dillard (2012) found a positive association between person-centered messages and the perceived as well as actual effectiveness of person-centered messages. The results indicated that across all 23 studies participants evaluated high person-centered messages as being sensitive, helpful, effective, appropriate, and supportive. Moreover highly person-centered messages were also associated with affect improvement. Finally, person-centered messages were found
to be effective across a wide range of distressful situations. These situations ranged from mild to severely distressful issues (e.g., receiving a bad grade on an exam, relational break-up, loss of a loved one, dealing with parental divorce, etc.).

Existing research has also demonstrated the mediating mechanisms through which person-centered messages have an influence on message evaluation and message outcomes. Burleson and Goldsmith (1998) have proposed that the comforting process brings about a change in distressed individuals’ emotional states by facilitating a reappraisal of the stressful event. Facilitating reappraisal of stressful events has been empirically validated in experimental studies. Jones and Wirtz (2006), for instance, found that effective comforting messages encouraged distressed individuals to verbalize their thoughts and emotions, which, in turn, facilitated a cognitive re-appraisal of the stressful situation and led to emotional improvement of the distressed individual.

**Hypotheses and Research Questions**

Synthesizing the literature reviewed thus far, a supportive communication framework is proposed for the study of effective support for dealing with everyday racial discrimination. The central goal is to identify theoretically relevant support message dimensions and test whether support messages with varying levels of these dimensions influence message evaluation and individual coping outcomes. For studying effective support provision for recipients of everyday racial discrimination, two message dimensions are identified: (a) person-centeredness, and (b) social identity affirmation
support. These two dimensions are selected based on their relevance for addressing the dilemmas and hurts caused by everyday discrimination. The following section theorizes how each of these message dimensions are can be effective in the context of everyday discrimination. Additional hypotheses are also proposed about reappraisal and reattribution processes that are predicted to mediate the influence of messages on message evaluation and message outcomes. Three research questions are also proposed to examine three moderating factors that might influence the impact of message quality on message evaluations and outcomes: perceived severity of the problem, number of inter-ethnic friendships, and the ethnicity of the support provider.

**Person-centeredness**

As summarized in Chapter 2, the experience of everyday racial discrimination causes significant emotional distress. Effective emotional support helps in alleviating emotional distress, facilitates coping, as well as aids relationship development and maintenance (Burleson, 2003). Burleson and Goldsmith (1998) have proposed that the comforting process brings about a change in distressed individuals’ emotional states by facilitating a reappraisal of the stressful event. Research by Burleson and colleagues has found that highly person-centered messages are perceived to be more sensitive and effective than low person centered messages (Burleson & Samter, 1985; Kunkel & Burleson, 1999; MacGeorge, Feng, & Burleson, 2011). In addition to being perceived as more sensitive and effective, experimental studies have also validated that high person-
centered messages are more effective than low or moderate person-centered messages in reducing emotional distress (Jones, 2004; Jones & Guerrero, 2004; Jones & Wirtz, 2006).

In the context of everyday racial discrimination, individuals who experience emotional distress often feel unsure about their experience and whether others will believe or support their perspective. Person-centered messages can help legitimize the feelings and perspectives of the individual who has experienced discrimination. For the purpose of this dissertation, person-centeredness was operationalized as two levels: high and low. High person-centered messages explicitly acknowledged, legitimized, and elaborated the participants’ experience of everyday discrimination. Low person-centered messages criticized, rejected and dismissed the perspectives and emotions of the support receivers.

It is hypothesized that messages high in person-centeredness will be linked with better evaluations of message effectiveness and affect change. Message effectiveness is conceptualized in terms of general message effectiveness and effectiveness in accomplishing multiple goals. General effectiveness is conceptualized as the extent to which participants evaluate the message as being helpful, appropriate, sensitive, supportive, effective, and successful (Goldsmith et al., 2000). Effectiveness in accomplishing multiple goals is the extent to which participants perceive the message to address relevant instrumental, identity, relational, and face goals. Affect change is
conceptualized as an improvement in the participants’ individual emotional state. Therefore, the first hypothesis is proposed:

**H1:** Recipients of everyday racial discrimination will evaluate highly person-centered messages as being (a) higher in message effectiveness and multiple goal achievement than low person-centered messages in (b) higher in facilitating emotional improvement than low-person-centered messages.

In addition to demonstrating the effectiveness of person-centered messages, research has also identified and tested the mediating mechanisms through which effective messages bring about positive outcomes. Cognitive reappraisal has been identified as emotion-focused coping mechanism that is effective in improving the emotional state of the distressed individual (Lazarus, 1999). Applying the concept of cognitive reappraisal in supportive communication theory, Burleson and Goldsmith (1998) contend that, “the only way to change a feeling state is to change what produced that feeling state in the first place: the appraisal of the distressed person” (p.258). Reappraisal has been identified and empirically validated as a mediating mechanism between supportive messages and positive message outcomes (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998; Jones & Wirtz, 2006). Jones and Wirtz (2006) found that effective comforting messages encouraged distressed individuals to verbalize their thoughts and emotions, resulting in a cognitive re-appraisal of the stressful situation, which led to emotional improvement of the distressed individual. The current study design does not address the verbalization of thoughts and
emotions, but it is hypothesized that hearing person-centered messages will allow participants to reappraise the discrimination situation in ways that facilitate emotional improvement. In addition to reappraisal, it is proposed that perspective taking and empathy are also at the core of person-centered messages and, therefore, empathy would mediate the influence of person-centered messages on message effectiveness and message outcomes. Participants’ perceptions about the extent to which support providers engage in perspective taking, or empathize with the message recipient are bound to influence their evaluations of person-centered messages. Therefore, empathy is proposed as a second mediator between message quality and message effectiveness outcomes. The second part of the first hypotheses is presented:

**H2:** Reappraisal and empathy will mediate the influence of person-centered messages on (a) message effectiveness and multiple goal achievement (b) affect change.

**Social Identity-Affirmation**

Besides invoking emotional distress, acts of discrimination can also pose a threat to one’s social identity. Acts of racial discrimination are typically appraised by recipients of racial discrimination as a devaluation of their social identity (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Crocker & Major, 1989). A person’s social identity is defined as that part of one’s self-conception that is tied to their membership in a social group (Tajfel, 1981; Thoits, 1991). While members of minority ethnic groups are generally aware of people’s
negative attitudes towards their social identity, discrimination incidents tend to make these judgments more salient (Miller & Major, 2000). Existing research shows that discrimination incidents are perceived as negative treatment directed towards their social identity rather than their personal identity (Crosby, 1982; Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990).

A social identity threat can be a significant stressor that impacts how people feel about their membership in a discriminated social group. Existing research has shown that social identity threats evoked by discrimination incidents negatively affect one’s collective self-esteem more than individual self-esteem (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Swim, Johnston, & Pearson, 2005; Twenge & Crocker, 2002). Collective self-esteem is defined as “feelings of self-worth derived from collective aspects of the self” (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994, p.503). Personal self-esteem is defined as a person’s evaluation of their individual self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965).

While esteem support might seem relevant in this context, there are two important reasons why esteem support or emotional support might not be sufficient to address identity threats invoked by racial discrimination: a) difference in situations that invoke esteem threats and identity threats and b) expected outcomes for coping with esteem threats and identity threats. Esteem support is relevant in situations that threaten one’s evaluation about their individual abilities and achievements (Holmstrom, 2012; Holmstrom & Burleson, 2011). For example, esteem threat examples can include getting
dumped by a romantic partner, losing a basketball game, or receiving a DUI. On the other hand, discrimination incidents described in the earlier section involve threats to one’s social identity, whereby individuals are avoided, derogated or negatively categorized based on their social identity. The focal outcome of esteem support messages is individual level self-esteem, whereas the focal outcome of social identity affirmation messages is collective self-esteem.

Attributional ambiguity is a defining feature of everyday discrimination experiences (Crocker & Major, 1989; Major & Crocker, 1993). Whether or not discrimination experiences pose an identity threat depends on how individuals make causal attributions about the discrimination incidents. Crocker, Major, and Steele (1998) contend that making external attributions about discrimination and emphasizing the positive aspects of one’s identity can address the identity threats posed by discrimination incidents. Building on Crocker’s research, the attribution theory of motivation (Weiner, 1986) is used to propose social identity affirmation as a support feature that facilitates a positive attribution of the causes that lead to everyday discrimination incidents.

In order to affirm the target’s threatened social identity, supportive messages need to help targets feel positively about their social identity, which is tied to their racial/ethnic group membership. Support providers can affirm the social identity of the targets by making salient the attributions that positively alter cast the target’s social identity that is tied to their racial/ethnic group. The four dimensions of causality in reattribute theory
are employed to construct the core features of social identity affirmation support: stability, controllability, locus of causality, and globality.

Stability is the degree to which a factor is expected to remain stable. Attributing negative events to a stable cause leads to negative emotions, while attributing negative events to unstable causes increases expectancies about positive events in the future. Controllability is the degree to which an individual perceives his/her ability to control a factor. Attribution of negative events as being uncontrollable leads to negative emotions, while attribution of negative events as being controllable increases expectancies about being able to avoid or prevent the negative events in the future. Locus of causality is the degree to which a causal factor is perceived as being internal or external. Internal attributions can lead to negative emotions such as self-blame, while external attributions can reduce the negative emotions by distancing the cause from oneself. Globality is the degree to which a causal factor is seen as being consistent over a period of time. Global attributions lead to perceptions that a causal factor will consistently cause negative outcomes, while specific attributions help to frame the negative event as an inconsistent/irregular occurrence.

In addition to identifying the relevant causal attributions, the study of supportive communication in this context also needs to identify the discursive processes involved in the act of affirming one’s social or collective identity. The communication literature provides insight about useful confirming practices such as recognition,
acknowledgement, and endorsement that are relevant in accomplishing the communicative task of affirming a person’s identity (Cissna & Sieburg, 1981). Therefore, it is proposed that social identity affirmation messages bring attention to the four relevant cognitive attributions by using affirming communication practice. For example, compliments help bring the support recipient’s attention to the positive aspects’ of his/her identity. These affirmations help establish that the problem lies outside of one’s self or social identity. Similarly, social identity affirmation messages recognize and acknowledge the ability of an individual as a member of their racial ethnic group. Social identity affirmation messages recognize the achievements and positive qualities of the racial/ethnic group in order to reinforce that a discrimination incident is an exception and not the norm. Finally, social identity affirmation messages affirm a threatened social identity by reinforcing that there exists a general positive consensus about the support receiver’s ethnic/racial group.

For the purpose of this dissertation social identity affirmation will be operationalized as two levels of social identity affirmation: high and low. Messages high in social identity affirmation will include four cognitions that cast discrimination instances as being external, unstable, controllable, and specific. On the other hand messages low in social identity affirmation include four cognitions that cast discrimination instances as internal, stable, uncontrollable, and global. It is hypothesized that high social identity affirmation messages will be associated with greater message
effectiveness and collective self-esteem than low social identity affirmation messages. Therefore a third hypothesis is proposed:

**H3:** Targets of everyday racial discrimination will evaluate high social identity-affirmation messages as (a) being higher in message effectiveness and multiple goal achievement than low social identity affirmation messages and (b) being associated with greater collective self-esteem than low social identity affirmation messages.

Causal attribution theory (Weiner, 1986) posits that reactions to a stressful event depend on the attributions that individuals make about the cause. Therefore, the effectiveness of social identity affirmation messages depends on whether these messages are able to bring about a beneficial reattribution about the discrimination incident. Prior research has identified reattribution as a mediating mechanism between support messages and their outcomes (Holmstrom & Burleson, 2011). Therefore, it is hypothesized that identity affirmation support can reaffirm a target’s identity by influencing the target’s attributions about the discrimination incident. Therefore a second mediating hypothesis is proposed:

**H4:** Reattribution will mediate the influence of social identity-affirmation messages on a) message effectiveness and multiple goal achievement and b) collective self-esteem.
Combination Support Messages

In addition to the individual influence of the message dimensions on participants’ message evaluation, it is also important to assess how a combination of the two features is evaluated. It is hypothesized that messages that combine high levels of the two dimensions will be more effective than messages that combine low levels of the two dimensions. The following hypothesis is proposed:

**H5:** Targets of everyday racial discrimination will evaluate high level combination support messages as (a) being higher in message effectiveness than low combination message and (b) being higher in other message outcomes than low level combination support messages.

The theoretical features and sample messages representing the message dimensions are provided in Table 1.

Other Factors Influencing the Evaluation of Support Messages

A large body of literature has focused on studying useful features of support messages, features of support providers and receivers that influence the processing of these messages, as well as situational or interactional contexts that influence supportive interactions. One way of synthesizing this large body of literature to study the influence of multiple factors on the effectiveness of support messages is the dual process theory of supportive communication (Bodie & Burleson, 2008).
Bodie and Burleson’s (2008) dual process theory of supportive communication is grounded in the dual process theories of persuasion such as the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and heuristic processing model (Chaiken, 1980). Elaboration is a central focus of the dual process theory of supportive communication and can be defined as “the extent to which a person thinks about the issue-relevant arguments contained in the message” (Petty & Cacciopo, 1986, p. 128). The theory adopts the assumption of two processing pathways – the central/systematic route involving greater message scrutiny, and the peripheral/heuristic-processing involving a reliance on cues instead of elaboration.

The dual process theory posits that message factors, individual level factors and situational factors affect the processing of support messages. According to Bodie and Burleson (2008) these influences can occur through different mechanisms, which require different levels of elaboration that can have different effects on recipient outcomes. According to the model, mechanisms that facilitate low elaboration and reliance on heuristics can help to achieve a temporary affect-change and make people feel better in mild forms of distress, where it is not important to address the cause of distress (Burleson, 2008). Mechanisms that require high elaboration can bring about cognitive appraisals that can be important for targeting the cause of distress and facilitation of coping during severe emotionally upsetting situations (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998).
Bodie and Burleson (2008) state that motivation to process support messages can be affected by situational factors like severity of the problem, timing of the message, content of the message, as well as individual factors like perceived availability of support, attachment style, affiliative needs as well as locus of control. Similarly, people’s ability to elaborate can be affected by situational factors like presence of distractors and cognitive load experienced by individuals, which can enhance or inhibit their capacity to engage in message scrutiny. When individuals do not possess adequate motivation or ability to process messages, environmental cues, which activate low elaboration or reliance on heuristics, influence evaluation of support messages.

In addition to the message features that are associated with the quality of support messages, evaluation of support messages can also depend on other factors associated with support providers, support receivers, and the situational context in which support is sought or provided. For example, support messages might be evaluated differently based on the biological sex of the person who provides support (Burleson, 2008), perceived credibility and/or level of confidence of the person providing support (Feng & MacGeorge, 2010), or experiential similarity (Suitor, Keeton, & Pillemer, 1995). Three important factors are identified that may influence the evaluation of support messages by targets of everyday racial discrimination: race/ethnicity of the support provider, number of inter-ethnic friendships, and perceived severity of the discrimination incident. The
following paragraphs provide a rationale for the selection for each of these factors and the accompanying research questions.

**Race/ethnicity of support provider.** Considering the context of racial or ethnicity-based discrimination, the ethnicity of the source and recipient becomes a salient issue. Some research has examined how members of different ethnicities or cultures differ in members’ evaluation of received support (e.g., Burleson & Mortenson, 2003; Mortenson, Liu, Burleson, & Liu, 2006). Burleson and Mortenson (2003) found that American and Chinese participants differ in their responses to support behaviors owing to differences in general value systems that characterize these two cultures, as well as the interaction goals that cultural members pursue in support situations. Members of collectivistic cultures and ethnicities such as Asians and African Americans tend to evaluate low person-centered messages as more helpful than members of other cultures and ethnicities (Burleson & Mortenson, 2003; Mortenson et al., 2006; Samter, Whaley, Mortenson, & Burleson, 1997). Differences in the evaluation of support messages are rooted in the cultural context in which support is provided. Members of collectivist cultures such as Chinese or Asian participants differ from individualist cultures such as North America in terms of the goals of social support as well as the interpretation or evaluation of enacted support (Burleson, 2003). According to Burleson, supportive communication in collectivist cultures is concerned with restoration of social harmony, while supportive communication in individualist cultures focuses on granting legitimacy.
to an individual’s distress. Finally, while members of individualistic cultures are more concerned about the message quality, members of collectivist cultures are more concerned about the presence of the support provider.

Therefore, existing research suggests that culturally dissimilar individuals might have different ideas about what constitutes effective social support provision. Whether the ethnicity of the support provider can influence message evaluation in the context of racial discrimination remains to be seen. Research in persuasion and social psychology can provide some insight about the role of ethnicity in influencing perception of messages. Research in social psychology suggests that social support provided by an individual who shares a social identity with the support recipient is more effective (Frisch, Hausser, van Dick, & Mojsisch, 2014). Mackie, Worth, and Asuncion (1990) found that the quality of the quality of persuasive messages does not seem to matter when the source is an out-group member, and people are largely not persuaded by messages that are attributed to out-group sources.

Ethnicity/race is at the core of the everyday discrimination experience. Considering that ethnic/racial similarity can be associated with experiential similarities, it is plausible that the ethnicity of the support provider might influence how support messages are perceived and evaluated. Therefore, a first research question is proposed to examine whether race/ethnicity of the support provider influences the perception of support messages in the context of everyday racial discrimination:
**RQ1:** Does the ethnicity of support provider moderate the influence of message quality on evaluations of message effectiveness and other message outcomes?

**The role of inter-ethnic friendships.** Research on college students’ experiences of racial microaggressions find that intra-ethnic or intra-racial friendships among students belonging to minority racial/ethnic groups become primary sources of support for students to cope with racial microaggressions (Martinez Aleman, 2000; McCabe, 2009; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). These studies underscore the importance of experiential similarities in friendships among young adults who belong to the same ethnic group.

However, people who have strong inter-ethnic friendships might also be better equipped to deal with instances of everyday racial discrimination. Page-Gould (2012) contends that cross-group friendships equip people to deal with intergroup stress by providing a source of social support that is uniquely relevant to the source of the problem. She also found that out-group friends are perceived as positive out-group exemplars that can negate the impact and facilitate speedy recovery from a negative intergroup interaction. Page-Gould’s results indicated that individuals with inter-ethnic friendships were more likely to engage in intergroup contact even after stressful incidents. In the context of everyday racial discrimination, individuals who have inter-ethnic friendships are not only accustomed to interacting with someone who has a different ethnicity but also have interpersonal attraction towards that friend. Prior research has shown that inter-
ethnic or inter-racial friendships can foster a positive inter-group orientation (Pettigrew, 1997; Wright & Van Der Zande, 1999). Therefore, a person who has inter-ethnic friendship(s) might be more willing to see the friend’s ethnic group in a more neutral or positive way as compared someone who has no inter-ethnic friends. However, whether or not inter-ethnic friendships influence the interpretation of support messages in the racial discrimination context remains to be seen. Therefore the second research question is proposed:

**RQ2:** Does the number of inter-ethnic friendships moderate the influence of source ethnicity on evaluations of message effectiveness and other message outcomes?

**Perceived severity of the problem.** The severity of the problem situation can also influence the effects of supportive interactions (Burleson, 2009). Experiences of everyday discrimination can often be perceived as ambiguous situations that may or may not be interpreted as discrimination. The problem severity of the situation might further depend on the appraisal of the situation by the distressed individual. Situations that are seen as very severe might indicate greater need for support than situations that are seen as moderately stressful, but might also influence how much attention is paid to the processing and interpretation of supportive messages (Burleson, 2008).

For instance, people are likely to differ in the way in which they appraise everyday acts of racial discrimination acts. While some might perceive these acts as very
severe, others might not think of these situations as relevant threats. How people appraise the situation will also determine their social support needs. For example, if someone perceived that an everyday racist incident was minor, then his or her support needs will be much lower than someone who appraises this situation as a severe and distressing incident. Burleson (2009) contends that emotional distress is unpleasant and therefore people who experience greater distress are more motivated to reduce their upset than those experiencing less distress. Therefore, individuals who appraise the situation as being more severe should be more motivated to focus on the content and quality of the supportive message and would be less likely to rely on ethnicity as a cue to evaluate the message quality. On the other hand, those who appraise their situation as less severe will be less motivated to process supportive messages and would rely on ethnicity as a cue to evaluate message quality. Therefore, a third research question is proposed to assess the role of problem severity:

**RQ3:** Does perceived severity of the problem moderate the influence of message quality on evaluations of message effectiveness and other message outcomes?

Overall, two support message dimensions relevant for dealing with everyday racial discrimination are proposed: person-centeredness, and social identity affirmation. The hypotheses contend that high levels of these dimensions will be associated with perceptions of message effectiveness and other message outcomes. Additionally, reappraisal, empathy, and reattribution processes will mediate the influence of messages
on message evaluation and outcomes. In addition to hypotheses about the message
dimensions, three research questions are posed to investigate the influence of three
moderating factors that could influence message evaluation. The next section describes
the method proposed to investigate these hypotheses and research questions.
Chapter 4: Method

An online experiment employing the message perception paradigm (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002) was conducted to test the hypotheses and research questions proposed in Chapter 3. The online experiment was preceded by a pre-study to understand the commonly experienced scenarios of discrimination and the relevant support messages. This chapter begins with a report on the procedures and findings of this pre-study. A description of the participants, stimuli design, procedures, and instruments used in the study follows.

Pre-study

The pre-study employed an online open-ended questionnaire. The following paragraphs describe the participants, procedures, and results of this questionnaire.

Participants and Procedures

A total of 24 participants participated in the pre-study, of which 58% (n = 14) were female and 42% (n = 10) were male. The average age of the participants was 32 years. Among the participants 38% (n = 9) identified as Black, African American or African, 58% (n = 14) identified as Asian American or Asian, and 4% (n = 1) identified as biracial/multiracial. Finally, 17% (n = 4) of the participants had obtained a graduate degree, 46% (n = 11) were current graduate students, and 37% (n = 9) were current undergraduate students. Participants were recruited from mailing lists for two cultural
student organizations at a large Midwestern university. No incentives were provided to participate in the study.

Participants completed an online questionnaire about their experiences with everyday racial discrimination and relevant support conversations about these incidents. Specifically, participants were asked to recall two separate incidents involving everyday racial discrimination. In order to provide clarity about which types of incidents could count as discrimination, everyday discrimination was described as: “*subtle forms of racial discrimination can be intentional or unintentional verbal or non-verbal communication that you find insulting, hostile, or disrespectful toward you as a member of your racial group*”. After each recalled conversation participants were asked if they talked to someone about the incident to seek support.

If they answered yes, they were asked to recall the conversation. The instructions for recalling the conversations read as follows:

“My think about the conversation you had with this other person. Please try to recall and describe the conversation in as much detail as possible. Write down the conversation for us using the exact words/phrases that you can recall. You can start by stating briefly how you described the incident to the other person. Then write down what the other person said to you using their exact words. Write down everything you can remember that was said during this conversation”.

If they answered no they were asked:
“Hypothetically, if you had talked to someone about this (friend/parent/significant other, etc.), what would you want to hear from him or her? Please try to list what you think would be the most helpful things to say in this situation. List as many as you can”.

After describing the conversations participants responded to two subsequent questions asking about which aspects of the conversation were most helpful and which aspects were least helpful. After this participants were then asked to recall a second discrimination incident (different from the one they described first). For the second discrimination incident participants were asked to recall one of the best or the worst support conversation they had about that second incident. Again, for participants who couldn’t recall a second incident or a conversation that they had about this incident, participants were asked to describe what they would want to hear if they chose to talk to someone.

In addition to the recalled incidents and support conversations participants reported their age, gender, ethnicity/race, and educational status. Participants also reported the ethnicity, gender, estimated age of the perpetrator, and their relationship with the perpetrator.

**Pre-study Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using grounded theory techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data were compiled into three subsets: recalled incidents of everyday
discrimination, responses describing helpful message features, and responses describing unhelpful message features. The coding procedures and analyses for these three subsets of the data are described next. Text responses were open coded to identify initial codes which are defined as, “a word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based data” (Saldana, 2009, p.3). These initial codes represented features of discrimination incidents, or features of helpful and unhelpful support messages. Thereafter axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was conducted which is the process of relating codes to each other. Using constant comparison procedures semantically identical units were combined into larger thematic categories. Some of the constant comparative techniques included searching for negative cases that would challenge the emerging categories.

**General features of everyday discrimination incidents.** Open-ended responses from the online questionnaire yielded a total of 27 recalled incidents of everyday discrimination. The responses were open coded to identify 27 specific actions that were perceived to be discriminatory by the participants. Using constant comparison procedures, three thematic categories of everyday discrimination incidents emerged: avoidance, derogation, and categorization.

**Avoidance.** Participants reported incidents in which perpetrators avoided them or acted in ways that made the participants feel excluded. Five (18.5%) participants recalled incidents where they were avoided. Avoidance examples included actions that conveyed
avoiding physical contact as well as avoiding verbal communication. For example, one participant recalled:

“I was working full-time as an English instructor and part-time at Belk (similar to Macy's) back in 2011/2012. One day at my part-time job, I was ringing up jewelry for a customer. Traditionally, people will hand me their dollars and coins, but this particular woman (who happened to be white) placed the money on the counter. At first, I thought it was just an absent-minded act since most people know that it's rude to place the money on the counter, especially when the associate is holding out her hand. So, I gather the money off the counter and collected her change from the register. Change in hand, I held it out to place the change in the palm of her hand and she refused to take it. "Place it on the counter," she said. Initially, I didn't know what to think about her behavior but it seemed that the only rational conclusion was that she didn't want my black hand to touch her white hand”.

While this example conveyed avoidance of physical contact another participant (an Asian international student) noted being ignored by her American peers in a conversation. The participant stated:

“When I was among a group of Americans, if I don't force myself in the conversation my presence can be easily ignored by others. For example, people
can carry conversation among each other without even looking at me the whole time as if I was not there”.

Thus, examples of avoidance included behaviors where individuals tried to directly establish physical distance from ethnic minorities but also instances where no effort was made to engage with or include ethnic minority individuals.

**Derogation.** A second category of discrimination incidents involved non-verbal assaults directed at one’s racial/ethnic group as well as instances of being treated as inferior to Caucasians. Thirteen (48.2%) participants reported incidents in which they were the targets of derogatory behavior. Examples of non-verbal assaults included the use of racial slurs or racial epithets, as well as offensive jokes about a particular ethnic/racial group. Some participants also mentioned how racial epithets were used by perpetrators as jokes but were perceived as offensive by the participants. For example, an Indian participant recalled:

“I went to a party with some American friends once. One person at the party was drunk and called me a dot head. I did not even know what that meant but my friend said it was slang used to describe Indian women (referring to the bindi Indian women put on their forehead). I was shocked that my friend also took it jokingly. I felt very uncomfortable and made an excuse to leave the party early.”
Similarly, some examples were non-verbal actions in which participants felt they were singled out and treated rudely in situations where other privileged members were not subjected to the same treatment. One Black participant recalled:

“I was followed in a store by a white lady in spite of telling her that I do not need help. It was clear that she was following me because I was a black girl in a high end store where she thought I was going to steal something.”

**Categorization.** The third category of discrimination incidents involved perpetrators making assumptions about participants based on their race/ethnicity. Nine participants (33.3%) reported experiencing incidents where they felt they were categorized or stereotyped based on their race/ethnicity. Different categorization instances emerged for African American and Asian American participants. Assumptions regarding African Americans often involved questioning their intellectual ability. For example, one person stated that the interviewer was surprised that the participant had a degree. Examples included incidents where people made explicit comments verbalizing specific assumptions about Asians. Assumptions about Asian Americans included views expressing that all Asians are the same, are very competitive, and culturally disconnected with the American culture. For example, one participant recalled:

“At the student fair on campus, I was volunteering at a student organization booth that I am a part of. An elderly White woman was volunteering at a booth next to ours. It was crowded and she made a comment about how Asians are very
rude and push you in the crowd. I interrupted her and said that is an offensive statement. She said, ‘Of course, not you, you are not that kind of Asian’.

Overall, responses describing everyday discrimination incidents produced a variety of verbal and non-verbal behaviors that constituted features of discrimination situations. The majority of these responses clustered around three broad thematic categories: avoidance, derogation, and categorization.

**Helpful features of support messages.** There were 40 open-ended responses that identified what participants perceived to be helpful features of support messages. Of these responses 14 reported helpful features of recalled support conversations, and 26 responses addressed what participants wanted to hear from a support provider. Six categories of helpful features of support messages emerged from the data.

*Validating feelings.* Participants reported that messages conveying understanding and acceptance of their emotional reactions were helpful. Nine participants reported on their need to be comforted, to feel understood, and the need to be assured about their right to be upset about the situation. Validation and understanding of one’s feelings seemed to be important because it legitimized their interpretation of the situation. For example, one participant noted, “The best thing that I like to hear is that someone understands why I am so enraged. I just really hate to be belittled like what I’m sensing is imaginary.” Participants stressed the importance of their perspective being validated as well as their dis-preference for their emotions being dismissed. Another participant noted, “I like that
they understood where I was coming from. They didn’t just try to provide a perfectly logical explanation and explain away the way I felt. They didn’t belittle my feelings and uncomfortableness (sic). They validated me and told me they felt the same”. In addition to validating their perspectives, participants also appreciated verbal and non-verbal communication that comforted them. For example, one participant wrote, “I felt very comforted after my friend hugged me to make me feel better. In addition to that gesture I very much appreciated the fact that he acknowledged it was okay for me to feel angry and sad.”

Externalizing the cause of the problem. Participants reported that the support provider’s attempts to externalize the cause of discriminatory behavior made them feel better. Seven participants stated that attributing the fault to the perpetrator rather than blaming themselves was helpful. Examples of statements externalizing the problem included:

“He reassured me that this problem was not my problem. This made me realize that I should not feel bad about myself but pity the person who was ignorant enough to say the horrible things to me.” and “people who say racist things are ignorant and need help, it is important that you should not let these things affect your day to day life.”

Finding solutions. Support messages that provided actual solutions to tackle the immediate problems in the given situations were also considered helpful. These solutions
included advice about managing emotions as well as strategies to confront and/or talk to the perpetrators. For example, one participant who was dealing with discriminatory behavior from a classmate said, “I would want them to tell me how I could address the issue. How I could possibly talk to that classmate again and tell him what he said was wrong and inappropriate.”

Sharing similar experiences. Participants indicated that hearing similar experiences from support providers was helpful. In some cases similarity of experiences might have helped in reiterating that the participants were not alone in their experiences of discrimination. For example, one participant noted, “I think that it was helpful that my friend had a similar experience to share. I think talking to her made me realize that this was an issue that was much bigger than me and the girls from work.” In another case similarity of experiences allowed participants to connect to their support providers. For example, a participant stated, “I’d probably want to hear about any experiences he/she has had in order to know how they dealt with it.”

Reaffirming self-worth. In addition to externalizing the cause of the problem, participants also reported feeling better when support providers made them feel about themselves. Four participants mentioned that it was helpful to be reassured about their individual ability to rise above the situation. Examples of reaffirming participants’ self-worth included: “It is wrong but you can let it go. You are above this”, and “One racist comment will not break me, it won’t stop me from believing in my own strengths.”
Eliciting empathy and expanding perspectives. A final feature of support messages that participants identified as helpful were messages that motivated participants to be more empathic and open-minded. Participants expressed that they were willing to hear other perspectives about the situation. For example, one participant wrote, “I’d want someone to help expand my horizons, give me differing viewpoints within reason.” Another participant when asked what they would want to hear from a support provider stated, “1. Be patient with myself and others 2. Be open-minded 3. Have faith in human beings 4. Live your life and don’t care how others look at you.” Some participants also reported that being aware of one’s own biases was also important in an effort to conquer racism. A participant stated, “It would be nice to hear that by not responding in a likewise discriminatory manner, I help make the world a little less racist”.

In summary, six thematic categories of helpful message features emerged: validating feelings, externalizing the cause of the problem, finding solutions, sharing similar experiences, reaffirming self-worth, and eliciting empathy/broadening perspectives.

Unhelpful features of support messages. There were only 6 open-ended responses that described unhelpful features of recalled support messages. All six responses clustered around a single thematic category: delegitimizing participants’ perspectives and emotions.
Delegitimizing participants’ perspectives and emotions. Six participants reported that they did not find support messages helpful when the support provider dismissed the seriousness of the problem and their emotional reaction to the problem. For example one participant stated, “My friend did not understand how important this was for me. Although it seems like a petty issue, I was very hurt by it. I wanted my friend to realize that this made me feel humiliated and angry. I felt frustrated that my friend not only dismissed me but also criticized me for reading too much into this situation.” In one instance a support provider encouraged the participant to focus on her friendship with the perpetrator, who was her friend. The support provider said, “Get over it already. She’s a good friend. She says really dumb things but overall she is a loyal friend.” The participant interpreted this as a dismissal of her perspective and evaluated this being unhelpful.

The pre-study provided useful insights about everyday discrimination incidents as well as helpful and unhelpful features of supportive messages in this context. Recalled discrimination incidents led to the validation of three types of discrimination incidents: avoidance, derogation, and categorization. These examples closely resembled the examples referenced in prior literature and mapped on to the typology proposed in Chapter Two.

Analysis of helpful recalled messages led to six categories: validating feelings, externalizing the cause of the problem, finding solutions, sharing similar experiences,
reaffirming self-worth, and eliciting empathy and expanding perspectives. These categories also mapped onto the supportive communication literature that outlines effective message features for provision of emotional and esteem support. For example, validation of feelings is characteristic feature of a level seven high person-centered messages in Applegate’s (1980) hierarchy of person-centeredness. Similarly eliciting empathy and expanding perspectives of one’s conversation partner is a characteristic of a level nine person-centered message. Therefore, these examples were used in constructing high-person centered messages for Study 1. Similarly externalizing the cause of the problem is a characteristic of problem-focused esteem support messages (Holmstrom & Burleson, 2011). These examples provided a basis for the construction of social-identity affirmation messages.

Similarly, analysis of the unhelpful messages also highlighted that participants do not appreciate support providers who dismiss or criticize their perspectives and emotions. These examples represented levels one and two of the person-centered hierarchy and were used to construct low person-centered messages in Study 1. A detailed report of stimuli development and research procedures for Study 1 are described next.

**Study 1**

An online message perception study was designed to test the hypotheses and research questions about the effectiveness of the two message features, and the proposed mediating and moderating processes proposed in Chapter 3. The study was funded by the
Ohio State University School of Communication Time Sharing Experiments program (TESoC) program, which provided access to an online participant panel through Qualtrics.com. The following sections describe the participants, study design and procedures, development of the discrimination scenarios and messages, and the instruments used in the study.

**Participants**

Participants were 750 adults (394 women, 391 men) recruited through the opt-in panel provider, Qualtrics.com. An overview of the sample characteristics is provided in Table 1. These participants were members of a participant pool, and participate in research studies in exchange for monetary incentives provided by Qualtrics.com. In order to participate in the current study participants had to satisfy two eligibility criteria. First, they had to be over 18 years of age. Second, they had to self-identify as either Asian/Asian American or Black/African American. Qualtrics.com handled the eligibility screening and data collection processes. They provided 750 “good completes” or responses from individuals who satisfied the eligibility criteria, and successfully completed the questionnaire, including two attention filters questions (e.g., for data quality purposes select disagree below”).

**Study Design and Procedures**

For all three message types (social identity affirmation, person-centeredness, combination) a 3 X 2 X 2 X 2 factorial design was implemented that included the
following factors: 3 discrimination scenarios (avoidance, derogation and categorization), 2 situation types for each scenario, 2 levels of message quality (high, low), and 2 conditions of source ethnicity (same, different).

Each of the three discrimination scenarios (avoidance, derogation and categorization) included two situation examples. Using multiple situation examples to manipulate messages is a common design strategy used to increase the generalizability of findings in message perception research (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002). Six messages were created for each situation. Each of the three message dimension conditions (person-centeredness, social identity affirmation, and combination) was operationalized as an independent variable with two levels of quality (high and low). Finally, the ethnicity of the support provider was manipulated to be the same as the participant’s ethnicity or different.

Informed consent was obtained from eligible participants using an online form that preceded the online questionnaire. Once participants indicated that they had read the consent information and were willing to participate they were directed to a study overview. The study instructions described the five broad sections of questionnaire. In the first section, participants reported their basic demographic information. In the second section participants were randomly assigned to read one of three discrimination scenarios, and asked to imagine themselves as the target of the discriminatory behaviors described in the scenario. In the third section they were asked to imagine that they had disclosed
their discrimination experience to a friend. A photograph of a friend was shown to the participants. The gender of the photograph was matched with the gender of the participants. The race/ethnicity of the person in the photograph was randomized (either Asian American, African American or Caucasian). In the fourth section participants were randomly assigned to read one of forty-eight messages based on their ethnicity, and the discrimination scenario they were presented with in section two. Finally in the fifth section of the questionnaire, participants answered questions about the message and likely outcomes from the message. The section also included questions about participants’ prior experiences with everyday discrimination and their identification with their ethnic/racial group.

**Development of Everyday Discrimination Scenarios**

Everyday discrimination scenarios were constructed based on prior research that has identified recurring examples of everyday racism (e.g., Feagin, 1991; Sue, 2011) as well as data gathered in the pre-study. Three types of everyday discrimination scenarios were identified: avoidance, derogation, and categorization. Descriptions of discrimination scenarios were constructed to reflect specific communicative actions that represented avoidance, derogation, and categorization of individuals in everyday interaction situations.

Previous research (Sue, 2010) has relied on examples that could be seen as relying heavily on daily interactions that don’t always lead to a clear interpretation that
these incidents are examples of discrimination. Therefore, in the current study an effort was made to construct interaction examples in a way that would minimize alternative explanations for discriminatory behavior. Two examples were constructed for each type of scenarios (avoidance, derogation, and categorization). The scenario descriptions can be found in the Appendix A.

Avoidance scenarios involved actions that conventionally signified an intent to increase or maintain a physical distance with an individual who belonged to an ethnic/racial minority group. For instance, the first version of the avoidance scenario was:

“Imagine that you are sitting in a bus. The bus is almost full but the seat next to you is empty. A Caucasian man enters the bus. He looks at the empty seat next to you. You smile and make eye contact. The man looks away and does not smile back. He stands for the rest of the time you are on the bus. As your stop approaches you get up from your seat and stand next to the exit door. As you walk out you see the man sit where you were sitting.”

The derogation scenarios involved actions that conventionally signified the superiority of individuals from privileged social groups over individuals from discriminated social groups. These scenarios involve preferential treatment of Caucasian Americans over members of other ethnicities. One rejection scenario used in the study is:

“You are at a high-end apparel store in the mall. There are a few European American customers browsing through the store. As you enter the store, a store
attendant who is sitting at the check out counter starts staring at you. As you begin to browse she gets up and starts following you. The attendant then comes up to you and asks, “looking for anything in particular?” You tell her that you are just looking around and continue to browse. She still keeps following you as you walk around in the store.”

The categorization scenarios involved actions that conventionally signified that a member of a racial or ethnic group possessed or lacked some specific traits or abilities that are associated with their racial/ethnic group. Common assumptions about African Americans can include notions about lower intelligence and possible criminality (Watkins, LaBarrie, & Appio, 2010). Common assumptions about Asian American can include assumptions about higher intelligence and foreign-ness (Lin, 2010). Based on these assumptions one categorization scenario that was developed for African American participants was:

“You are walking on the sidewalk of a busy street. A woman is walking towards you on the sidewalk. She looks at you and clutches her purse and looks away from you. She has an expression of fear on her face and moves away from you while you pass her”. The scenario for Asian American participants was, “You are meeting your friend’s sister for the first time. Immediately after your friend introduces you, the mother asks where you are from. You tell her that you are
from San Diego, California. Not satisfied with the answer, she asks, “Where are you really from? and “What are you?”

**Development of Support Messages**

A total of forty-eight messages were developed for this study. Twelve messages each were created for three discrimination scenarios (avoidance, derogation, and categorization). Within each scenario two messages were created to represent high and low levels of the three message dimension conditions (person-centeredness, social identity affirmation, and a combination condition).

Messages high in person-centeredness reflected levels seven through nine of the person-centered hierarchy (Burleson, 1984). These messages explicitly acknowledged, legitimized and elaborated the perspectives of the individuals experiencing discrimination. Messages low in person-centeredness reflected levels one through three of the person-centered hierarchy and criticized, rejected, and dismissed the perspectives of the individuals experiencing discrimination. Messages operationalizing social identity affirmation addressed the four relevant attributions about discrimination: locus, controllability, globality and stability of discrimination. Messages were constructed using affirming expressions that complemented that racial/ethnic group of the support provider. These affirmative expressions included acknowledgement of a person’s achievements as a successful member of their ethnic/racial group (e.g., *you are a strong person of color*) as well as views that helped to restore or maintain a positive status of the entire
racial/ethnic group (e.g., I/we all respect the resilience of your racial group). Messages low in social identity affirmation expressed that discrimination is an external problem, is controllable, is not global, and is not stable. On the other hand messages high in social identity affirmation expressed that discrimination was an internal problem, was not controllable, was global, and was stable.

Combining the high features of person-centeredness and social identity affirmation messages, a high combination message was created for each discrimination scenario. Similarly, low levels of both message types were merged to construct low combination messages. Sample message example with description of message features is provided in Table 2.

The message design process involved several stages. Messages were initially constructed by operationalizing the individual theoretical constructs in the person-centered hierarchy and the four attributions outlined by attribution theory. Messages were then subjected to several rounds of revision to make the language more colloquial while retaining the core theoretical concepts. Messages and scenarios were also subjected to a pretest among a convenience sample of 25 African American and Asian American adults. Participants were asked to indicate on a Likert-type scale how realistic each message was in the given situation. Participants also provided open-ended responses that listed specific suggestions for improving the messages. Taking these responses into account, messages went through a final revision before they were used for the study. All messages were of
similar length (100-112 words). The final 48 messages used in the study can be found in Appendix B.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message Dimension</th>
<th>Message Quality</th>
<th>Example Message</th>
<th>Features Embodied in the Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person-centeredness</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>I can understand how angry and upset you are. It’s outrageous that people might still act this way today! It is disappointing, as it seems he was avoiding sitting next to you because you aren’t white. So it is natural that you’d feel upset about this incident. But you know sometimes people grow up with these biased attitudes and they might not even realize how their actions can be seen as offensive. I’ve been in a similar situation and I felt terrible too. But then I realized I could feel better if I could consider this as their ignorance and move on.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>I think it’s ridiculous you are still thinking about this. You can’t get upset about who sits where on the bus. You are an adult and you shouldn’t get upset over such petty issues. Just stop imagining that people are always avoiding you because of your ethnicity. It’s just wrong for you to overanalyze a situation like this. Maybe you were putting out a weird vibe that prevented people from sitting next to you. You know, buses aren’t the most efficient public transport in this city. I don’t like riding the bus. Forget about that man, and forget about the bus.</td>
<td>Message explicitly recognized and elaborates other’s feelings. Message elaborates, acknowledges and provides an explanation of other’s feelings. Message attempts to help the person to see their feelings in relation to a broader context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Identity</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>You know this is not about you, right? It’s not your fault that some people can’t get past your ethnicity. Other people and I respect you for who you are. As a member of your ethnicity, you have so many achievements in your personal and professional life to be proud of. So, incidents like these won’t harm your strong heritage and your rich culture. Maybe if we explain to people that their actions can be seen as offensive, they might not act that way again. I think things are changing because people are becoming more aware of such biases. Incidents like these might become less frequent in the future.</td>
<td>Message conveys external locus of causality. Message casts incident as specific rather than global (this is an exception). Message elaborates on the controllable nature of problem. Message elaborates on the unstable or transient nature of the problem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
Unfortunately, people tend to make so many assumptions about you because of your ethnicity. That’s why some people might not sit next to you on the bus or socialize with you in other situations. I know that you can’t easily succeed at work or even expect great service at a restaurant because of your ethnicity. People treat you differently because of your ethnicity all the time. But we can’t change everyone’s mindset and make them treat everyone equally. People will continue to behave like this because such biases don’t go away quickly. I think such incidents will continue to happen in the future.

Combined Messages

I know that you are upset. It’s disappointing, as it seems like he was avoiding sitting next to you because you aren’t white. Sometimes people grow up with these biases and don’t even realize how inappropriate their actions are. Letting it go might help. When I encountered a similar situation I realized I could feel better by not focusing on how people treat me, but on how I react to people’s actions. And this is not about you. Other people and I respect you for who you are. Incidents like these won’t harm your strong heritage and your rich culture. I think things are changing and such incidents will become less frequent.

Low

I think it’s ridiculous that you are still moping about this. You can’t be upset about who sits where on the bus. Just stop imagining that people are always avoiding you because of your ethnicity. It’s just wrong for you to overanalyze this situation. Forget about that man, and forget about the bus. Unfortunately, your ethnicity prevents some people from sitting next to you on the bus or being your friend. People will treat you differently because of your ethnicity all the time, so I think we can’t change people’s mindsets and make them treat everyone equally. I think such incidents will continue to happen in the future.

Message conveys internal locus of causality
Message casts incident as global rather than specific (this happens all the time)
Message elaborates on the uncontrollable nature of problem
Message elaborates on the stable or transient nature of the problem

Message incorporates features from the high levels of both message dimensions

Message incorporates features from the low levels of both message dimensions
Instrumentation

In order to test the proposed hypotheses and research questions, the following measures will be used. The instruments used form five types of variables: demographic characteristics, manipulation checks, message effectiveness and message outcomes, mediating factors, and moderating factors. Participants responded to all items except where mentioned on 7-point Likert scales (1= strongly disagree; 7= strongly agree).

Demographic Characteristics

Participants were asked to their age, gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, and education level. Considering that race/ethnicity was a selection criterion for participation, participants chose from the two options to indicate their race/ethnicity: African/African American and Asian/Asian American. A detailed list of items of the demographic variables is included in Appendix A.

Manipulation Checks

Participants completed three manipulation checks for the discrimination scenarios and support messages.

Scenario realism. Three scenario realism items assessed the extent to which participants perceived the discrimination scenarios to be realistic. These items have been extensively employed in message perception studies of supportive communication (e.g., Feng, 2009; Ford, Babrow, & Stohl, 1996; Holmstrom & Kim, 2012). One sample item was: “This scenario is believable”. The three items
demonstrated satisfactory levels of internal reliability ($\alpha = .91, M = 5.52, SD = 1.28$) and were averaged to create a composite measure of scenario realism.

**Message realism.** Message realism items assessed the extent to which participants perceived that the support messages simulated real life conversations. Three items used in prior message perception studies (Holmstrom & Kim, 2012; Feng & Burleson, 2008; Samter, Burleson, & Murphy, 1987) were used to measure message realism. Sample items were: “It is hard for me to imagine a person hearing this message” and “This message is believable”. All four items demonstrated satisfactory levels of internal consistency ($\alpha = .81, M = 5.31, SD = 1.30$), and were averaged to create a single measure of message realism.

**Person-centeredness.** The person-centeredness items measured the extent to which participants perceived a message as being person-centered. Four items from Jones (2004) were used. Sample items were: “This message focused on my feelings” or “This message validated my feelings”. The four items demonstrated satisfactory levels of reliability ($\alpha = .93, M = 4.62, SD = 1.68$), and were averaged to create a single measure of person-centeredness.

**Social identity affirmation.** Five items measured the extent to which participants perceived that the message reaffirmed their social identity. Five items were created by the researcher. Sample items were: “I am a worthy member of my ethnic/racial group” and “My racial/ethnic group is valued and respected by other people”. The five items demonstrated satisfactory levels of reliability ($\alpha = .93, M =$}
4.54, $SD = 1.60$), and were averaged to form a composite measure of social identity affirmation.

**Message Effectiveness and Message Outcomes**

Participants evaluated the support messages on several features: general message effectiveness, affect change, collective self-esteem, and effectiveness in achieving multiple goals.

**Message effectiveness.** Message effectiveness was assessed using six items from Goldsmith, McDermott, and Alexander (2000). These items have been extensively employed in prior studies of supportive communication (e.g., Bodie, Burleson, & Jones, 2012; High & Dillard, 2012). Participants responded to seven adjective pairs to indicate the extent to which support messages were “helpful/unhelpful”, “appropriate/inappropriate”, “sensitive/insensitive”, “supportive/unsupportive”, “effective/ineffective”, and “successful/unsuccessful”. Participants indicated the degree with which they agreed with each statement on a Likert-type scale of 1-7 (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). These seven items demonstrated a satisfactory level of internal reliability ($\alpha = .95, M = 4.46, SD = 1.72$) and were averaged to form a composite measure of message effectiveness.

**Affect change.** The emotional improvement items measured the extent to which the participants perceived that the message helped them improve their emotional state. Five items from Jones (2004) were used. Sample items were: “This message would make me feel better” and “This message would make me feel more
optimistic”. These five items demonstrated a satisfactory level of internal reliability ($\alpha = .96, M = 4.37, SD = 1.74$), and were averaged into a composite measure of affect change.

**Collective self-esteem.** Four items assessed the extent to which participants perceive that the support messages would affect their collective self-esteem. These items were adapted from the collective self-esteem scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) to assess the extent to which support messages reaffirmed participants’ collective self-esteem. Sample items were: “This message would make me feel proud about belonging to my racial/ethnic group” and “This message would make me feel that others respect my race/ethnicity”. The four items were internally consistent and were averaged to form a composite measure of collective self-esteem ($\alpha = .95, M = 4.46, SD = 1.72$).

**Effectiveness in accomplishing multiple goals.** Message effectiveness in accomplishing four types of goals was also measured: instrumental goals, positive and negative face goals, identity goals, and relationship goals. The items used to measure how effectively support messages addressed each of these goals are described next.

**Instrumental goals.** Four items measured the extent to which participants perceived the messages as being effective in facilitating instrumental goals relevant in the context of everyday discrimination. Items were created by the researcher. Sample items were: “This message would help me feel better” and “This message would help
me deal with the incident”. The items demonstrated a satisfactory level of internal reliability ($\alpha = .95, M = 4.53, SD = 1.73$) and were averaged to form a composite.

**Relational goals.** Four items from Holmstrom, Burleson and Jones (2005) measured the extent to which the participants’ perceived that the message could enhance their relationship with the support provider. Sample items were: “This message would leave me liking my conversational partner” and “This message would make my relationship with the support provider stronger”. The four items were internally consistent and were averaged to form a composite measure of relational goals ($\alpha = .957, M = 4.69, SD = 1.75$).

**Face goals.** Seven items from Goldsmith (2000) assessed the extent to which participants’ perceived that the support message addressed their positive and negative face needs. Sample items for positive face needs were: “This message would make me feel like I am being criticized” and “This message would make me feel liked”. The three items for positive face goals were internally consistent and were averaged to form a composite ($\alpha = .95, M = 4.17, SD = 1.73$).

Sample items for negative face were: “This message would make me feel that I am free to decide for myself how to cope with the discrimination experience” and “This message would make me feel like I have to do what I am told”. There was internal consistency within the four items for negative face ($\alpha = .91, M = 4.27, SD = 1.63$), which were averaged to form a composite.
Identity goals. Six items from Wilson’s research (Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 2006; Wilson & Feng, 2007) assessed the extent to which support messages addressed participants’ personal identity and collective identity goals. These items were reworded to make them relevant to the discrimination and support context. One of the sample items for personal identity was: “This message would make me feel valued”. These items demonstrated internal consistency and were averaged to form a composite (α = .95, M = 4.35, SD = 1.81). Sample item for collective identity goals was: “This message would make me feel positively about the status of my racial/ethnic group”. These items also demonstrated internal consistency and were averaged to form a collective identity goal scale (α = .95, M = 4.38, SD = 1.79). Mediating and Moderating Factors

The message dimensions are hypothesized to influence message effectiveness and outcomes through three mediating mechanisms: reappraisal, empathy, and reattribution.

Reappraisal. Reappraisal items measured the extent to which the participants perceived that the support message helped them think about the incident differently or re-evaluate the situation in a way that would make them feel better. Five items were adapted from Jones and Wirtz (2006). Sample items are: “This message made me think about the discrimination incident in a different light” and “This message helped me re-evaluate the discrimination incident”. These five items demonstrated a
satisfactory level of internal reliability ($\alpha = .93$, $M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.63$), and were averaged to form a composite.

**Empathy.** Empathy measured the extent to which the participants perceived that the message reflected an effort from the support provider to empathize with them. Seven items were created by the researcher. Sample items were: “This message made me feel that my friend empathized with me” and, “This message made me feel that my friend understood the reasons why I could be upset about the situation”. These items demonstrated internal consistency ($\alpha = .97$, $M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.87$), and were averaged into a composite measure of empathy.

**Reattribution.** Reattribution items measured the extent to which the participants perceived the message as restructuring cognitions about the discrimination incident in order to reaffirm their collective self-esteem. Five items were adapted from Jones and Kim (2012). Sample items are: “This message lead me to think that the cause of discriminatory behavior is me/is not me” “This message lead me to think that the cause of discriminatory behavior is unlikely to last/likely to last”. These items demonstrated a satisfactory level of internal reliability ($\alpha = .84$, $M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.43$) and were averaged to form a composite measure of reattribution.

In addition to the three mediating factors, participants also completed instructions regarding three moderating factors: perceived severity of the discrimination scenario, the number of inter-ethnic friendships, and the ethnicity of the support provider.
**Ethnicity of the support provider.** The ethnicity of the support provider was operationalized into the design through the use of photographs of individuals of different ethnicities. Photographs depicted male and female individuals belonging to three ethnic/racial groups: African American, Asian American, and Caucasian. The race/ethnicity of the person in the photograph was randomized, but the gender was matched with the participants’ gender. The photographs are provided in Appendix A.

**Number of inter-ethnic friendships.** A close-ended multiple-choice response item will assess the number of inter-ethnic friends that the participants report having. The measure will allow participants to indicate how many of their good friends are a) the same racial/ethnic group as them b) White/Caucasian and c) other racial/ethnic group. Response options included: none, at least one, two or more, and more than five. Measures categorizing number of friends according to same/different ethnicities are common in social scientific studies that deal with interracial friendships (e.g., Stearn, Buchmann & Bonneau, 2009).

**Scenario severity.** Four items from Holmstrom (2012) assessed the extent to which participants found the scenario to be problematic or upsetting. Sample items were: “The act described in the scenario was distressful” and “The act described in the scenario was problematic”. These items demonstrated a satisfactory level of internal reliability ($\alpha = .89$, $M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.56$) and were averaged to form a composite measure of scenario severity.
Chapter 5: Results

The aim of this investigation was to assess the effectiveness of three message types (person-centeredness, social-identity affirmation and combination messages) in dealing with everyday experiences of racial discrimination. Perceptions of message effectiveness were assessed using measures of general message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement and two message outcomes (affect change, collective esteem). The analyses are presented in three sections: sample characteristics, manipulation checks, and tests of the hypotheses and research questions. Manipulation checks analyses include descriptions of tests conducted to ensure the perceived realism and quality of manipulated messages and scenarios that were used in the study. The tests of hypotheses include analyses conducted to assess general message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement of the message types, and reports of the mediation analyses conducted for the three mediating variables (reappraisal, empathy, reattribution). The tests of research questions include moderation analyses conducted for the three proposed moderating variables (source ethnicity, number of inter-ethnic friends, and scenario severity).

Sample Characteristics

Participants were total of 785 adults (391 males, and 394 females). Participants self-identified as either African American (n = 394) or Asian American
The age range of participants included individuals who were 18 years to 80 or more years of age. Detailed sample characteristics are presented in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>391 (49.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>394 (50.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black/African</td>
<td>394 (50.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American/Asian</td>
<td>391 (49.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-20 years</td>
<td>87 (11.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-29 years</td>
<td>183 (23.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39 years</td>
<td>131 (16.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49 years</td>
<td>94 (12.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59 years</td>
<td>126 (16.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69 years</td>
<td>125 (15.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79 years</td>
<td>35 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 years and above</td>
<td>4 (0.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/Civil Union</td>
<td>293 (37.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>18 (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>58 (7.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>15 (1.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never married/Single</td>
<td>374 (47.6%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cohabitation</td>
<td>27 (3.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than a high school degree</td>
<td>12 (1.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school degree or equivalent</td>
<td>247 (31.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>157 (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>255 (32.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td>114 (14.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Sample Characteristics
Manipulation Check Analyses

Manipulation checks were conducted to ensure that: a) participants perceived the scenarios and messages to be realistic, and that b) the messages embodied the intended levels of the two theorized message dimensions.

Scenario and Message Realism

This study employed hypothetical discrimination scenarios and support messages. Therefore it was important to assess whether the participants perceived the scenarios and messages to be realistic and believable. A univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether the scenarios were perceived as realistic. The between group factors were scenario type (avoidance, derogation, categorization for African Americans and categorization for Asian Americans) and situation (situation1, and situation 2) and scenario realism was the dependent variable.

Scenario type did not have a significant effect on scenario realism, $F(2, 777) = .40, p > .05$, but there was a main effect for situation type, $F(1, 777) = 15.10, p = .000, \eta^2 = .02$, such that all first situation examples were rated higher in realism ($M = 5.71, SD = 1.23$) second situation examples ($M = 5.34, SD =1.32$). However, the interaction between scenario and situation was non-significant, $F(3, 777) = 2.30, p > .05$, with no significant differences emerging across the eight individual situation examples across the three scenarios. Also, the realism for all eight numbers are
confusing scenarios were above 5, which meant that participants perceived all the scenarios to be realistic.

A second univariate ANOVA examined whether the message types were considered to be realistic. Message type, scenario type, and situation were entered as between group factors, and message realism was the dependent variable. There were no significant effects for scenario type or situation type. Message type had a significant main effect on message realism, $F(5, 749) = 6.13, p = .000, \eta^2 = .04$. Post hoc analyses indicated two significant differences. High person-centered messages ($M = 5.48, SD = 1.28$) were evaluated to be more realistic than low person-centered messages ($M = 4.94, S = 1.29$), and high combination messages ($M = 5.69, SD = 1.09$) were rated as more realistic than low combination messages ($M = 5.04, SD = 1.42$).

There was no significant difference between the message realism scores high social identity affirmation messages ($M = 5.37, SD = 1.36$) and low social identity affirmation messages ($M = 5.38, SD = 1.28$). As can be seen above, despite the two differences, the realism scores for most message types were well above the scale midpoint of 5. Therefore, the participants largely perceived the messages as being realistic. A table for the realism scores for all messages across all scenario types is included in Appendix E.

**Analyses of Message Feature Enactment**

A second set of analyses was conducted to examine if high and low versions of each message type (person-centered, social identity affirmation, and combination
messages) successfully embodied the designated levels of the theoretical message dimensions.

Three MANOVAs were conducted for the three message types (person-centered messages, social identity affirmation and combination messages). In each analysis message quality (high vs. low), scenario type (avoidance, derogation, categorization), and situation (situation1, situation2) were entered as between group factors. Social identity affirmation and person-centeredness were the two dependent variables.

The MANOVA for person-centered message type produced no significant effects for the scenario type or situation. However, there was a significant effect for message quality, Wilks lambda = .813, $F (2, 244) = 28.12, p = .000, \eta^2 = .19$. A follow-up univariate analysis produced a significant main effect for message quality on person-centeredness $F (1, 254) = 55.47, p = .011, \eta^2 = .18$. Participants evaluated the high-person centered messages as embodying a greater degree of person-centeredness ($M = 5.17, SD = 1.40$) than low person-centered messages ($M = 3.62, SD = 1.79$).

Similarly, a MANOVA for social identity affirmation message type did not produce any significant effects for scenario type or situation type. There was an effect for message quality, Wilks lambda = .927, $F (2, 243) = 9.61, p = .000, \eta^2 = .06$. A follow-up univariate analysis produced a significant main effect for message quality on social identity affirmation $F (1, 244) = 15.08, p = .000, \eta^2 = .06$, indicating that
participants perceived the level of social identity affirmation to be higher for high social identity affirmation messages ($M = 5.30, SD = 1.39$) than low social identity affirmation messages ($M = 4.54, SD = 1.52$).

Finally, the MANOVA for combination message type also had only one significant effect, which was for message quality, Wilks lambda = .771, $F(2, 259) = 38.42$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .23$. Since combination messages were hypothesized to be higher on both message dimensions, separate univariate analyses were conducted for the two dimensions. The first univariate analysis indicated that message quality had a significant main effect on social identity affirmation $F(1, 260) = 61.41$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .18$, such that participants perceived the level of social identity affirmation to be higher for high combination messages ($M = 5.30, SD = 1.39$) than low combination messages ($M = 4.54, SD = 1.52$). The second follow-up univariate analysis also produced a significant main effect for message quality on person-centeredness $F(1,260) = 74.41$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .21$, indicating participants perceived the level of person-centeredness to be higher for high combination messages ($M = 5.48, SD = 1.19$) than low combination messages ($M = 3.80, SD = 1.79$).

Taken together, these findings indicate that high person-centered messages and high social identity affirmation messages were perceived as embodying greater degrees person-centeredness and social identity affirmation than the lower level messages. Also, high combination messages indicated higher levels of both message
dimensions than low combination messages. These findings are also presented in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message Type</th>
<th>Message Quality</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person-centeredness</td>
<td>High 5.18 (1.40)</td>
<td>3.60 (1.79)</td>
<td>55.47</td>
<td>1, 245</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Identity Affirmation</td>
<td>High 5.29 (1.40)</td>
<td>4.45 (1.52)</td>
<td>20.81</td>
<td>1, 254</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination (PC)</td>
<td>High 5.48 (1.19)</td>
<td>3.82 (1.79)</td>
<td>80.51</td>
<td>1, 270</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination (SIA)</td>
<td>High 5.38 (1.27)</td>
<td>3.88 (1.73)</td>
<td>66.63</td>
<td>1, 270</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tests of Hypotheses and Research Questions

After the manipulation checks, a series of analyses investigated the proposed hypotheses and research questions. The first set of hypotheses proposed that high quality messages would be evaluated as more effective generally and more effective at accomplishing multiple goals (H1a, H2a, H3a), and would be associated with greater levels of affect change and collective esteem (H1b, H2b, H3b). A second set of hypotheses proposed that reappraisal, empathy, and reattribution processes would mediate the influence of message quality on message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement and other message outcomes (H2a, H2b, H4a, H4b). Finally, three research questions were forwarded to investigate whether ethnicity of support provider (RQ1), number of interethnic friendships (RQ2), or perceived severity of the problem (RQ3) would moderate the influence of message quality on message evaluation and other message outcomes.
Perceived Message Effectiveness

A MANOVA was conducted to determine the overall effect of message quality on message effectiveness for all the three message types. Message quality, scenario type, and situation type were between group factors, while the dependent variables included message effectiveness, and the six goal achievement measures (instrumental, positive face, negative face, self-identity, collective identity, relational). The only multivariate analysis effect that was statistically significant was for message quality, Wilks lambda = .829, $F (7, 767) = 22.60$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .16$. From this analysis, univariate analyses of variance were examined for each of the three message types (person-centered messages, social identity affirmation messages, and combination messages).

Three univariate analyses of variance indicated that message quality had a main effect on message effectiveness for person-centered messages, social identity affirmation messages, and combination messages. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 3. Overall, across the three message types, participants perceived high quality messages as being more successful, helpful, supportive, appropriate, sensitive, and effective than low quality messages.

Similarly, six univariate analyses of variance were conducted to assess the effect of message quality on multiple goal achievement for each of the three message types. The findings of these analyses are also presented in Table 3. For person-centered messages, social identity affirmation messages and combination messages,
message quality had a main effect on achievement of instrumental goals, positive face
goals, negative face goals, self-identity goals, collective identity goals, and relational
goals. Across all three message types, participants perceived high quality messages as
being more effective than low quality person-centered messages at facilitating the
instrumental goals in the given situation (e.g., feeling better, being able to deal with
the situation). Similarly, high quality messages were also perceived to be better than
low quality messages at maintaining a positive image of the participants (positive face
goals), and respecting the participants’ autonomy and right to non-imposition
(negative face goals). High quality messages were better than low quality messages at
making participants feel positively about their self-identity as well as their collective
identity that was associated with their racial/ethnic group. Lastly, participants
perceived that high quality messages were better than low quality messages at
maintaining a positive relationship with their support provider.

Consistent with the proposed hypotheses these findings suggest that high
quality messages were evaluated as being more effective and more successful in
achieving multiple goals than low quality messages for person-centered messages
(H1a), social identity affirmation messages (H3a) and for combination messages
(H5a). Therefore H1a, H3a, and H5a were fully supported.
Table 4. Effects of Message Type and Message Quality on Message Effectiveness Outcomes

**Message Outcomes**

A MANOVA was conducted to determine the overall effect of message quality on two message outcomes (affect change, collective esteem) for all the three message types. Message quality, scenario type, and situation type were between group factors, while the dependent variables included affect change and collective esteem. The only multivariate analysis effect that was statistically significant was for message quality, Wilks lambda = .882, $F (2, 772) = 51.64, p = .000, \eta^2 = .12$. From this

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message Effectiveness Outcomes</th>
<th>High M (SD)</th>
<th>Low M (SD)</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$\eta^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>Person-centeredness</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message Effectiveness</td>
<td>5.32 (1.27)</td>
<td>3.81 (1.64)</td>
<td>61.06</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instrumental Goals</td>
<td>4.97 (1.47)</td>
<td>3.80 (1.87)</td>
<td>31.37</td>
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<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Face Goals</td>
<td>4.57 (1.60)</td>
<td>3.45 (1.80)</td>
<td>25.71</td>
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<td>.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative Face Goals</td>
<td>4.72 (1.42)</td>
<td>3.67 (1.70)</td>
<td>26.93</td>
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<td>.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self Identity Goals</td>
<td>4.87 (1.59)</td>
<td>3.64 (1.78)</td>
<td>34.74</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Identity Goals</td>
<td>4.80 (1.54)</td>
<td>3.77 (1.84)</td>
<td>22.64</td>
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<td>.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relational Goals</td>
<td>5.10 (1.56)</td>
<td>3.85 (1.81)</td>
<td>37.84</td>
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<td><strong>Social-Identity Affirmation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Message Effectiveness</td>
<td>5.36 (1.26)</td>
<td>4.56 (1.51)</td>
<td>15.45</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental Goals</td>
<td>5.01 (1.41)</td>
<td>4.35 (1.71)</td>
<td>10.20</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
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<td>Positive Face Goals</td>
<td>4.85 (1.39)</td>
<td>3.88 (1.80)</td>
<td>20.56</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Face Goals</td>
<td>4.84 (1.36)</td>
<td>4.05 (1.46)</td>
<td>14.83</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Identity Goals</td>
<td>4.90 (1.61)</td>
<td>3.98 (1.84)</td>
<td>15.54</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Identity Goals</td>
<td>5.01 (1.60)</td>
<td>3.94 (1.83)</td>
<td>21.99</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.07</td>
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<td>5.21 (1.45)</td>
<td>4.62 (1.65)</td>
<td>8.41</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<td><strong>Combination Messages</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message Effectiveness</td>
<td>5.63 (1.12)</td>
<td>3.87 (1.82)</td>
<td>85.00</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.25</td>
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<td>3.77 (1.86)</td>
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<td>.000</td>
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<td>Positive Face Goals</td>
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<td>3.31 (1.85)</td>
<td>58.35</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Face Goals</td>
<td>4.76 (1.36)</td>
<td>3.51 (1.68)</td>
<td>41.26</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Identity Goals</td>
<td>5.01 (1.45)</td>
<td>3.59 (1.95)</td>
<td>44.34</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Identity Goals</td>
<td>5.06 (1.41)</td>
<td>3.57 (1.89)</td>
<td>49.85</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Goals</td>
<td>5.45 (1.30)</td>
<td>3.90 (1.89)</td>
<td>59.01</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
analysis, univariate analyses of variance were examined for each of the three message types. These details of these findings are presented in Table 4.

Two sets of univariate analyses of variance were conducted for each message type to examine whether high quality messages significantly differed from low quality messages on affect change and collective esteem. The first set of univariate analyses found that message quality had a main effect on affect change for person-centered messages, \( F(1,245) = 43.86, p = .000, \eta^2 = .14 \) social-identity affirmation messages, \( F(1,244) = 11.41, p = .001, \eta^2 = .04 \), as well as combination messages, \( F(1, 260) = 61.69, p = .000, \eta^2 = .18 \). Across all three message types high quality messages were evaluated as being better at facilitating emotional improvement than low quality messages. Also, the second set of univariate analyses found that message quality has a main effect on collective esteem for person-centered messages \( F(1, 245) = 32.79, p = .000, \eta^2 = .12 \), social identity affirmation messages, \( F(1,244) = 16.94, p = .000, \eta^2 = .06 \), and combination messages, \( F(1, 260) = 32.97, p = .000, \eta^2 = .10 \). Across the three message types high quality messages were associated with higher collective esteem than low quality messages.

In sum, as hypothesized, high person-centered messages were better at facilitating emotional improvement than low person-centered messages (H1b). Also, high social identity affirmation messages were associated with greater collective self-esteem than low social identity messages (H3b). Finally, high combination messages were better at facilitating emotional improvement and were associated with greater
collective esteem than low combination messages (H5b). Therefore H1b, H3b, and H5b were fully supported.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message Effectiveness Outcomes</th>
<th>High M (SD)</th>
<th>Low M (SD)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Person-centeredness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect Change</td>
<td>4.95 (1.45)</td>
<td>3.61 (1.89)</td>
<td>43.86</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collective Esteem</td>
<td>4.73 (1.22)</td>
<td>3.67 (1.71)</td>
<td>32.79</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social-Identity Affirmation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect Change</td>
<td>4.86 (1.44)</td>
<td>4.17 (1.68)</td>
<td>11.41</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Esteem</td>
<td>4.97 (1.34)</td>
<td>4.13 (1.50)</td>
<td>16.94</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Combination Messages</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect Change</td>
<td>4.99 (1.36)</td>
<td>3.43 (1.77)</td>
<td>61.69</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Esteem</td>
<td>4.88 (1.22)</td>
<td>3.81 (1.71)</td>
<td>32.97</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Effect of Message Type and Message Quality on Message Outcomes

**Mediation Analyses for Person-centered Messages**

H2a, and H2b predicted mediating relationships where reappraisal, and empathy mediated the effect of message quality on message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement and affect change for person-centered messages. These mediation analyses were conducted using the SPSS PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2013). All mediation procedures employed Model 4 in the macro. A statistical diagram of the parallel multiple mediator model for person-centered messages is provided in Figure 1.
From a parallel multiple mediation analysis conducted using ordinary least square path analysis, reappraisal and empathy indirectly influenced the impact of message quality on message effectiveness for person-centered messages. As can be seen in Table 5, participants who read higher quality person-centered messages were more likely to reappraise the discrimination situation ($a_1 = .753$), which in turn lead to a higher evaluation of message effectiveness ($b_1 = .254$). A bias corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect ($a_1b_1 = .190$) based on 10,000 bootstrap samples was entirely above zero (.0736 to .3938). Similarly participants who read higher quality person-centered messages were more likely to perceive a greater level of empathy from the message source ($a_2 = 2.04$), which in turn lead to a higher evaluation of message effectiveness ($b_2 = .570$). A bias corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect ($a_2b_2 = 1.173$) based on 10,000 bootstrap samples was entirely above zero (.8110 to 1.6139). There was no evidence that message quality
influenced message effectiveness independent of its effects on reappraisal and empathy ($c' = .157, p = .248$).

<table>
<thead>
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Table 6. Indirect Effects of Message Quality on Message Effectiveness Through Reappraisal and Empathy

Similarly six parallel multiple mediation analyses were conducted to examine whether reappraisal and empathy mediated the influence of message quality on the six goal achievement outcomes for person-centered messages (i.e., instrumental goals, positive face goals, negative face goals, self-identity goals, collective-identity goals, and relational goals).

Reappraisal and empathy were significant mediators for the influence of message quality on instrumental goal achievement, $a_1b_1 = .465, 95\% CI [.243 to .778], a_2b_2 = .732, 95\% CI [.454 to 1.063]$, with no direct effect for message quality, $c' = -.027, p = .841$. The total indirect effect of both mediators was also significant, $a_1b_1 + a_2b_2 = 1.199, 95\% CI [.799 to 1.6257]$. The findings are presented in Table 6 below.
Table 7. Indirect Effects of Message Quality on Instrumental Goal Achievement Through Reappraisal and Empathy

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</table>

R² = .048, F (1, 255) = 13.01, p = .000
R² = .307, F (1, 255) = 112.83, p = .000
R² = .743, F (3, 253) = 245.09, p = .000

Reappraisal and empathy also significantly mediated the influence of message quality on positive face goal achievement $a_1b_1 = .348$, 95% CI [.175 to .601], $a_2b_2 = .801$, 95% CI [.444 to 1.179], with no direct effect for message quality, $c' = -.106$, $p = .561$. The total indirect effect of both mediators was also significant, $a_1b_1 + a_2b_2 = 1.151$, 95% CI [.763 to 1.566].
Table 8. Indirect Effects of Message Quality on Positive Face Goal Achievement Through Reappraisal and Empathy

Message quality had significant indirect effects on negative face goals through reappraisal, $a_1b_1 = .356$, 95% CI [.179 to .594], and empathy, $a_1b_1 = .733$, 95% CI [.456 to 1.029], and no direct effect for message quality $c' = -.108$, $p = .478$. The total indirect effect of both mediators was significant, $a_1b_1 + a_2b_2 = 1.08$, 95% CI [.739 to 1.455].

Table 9. Indirect Effects of Message Quality on Negative Face Goal Achievement Through Reappraisal and Empathy
Reappraisal and empathy mediated the relationship between message quality and self-identity goals, $a_1b_1 = .394$, 95% CI [.203 to .654], and empathy, $a_1b_1 = .871$, 95% CI [.572 to 1.181], and no direct effect for message quality $c' = -.039$, $p = .792$.

The total indirect effect of both mediators was also significant, $a_1b_1 + a_2b_2 = 1.27$, 95% CI [.875 to 1.671].

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Table 10. Indirect Effects of Message Quality on Self-Identity Goal Achievement Through Reappraisal and Empathy

Reappraisal and empathy mediated the relationship between message quality and collective-identity goals, $a_1b_1 = .364$, 95% CI [.189 to .632], and empathy, $a_1b_1 = .872$, 95% CI [.568 to 1.265], and no direct effect for message quality $c' = -.271$, $p = .105$. The total indirect effect of both mediators was also significant, $a_1b_1 + a_2b_2 = 1.236$, 95% CI [.848 to 1.642].
Reappraisal and empathy mediated the relationship between message quality and relational goals, $a_1b_1 = .408$, 95% CI [.209 to .680], and empathy, $a_1b_1 = .736$, 95% CI [.494 to 1.055], and no direct effect for message quality $c^* = .103$, $p = .530$. The total indirect effect of both mediators was also significant, $a_1b_1 + a_2b_2 = 1.144$, 95% CI [.814 to 1.554].
Finally reappraisal and empathy also mediated the relationship between message quality and affect change, $a_1 b_1 = .546$, 95% CI [0.279 to 0.869], and empathy, $a_1 b_1 = .467$, 95% CI [0.289 to 0.730]; however, with a significant direct effect for message quality $c' = .324$, $p = .01$. The total indirect effect of both mediators was also significant, $a_1 b_1 + a_2 b_2 = 1.01$, 95% CI [0.654 to 1.417].

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Table 13. Indirect Effects of Message Quality on Affect Change Through Reappraisal and Empathy

In sum, the seven meditational analyses indicated that reappraisal and empathy mediated the influence of message quality on general message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement, and affect change. Therefore H2a and H2b were supported.

**Mediation Analyses for Social Identity Affirmation Messages**

A second set of mediation analyses investigated H4a and H4b, which proposed that reattribution would mediate the influence of message quality on message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement, and collective esteem for social identity affirmation messages. A statistical diagram of the simple mediation model for social identity affirmation messages is presented in Figure 2.
A simple mediation analysis conducted using ordinary least squares path analysis, message quality indirectly influenced message effectiveness through its effect on reattribution. As can be seen in Figure 2 and Table 13, participants who read higher quality social identity affirmation messages were more likely to make positive reattributions about the discrimination situation ($a = .605$), which, in turn, would lead to higher evaluations of message effectiveness ($b = .570$). A bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect ($ab = .344$) based on 10,000 bootstrap samples was between .157 and .547. The direct effect of message quality on message effectiveness was also significant ($c' = .442$, $p = .004$).
Table 14. Indirect Effect of Message Quality on Message Effectiveness through Reattribution

Reattribution completely mediated the influence of message quality on instrumental goal achievement, \( ab = .530, 95\% \text{ CI [.242 to .818]}, \) with no direct effect for message quality, \( c' = .134, p = .320. \)

Table 15. Indirect Effect of Message Quality on Instrumental Goal Achievement through Reattribution

However, reattribution only partially mediated the influence of message quality on positive face goal achievement, \( ab = .538, 95\% \text{ CI [.247 to .844]}, \) with a significant direct effect of message quality, \( c' = .521, p = .000. \)
Table 16. Indirect Effect of Message Quality on Positive Face Goal Achievement through Reattribution

Similarly reattribution partially mediated the influence of message quality on negative face goal achievement, $ab = .523$, 95% CI [.229 to .805], with a significant direct effect of message quality, $c' = .333$, $p = .01$.

Table 17. Indirect Effect of Message Quality on Negative Face Goal Achievement through Reattribution

Reattribution was also a significant partial mediator for the influence of message quality on self-identity goal achievement, $ab = .580$, 95% CI [.256 to .885], with a significant direct effect of message quality, $c' = .382$, $p = .011$. 

|                      | Reattribution | Positive Face Goal Achievement |               |               |               |               |               |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|                      | Coeff.        | SE    | $p$     | Coeff.        | SE    | $p$     |
| Message Quality      | .605          | .166  | .000    | .521          | .142  | .000    |
| Reattribution        | -             | -     | -       | .887          | .051  | .000    |
|                      |               |       |         |               |       |         |
| $R^2 = .049$         |               |       |         | $R^2 = .577$  |       |         |
| $F (1, 254) = 13.07$, $p = .000$ |               |       |         | $F (2, 253) = 172.28, p = .000$ |       |         |

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<td>Coeff.</td>
<td>SE</td>
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<td>$F (2, 253) = 195.28, p = .000$</td>
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</table>
Reattribution partially mediated the influence of message quality on collective identity goal achievement, $ab = .558$, 95% CI [.243 to .845], with a significant direct effect of message quality, $c' = .559$, $p = .000$.

Table 18. Indirect Effect of Message Quality on Self-Identity Goal Achievement through Reattribution

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$R^2 = .049$
$F (1, 254) = 13.07$, $p = .000$

$R^2 = .576$
$F (2, 253) = 172.22$, $p = .000$

Table 19. Indirect Effect of Message Quality on Collective-Identity Goal Achievement through Reattribution

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</table>

$R^2 = .049$
$F (1, 254) = 13.07$, $p = .000$

$R^2 = .554$
$F (2, 253) = 156.91$, $p = .000$
Reattribution completely mediated the influence of message quality on relational goal achievement, $ab = .472$, 95% CI [.211 to .728], with no direct effect of message quality, $c' = .213$, $p = .159$.

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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

$R^2 = .049$  
$F(1, 254) = 13.07$, $p = .000$

Table 20. Indirect Effect of Message Quality on Relational Goal Achievement through Reattribution

Finally, reattribution partially mediated the influence of message quality on collective esteem, $ab = .477$, 95% CI [.214 to .763], with a significant direct effect of message quality remaining, $c' = .342$, $p = .005$.

<table>
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$R^2 = .049$  
$F(1, 254) = 13.07$, $p = .000$

$R^2 = .576$  
$F(2, 253) = 172.64$, $p = .000$

Table 21. Indirect Effect of Message Quality on Collective Esteem through Reattribution

In sum, reappraisal, empathy and reattribution significantly mediated the effect of message quality on message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement, affect change, and collective esteem. In the case of person-centered messages reappraisal
and empathy completely mediated the influence of message quality on message effectiveness, instrumental goal achievement, positive face goal achievement, negative face goal achievement, self-identity goals, collective-identity goals and relational goals. That is, message quality did not have a direct effect on any of these outcome variables but only indirect effects through the mediators. However, the two mediators partially mediated the path between message quality and affect change. Thus, while some effect of message quality on affect change occurred through the two mediators, message quality also had a significant direct effect on affect change.

In the case of social identity affirmation messages reattribution fully mediated the influence of message quality on instrumental goal achievement and relational goal achievement. However, reattribution partially mediated the influence of message quality on message effectiveness, positive face goal achievement, negative face goal achievement, self-identity goal achievement, collective identity goal achievement, and collective esteem. In sum, H2a, H2b, H4a, and H4b were largely supported.

**Moderation Analyses**

The three research questions were also investigated using the PROCESS SPSS macro (Hayes, 2013). Simple moderation analyses were conducted using Model 1. RQ1 examined whether the race/ethnicity of the source would moderate the influence of message quality on message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement, and relevant message outcomes.
Eight simple moderation analysis using Model 1 were conducted for person-centered messages. In all eight models message quality was the independent variable, ethnicity of the source (same or different as the participant) was the moderator, and the dependent variables were: message effectiveness, instrumental goal achievement, positive face goal achievement, negative face goal achievement, self-identity achievement, collective-identity goal achievement, relational goal achievement, and affect change.

The moderation analyses showed that source ethnicity did not have any main effects on message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement and affect change. Message quality did not moderate the influence of message quality on message effectiveness \( (b = .118, p > .05) \), instrumental goal achievement, \( (b = .434, p > .05) \), negative face goal achievement, \( (b = .449, p > .05) \), self-identity goal achievement, \( (b = .419, p > .05) \), collective identity goal achievement, \( (b = .479, p > .05) \), and relational goal achievement \( (b = .574, p > .05) \), and affect change \( (b = .269, p > .05) \).

However, source ethnicity had a significant main effect on positive face \( (b = -1.90, SE = .72, t = -2.60, p = .009) \) such that messages from a same ethnicity source \( (M = 4.24, SD = 1.79) \) were rated higher in positive face goal achievement than messages from a different ethnicity source \( (M = 3.96) \). However, there was also a significant interaction effect of source ethnicity and message quality on positive face goal achievement \( (b = 1.08, SE = .45, t = 2.36, p = .02) \). Post-hoc analyses revealed that the moderation was only significant for messages delivered by a different
ethnicity source. High quality messages from a different ethnicity sources were rated higher in positive face goal achievement than lower quality messages from different ethnicity sources. The interaction between message quality and source ethnicity accounted for 1.9 % of the variance in positive face goal achievement $F (1,253) = 5.58, p = .02$

Similarly, eight sets of simple moderation analyses were also conducted for social identity affirmation messages. Message quality was the independent variable, source ethnicity was the moderator, and the dependent variables were: message effectiveness, instrumental goal achievement, positive face goals, negative face goals, self-identity goals, collective-identity goals, relational goals, and collective esteem. Source ethnicity did not have any main effects for message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement, and collective self-esteem. In the case of social identity affirmation messages, source ethnicity did not moderate the influence of message quality for message effectiveness, ($b = -.011, p > .05$), instrumental goal achievement, ($b = -.342, p > .05$), positive face goals ($b = -.601, p > .05$), negative face goal achievement, ($b = -.509, p > .05$), self-identity goal achievement, ($b = -.669, p > .05$), collective identity goal achievement, ($b = -.770, p > .05$), relational goal achievement, ($b = -.408, p > .05$), and collective esteem ($b = -.461, p > .05$).

Taken together, these findings indicate that, with the exception of positive face goal achievement for person-centered messages, source ethnicity did not moderate the
influence of message quality on message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement, affect change and collective esteem.

The second research question asked whether the number of inter-ethnic friendships would moderate the influence of source ethnicity on message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement, affect change, and collective esteem. A series of eight simple moderation analyses were conducted with source ethnicity as the independent variable, number of inter-ethnic friendships as the moderator and eight dependent variables: message effectiveness, instrumental goal achievement, positive face goals, negative face goals, self-identity goal achievement, collective identity goal achievement, relational goal achievement, affect change, and collective esteem.

The number of interethnic friendships moderated the influence of source ethnicity on positive face goal achievement, \((b = .575, SE = .229, t = 2.514, p = .001)\), negative face goal achievement, \((b = .422, SE = .210, t = 2.008, p = .04)\), collective identity goals, \((b = .529, SE = .231, t = 2.276, p = .04)\), and relational goal achievement \((b = .570, SE = .224, t = 2.532, p = .002)\). However all three moderation effects were only significant for participants who had no inter-ethnic friends (moderator value = 1). See Figure 3. for a visual representation of the interaction effect of interethnic friendships and source ethnicity on positive face goal achievement.
Participants who reported that they did not have any inter-ethnic friends rated messages from same ethnicity sources as being higher on positive face goal achievement (M = 5.26, SD = 1.48), negative face goal achievement (M = 5.22, SD = 1.39), collective identity goal achievement (M = 5.36, SD = 1.21), and relational goal achievement (M = 5.64, SD = 1.08). While messages from different ethnicity sources were evaluated as being lower on positive face goal achievement (M = 3.85, SD =
2.05), negative face goal achievement ($M = 4.08, SD = 1.90$), collective identity goal achievement ($M = 4.21, SD = 2.14$), and relational goal achievement ($M = 4.45, SD = 2.01$).

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<td>Negative Face Goal Achievement</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>1, 781</td>
<td>.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Identity Goal Achievement</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>1, 781</td>
<td>.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Goal Achievement</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>6.41</td>
<td>1, 781</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22. Interaction Effects of Inter-ethnic Friendships and Source Ethnicity

The number of inter-ethnic friendships did not moderate the influence of source ethnicity on message effectiveness ($b = .319, p > .05$), instrumental goal achievement ($b = .429, p > .05$), self-identity goals ($b = .440, p > .05$), affect change ($b = .300, p > .05$), and collective esteem ($b = .256, p > .05$).

Finally research question three asked whether scenario severity would moderate the influence of message quality on message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement, and the two message outcomes (i.e., affect change and collective esteem). In order to investigate this question, a series of simple moderation models were conducted for both message types.

For person-centered messages, eight moderation analyses were conducted with message quality as the independent variable, scenario severity as the moderator, and the eight dependent variables: message effectiveness, six goal achievement measures, and affect change. Scenario severity did not have any main effects on the message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement, and affect change. Scenario severity and
message quality did not have a significant interaction effect on message effectiveness \((b = .279, p > .05)\), instrumental goal achievement \((b = .047, p > .05)\), positive face goal achievement \((b = .217, p > .05)\), negative face goal achievement \((b = .026, p > .05)\), self-identity goal achievement \((b = .002, p > .05)\), collective identity goal achievement \((b = -.118, p > .05)\), relational goal achievement \((b = -.030, p > .05)\), affect change \((b = .266, p > .05)\).

For social identity affirmation messages, eight moderation analyses were conducted with message quality as the independent variable, scenario severity as the moderator, and the eight dependent variables: message effectiveness, six goal achievement measures, and collective esteem. Scenario severity did not have any main effects on the message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement, and affect change. Scenario severity and message quality did not have a significant interaction effect on message effectiveness \((b = -.147, p > .05)\), instrumental goal achievement \((b = .376, p > .05)\), positive face goal achievement \((b = .036, p > .05)\), negative face goal achievement \((b = .113, p > .05)\), self-identity goal achievement \((b = .313, p > .05)\), collective identity goal achievement \((b = .235, p > .05)\), relational goal achievement \((b = -.107, p > .05)\), and collective esteem \((b = .254, p > .05)\).

In sum, scenario severity did not moderate the influence of message quality on message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement outcomes or other message outcomes for either message types.
Overall, the analyses presented in this chapter indicate that all five proposed hypotheses were supported. Across all message types, participants perceived high quality messages as being more effective than low quality messages. The proposed mediation paths were found to be significant for person-centered and social identity affirmation messages. Also, the investigations of research questions demonstrated the significant moderating roles of source ethnicity and number of inter-ethnic friendships, while the moderation for scenario severity was non-significant. The interpretation, and implication of these findings are discussed in detail in the next chapter.
Chapter 6: Discussion

This dissertation proposed a framework for investigating effective support messages for dealing with incidents of everyday racial discrimination. Two theoretically relevant message dimensions were identified and tested: person-centeredness and social identity affirmation. Hypotheses and research questions were advanced about the effectiveness of the two message dimensions. An online experiment employing the message perception paradigm tested substantially supported the predictions. This section begins with the summary of the findings and discusses the implications of these findings for research dealing with everyday discrimination and social support. The section also identifies limitations of the current study and directions for future research in this area.

Research Summary

This research investigated perceptions about different messages that can be used by friends and family members of individuals who deal with everyday racial discrimination. It was predicted that messages embodying higher levels of person-centeredness, social identity affirmation, or both would be more effective generally, more effective in achieving goals, and facilitating positive outcomes such as emotional improvement or enhanced collective esteem.

To test these predictions three hypothetical scenarios of everyday discrimination were created (avoidance, derogation, and categorization). There were
two situation examples for the avoidance and derogation scenarios and four situation examples of the categorization scenarios (two each for African American and Asian American participants). For each situation there were eight messages that reflected combinations of message type (person-centered, social identity affirmation, combination), message quality (high and low), and source ethnicity (same ethnicity as participant vs. different ethnicity).

Participants were randomly assigned to read one of the three discrimination scenarios and were asked to imagine themselves as the target of the discriminatory actions described in the scenario. Participants were then presented with one of the forty-eight support messages that were manipulated for message dimension (person-centeredness, social identity affirmation, combination), message quality (high vs. low), and source ethnicity (same as participant vs. different), and corresponded to different discrimination scenarios (avoidance, derogation, and categorization). Participants then completed a series of scales that measured their perceptions about the effectiveness and other outcomes of the messages. The hypotheses and research questions were tested using multivariate and univariate analyses of variance and a series of mediation and moderation analyses.

**Summary of Findings**

Analyses of the first set of hypotheses demonstrated that across all message types (person-centered, social identity affirmation, and combination), participants evaluated high quality messages as being higher in general message effectiveness than
lower quality messages. Thus, high quality messages were considered to be more helpful, appropriate, sensitive, supportive, effective and successful than low quality messages.

In addition general message effectiveness, high quality messages were also perceived to be more successful in facilitating multiple goal achievement than low quality messages. Participants perceived that high quality messages would better at helping them tackle the instrumental tasks involved in the experience of everyday discrimination, such as feeling better or dealing with the incident. Similarly, higher quality messages were perceived to be better at communicating regard for the participants’ positive face needs (claim to maintain a positive self-image) and negative face needs (claim to autonomy and respect for non-imposition. Higher quality messages were also perceived to be better at communicating regard for the participants’ threatened self-identity and collective-identity goals. Finally, higher quality messages were perceived to be better at maintaining the relationship goals between the participant and their friend (who they perceived delivered the message) than lower quality messages.

For person-centered messages, high quality messages were more effective at facilitating emotional improvement than low quality messages. For social identity affirmation messages high quality messages were more effective at enhancing participants’ collective esteem. Finally, high quality combination messages were more
effective than low quality combination messages at facilitating emotional improvement as well as collective esteem enhancement.

In addition to demonstrating the effectiveness of high versus low quality messages, a second set of findings demonstrated that empathy, reappraisal and reattribution mediated the influence of message quality on message effectiveness and other message outcomes. In the case of person-centered messages, higher quality messages were associated with greater degrees of reappraisal of the discrimination situation, and perceptions of empathy from the message source, which in turn lead to higher ratings of message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement, as well as emotional improvement. In the case of social identity affirmation messages, participants perceived higher quality messages as being successful at making positive reattributions about the discrimination situation, which in turn led to higher ratings of message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement, and collective esteem enhancement. Thus, for person-centered messages empathy and reappraisal significantly mediated the influence of message quality. In the case of person-centered messages reattribution significantly mediated the effect of message quality.

In addition to these hypotheses, three research questions investigated the moderating role of source ethnicity, number of inter-ethnic friends, and scenario severity in message evaluations. The moderating effect of source ethnicity was investigated for the two types of messages. In the case of person-centered messages source ethnicity did not moderate the influence of message quality on message
effectiveness, instrumental goal achievement, negative face goal achievement, self-
identity goal achievement, collective identity goal achievement, relational goal 
achievement, and affect change. The findings indicated that participants rated high 
quality messages from different ethnicity sources as higher in positive face goal 
achievement than lower quality messages from different ethnicity sources. In the case 
of social identity affirmation messages, source ethnicity did not moderate the 
influence of message quality on any of the message effectiveness.

Analyses were also conducted to assess whether the participants’ reported 
number of inter-ethnic friends would influence the effect of source ethnicity on 
message evaluations. The number of interethnic friendships moderated the influence 
of source ethnicity on positive face goal achievement, negative face goal 
achievement, collective identity goals, and relational goal achievement. The analysis 
showed that these moderation effects were significant for participants who had no 
inter-ethnic friends. Thus, participants who did not have any inter-ethnic friends rated 
messages from same ethnicity sources as being higher on positive face goal 
achievement, negative face goal achievement, collective identity goal achievement, 
and relational goal achievement. They also evaluated messages from different 
etnicity sources as being lower on positive face goal achievement, negative face goal 
achievement, collective identity goal achievement, and relational goal achievement.
Finally, across all message types, scenario severity did not moderate the influence of message quality on message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement, affect change, and collective esteem.

**Theoretical Implications**

The findings of this study demonstrated the effectiveness of high versus low person-centered messages, which is consistent with prior studies examining the effectiveness of person-centered messages in various support contexts (e.g., High & Dillard, 2012, Jones, 2004). However, in addition to providing additional empirical support to the person-centered message framework, the study applied and tested this framework in a new interpersonal interaction context. The experience of racial discrimination causes emotional hurt or anger and frustration because individuals appraise discrimination behaviors as a devaluation of their racial/ethnic identities. Therefore the primary task of person-centered messages in this context is help individuals perceive discrimination incidents in a manner that allows them to maintain or restore a positive view about their ethnic/racial identity. Person-centered messages are able to achieve this goal by legitimizing the individual’s perspective of the situation, and their right to be hurt or frustrated by the incident. Also, highly person-centered communication reassures an individual that his/her support provider is able to empathize with him/her and understand his/her emotional reactions to the incident.

Emotional support has been identified as an important factor that could facilitate coping with everyday experiences of racial discrimination. Yet no studies till
date have examined the effectiveness of person-centered messages for dealing with everyday incidents of racial discrimination. Furthermore, person-centered messages were tested as responses to three different types of discrimination scenarios with two situation examples representing each scenario. Many of these situations were documented in prior discrimination research, and were also validated in the pre-study. Thus, the effectiveness of person-centered messages was demonstrated across various scenarios of everyday racial discrimination.

The appraisal based mechanism for effectiveness of comforting messages proposed by Burleson and Goldsmith (1998) and tested by Jones and Wirtz (2006) was replicated for person-centered messages in the context of racial discrimination. However, in addition to emotional improvement, the current investigation also examined how reappraisal mediated the influence of message quality on several other outcomes: general message effectiveness and multiple goal achievement. In addition to the appraisal mechanism, the study also introduced another mediator that functioned parallel to the reappraisal processes: empathy. Perspective taking and empathy that constitute the core conception of the person-centeredness construct (Burleson, Delia, Applegate, 1992; Burleson, 1982). Most studies of person-centered messages focus on the mediating role of reappraisal (e.g., Jones et al., 2006). However reappraisal focuses on the support recipient’s perception of the problem, but it does not address support recipient’s perceptions about whether the support provider’s engages in perspective taking and empathizes with them. Thus, empathy
represents a mechanism that facilitates coordinated interpersonal communication between the support provider and the support receiver. A support provider’s perceptions about the discrimination incident may or may not coincide with the target’s perspective. However, empathy represents the support provider’s ability to understand and represent the target’s perspective of the discrimination incident and the subsequent emotional reactions.

As a mediating mechanism, the support provider’s level of empathy influences the target’s perceptions about how well a support provider is able to understand and empathize with them in the given situation. The findings indicated that empathy was a separate mediator that functioned parallel to reappraisal. While the two mediators accounted for all variance in message effectiveness and all six goal achievement outcomes, but only part of the variance for affect change.

Another important contribution of the existing study was the introduction of the support message dimension of social identity affirmation. Support that addresses threats to one’s social identity has been missing from the list of functional support types investigated so far. Holmstrom and Burleson’s (2011) cognitive-emotional theory of esteem support messages (CETESM) presents a framework to examine esteem support messages to deal with self-esteem or self-identity threats. However, racial discrimination situations pose a threat to one’s social identity and hence their collective esteem (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Therefore, individuals who experience everyday
racial discrimination are likely to feel negatively not about their self-esteem but their collective-esteem. Therefore, using the attribution theory of motivation (Weiner, 1986), a social identity affirmation dimension was theorized to be relevant in this context. It was hypothesized that high quality social identity affirmation messages would affirm targets’ collective esteem by casting discrimination incidents as being caused by external factors, being unstable, controllable, and specific. On the other hand, low quality social identity affirmation messages were less effective because they attributed discrimination incidents to internal causes that were stable, uncontrollable, and global.

Participants who experience racial discrimination not only feel emotionally hurt, but also risk internalizing negative attitudes about one’s racial/ethnic group. As seen earlier, person-centered messages can be helpful in making participants feel better about their ethnic/racial identity by focusing on their feelings and emotions. However social identity affirmation messages address the individual’s cognitions about their social identity by helping them to attribute discrimination experience to causes that are external, instable, controllable, and specific. Confirming communication practices such as recognition, acknowledgement, and endorsement have been shown to be helpful in confirming or affirming a person’s sense of self or identity (Cissna & Sieburg, 1981). It is important to note that confirmation does not simply entail acceptance but also includes pushing the conversation partner to achieve a greater potential (Buber, 1986). Thus, for instance, if discrimination led an
individual to internalize negative attitudes about one’s social group, affirming messages helped to restore the positive identity. Socially identity affirmation messages employed compliments to reinforce the positive attributes of an individual as a member of a minority ethnic/racial group. These messages also recognized the rich cultural heritage and positive attributed associated with the ethnic group of the participants.

As hypothesized, participants perceived high social identity affirmation messages as being more effective generally than low quality social identity affirmation messages. High quality messages were also associated with greater collective esteem enhancement as compared to low quality messages. Moreover, high quality social identity affirmation messages were perceived as being more successful at fulfilling multiple goals (instrumental, positive face, negative face, self-identity goals, collective-identity goals, and relationship goals). The assessment of message effectiveness based on their ability to address multiple communication goals is rooted in the behavioral complexity theory (O’Keefe, 1988; O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). The findings demonstrate that high social identity affirmation messages represent a sophisticated way of communication that seems to address multiple goals relevant in the context of racial discrimination.

In addition to examining the effectiveness of social identity affirmation messages, the study also demonstrated reattribution as a mediator through which message quality influenced message effectiveness, multiple goal achievement, and
collective esteem. Reattribution completely mediated the influence of message quality on instrumental goals and partially mediated the influence of message quality on face goals, identity goals, relationship goals, and collective esteem enhancement. The mediation analyses lend support to the theoretical linkage between message quality and message evaluation through reattribution.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that social identity affirmation could be relevant in contexts other than everyday racial discrimination. This message dimension could be applied in investigations of support contexts that involve different types of social identity threats such as those associated with one’s race, nationality, gender, or sexual orientation.

In addition to identifying the two message dimensions relevant in the context of racial discrimination, the current investigation also examined the role of important moderating mechanisms. The dual-process model of supportive communication (Bodie & Burleson, 2008) posits that individual level and situational factors can influence the processing of support messages and evaluation of support messages. Existing support research has documented that racial/ethnic differences exist in the way participants evaluate support messages (Burleson & Mortenson, 2003; Mortenson, Liu, Burleson, & Liu, 2006). With the exception of one instance, source ethnicity did not moderate the influence of message quality on message effectiveness, multiple goal outcomes, and message outcomes. In the case of person-centered messages source ethnicity did moderate the influence of message quality on positive
face goal achievement. The interaction was only significant for messages delivered by different ethnicity sources. These findings can be explained using the dual-process model of supportive communication. It is possible that participants seemed to be more trusting of same ethnicity sources and hence less motivated to scrutinize messages from these sources. On the other hand participants might have been less trusting of the different ethnicity sources and hence were more motivated to scrutinize these messages. This is also consistent with the findings in social psychology research, which finds that participants engage in greater message scrutiny when the source is of a different ethnicity than their own (Frisch, Hausser, van Dick, & Mojzisch, 2014; Mackie, Worth, & Asuncion, 1990).

Similarly, it was found that the influence of source ethnicity on message evaluations differed based on the participants’ reported number of inter-ethnic friendships. The findings indicated that source ethnicity influenced message evaluations only when participants did not have any inter-ethnic friendships. These findings provide additional support to the contention that intergroup friendships allow individuals to recover from negative intergroup interactions (such as a discrimination incident) and foster a positive inter-group orientation (Page-Gould, 2012; Pettigrew, 1997; Wright & Van Der Zande, 1999). These findings can also be explained using the dual process model of supportive communication (Bodie & Burleson, 2008), which contends that individuals are likely to rely on heuristics when their motivation to process messages is lower. In the case of participants who did not have inter-ethnic
friendships, it might be easier to imagine and pay attention to a message coming from a friend of the same ethnicity that a different ethnicity friend. It could be possible that these participants might have been less motivated to consider a message that was delivered by a different ethnicity friend. Therefore, messages from same ethnicity friends might have been evaluated as being better than messages from different ethnicity friends. These findings illustrate the influence of relational histories on how individuals perceive messages from people of different races or ethnicities.

Lastly, it must be acknowledged that prior investigations of person-centered support messages have conceptualized and operationalized as the extent to which support receivers perceive messages to be effective, sensitive, supportive, appropriate, and helpful (for a review see High & Dillard, 2012). However, this dissertation employed a more nuanced operationalization of effectiveness by assessing the degree to which messages were perceived as being effective in accomplishing multiple goals.

**Practical Implications**

In addition to the theoretical contribution, the findings of the current investigation have important implications for informing everyday interactions in the context of racial discrimination. Discussions of race and racial discrimination are extremely relevant in the United States. The ongoing public discourse (podcasts, films, books, etc.) continues to document people’s experiences of everyday racial discrimination. Researchers contend that these experiences are detrimental to individuals’ psychological, emotional, and physical well-being (Brondolo et al., 2008;
Clark, 2003; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Utsey, Payne, Jackson, & Jones, 2002) and that talking to people helps to minimize these detrimental effects (Hayward & Krause, 2015; Noh & Kasper, 2003). However, knowing that not all forms of support are equally effective (Goldsmith, 2004), the findings of this investigation provide insight into what one might say to a friend or a family member who is dealing with everyday racial discrimination. In addition to explicating some effective forms of support messages, the study also elaborates on types of support messages that might not be perceived as helpful or effective by targets of everyday racial discrimination.

For example, findings of the study demonstrate that person-centered messages that legitimize the target’s perspective of the situation and explicitly recognize and verbalize their emotions seem to be perceived as more effective. Many prior investigations of racial discrimination (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989; Sue et al., 201) demonstrate that targets tend to fear that their experiences can be dismissed as overreactions to minor incidents. Therefore explicitly recognizing that an individual is justified in feeling hurt by an incident of everyday discrimination seems to be helpful. In addition to focusing on the person’s emotions, a commentary on the actual act of everyday discrimination also seems to be relevant. Conveying that everyday discrimination incidents result out of another person’s biases helps participants to externalize the cause of the problem. Similarly, framing these incidents as exceptions to the norm might help participants remain hopeful about racial progress and therefore prevent any negative impact on their collective esteem.
The findings provide several effective message practices that can help support targets of everyday racial discrimination. Person-centered messages can be constructed employing three basic strategies: explicitly recognizing and elaborating the individual’s feelings (e.g., I can understand how angry and upset you are), acknowledge and provide an explanation of the other person’s feelings (e.g., It’s disappointing as it seems he was avoiding sitting next to you because you aren’t White), and helping the person see their feelings in relation to a broader context (e.g., sometimes people grow up with biased attitudes and they might not even realize how their actions can be perceived as offensive).

Four strategies can be identified for constructing effective social identity affirmation messages: identify an external locus of causality (e.g., It’s not your fault that some people can’t get past your ethnicity), cast the incident as an exception rather than norm (e.g., Other people and I have always respected you for who you are), demonstrate the controllable nature of the problem (e.g., incidents like these won’t harm your strong heritage and your rich culture), and elaborate on the transient nature of the problem (e.g., incidents like these might become less frequent as people are becoming more aware of such subtle biases). The social identity affirmation messages employ several communicative practices such as the use of compliments, recognition of one’s positive attributes and achievements, or the positive attributes associated with their ethnic/racial group.
**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Despite the theoretical and practical importance of the findings of this study, there exist some limitations that must be acknowledged. First, it must be acknowledged that investigations of person-centered messages typically operationalize message quality as low, moderate, and high levels rather than just low and high (e.g., Burleson & Mortenson, 2003; Servaty-Seib & Burleson, 2007). However, in order to retain the feasibility of the study design it was deemed appropriate to test the differences between high and low levels in this investigation. Future research designs can incorporate moderate levels of person-centered messages.

Secondly, this investigation only tested two theoretically relevant message dimensions in the context of everyday racial discrimination. Other forms of support such as esteem support or informational support can also be perceived helpful by targets of racial discrimination. Future research can assess the other types of support that might help individuals deal with everyday instances of racial discrimination. For example, prior research on racial discrimination suggests that after experiencing racial discrimination individuals either confront the perpetrator or just ignore the situation (Swim & Thomas, 2006). While seeking support after ignoring the situation is one way of coping with the discrimination experience, confronting prejudice is an important aspect that needs to be studied in this context. Researchers argue that remaining silent in a discrimination scenario can be detrimental for an individual’s emotional well-being and confronting prejudice might be useful (Shelton, Richeson,
Salvatore, & Hill, 2006). However, confronting prejudice can often hinder interpersonal and intergroup harmony. The conflict management literature can be useful in this context to investigate the most effective ways to initiate conversations about everyday discrimination. This is an important avenue because while support from family and friends might help targets feel better, effective communication with the person who enacts the discriminatory behavior has the potential to change attitudes.

Third, as with all message perception studies, the findings of this study validated predictions about effectiveness of role-play scenarios and messages. As noted by scholars in the message perception paradigm (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002; Jones & Burleson, 2003) findings using this methodology cannot assure that participants’ evaluations of messages coincide with their actual behavior in real life. Thus, despite the fact that participants rated the scenarios and messages as being realistic, inferences cannot be made about participants’ actual behavior in response to discrimination situations and responses to support from family and friends. However role-play studies have been used to triangulate findings (e.g., Applegate, 1980; Kline & Creposki, 1984). Therefore future research can triangulate these findings by employing diary studies that might allow participants to record their support exchanges, or assessing support conversations in a lab setting.

Finally, it should be noted that in this study participants identified as Asian Americans. However, there exist several such groups under the broader category of
Asian Americans. Future studies can investigate the nuanced differences within different Asian sub-groups. Further, the current study only included participants from two ethnic groups: African Americans, and Asian Americans. The phenomenon of racial discrimination is certainly not limited to these two groups and future research must extend these investigations to other ethnic/racial groups such as Native Americans, and Hispanic and Latino groups as well as biracial or multi-racial populations.

**Conclusion**

Everyday racial discrimination remains a significant stressor in the lives of ethnic minorities. Subtle everyday forms of racial discrimination, such as the scenarios described in this study, are increasingly common in the lives of ethnic minorities. While research dealing with criminal or overt manifestations of racial discrimination are important, it is equally important to raise awareness about the everyday forms of discrimination that are often dismissed as minor or inconsequential. The negative impact of these incidents on individuals’ overall well being is well documented. Therefore this study contributes to increasing our understanding about how individuals perceive and respond to everyday discrimination.

Furthermore, individuals who experience everyday discrimination seek support by talking to their friends and family members about these incidents. Knowing that all forms of enacted support are not equally effective, it is important to
understand what constitutes effective support for dealing with everyday racial discrimination. Insensitive or inappropriate responses to disclosures of everyday discrimination can add to the traumatic experience of everyday discrimination. The findings of this study have practical implications for those who want to construct effective support messages for dealing with everyday racial discrimination.

This dissertation aimed to investigate how effective supportive communication could help individuals deal with the hurt caused by everyday experiences of racial discrimination. Theoretically relevant dimensions of person-centeredness and social identity affirmation were demonstrated as being effective for helping individuals cope with different types of everyday discrimination scenarios. The findings of this study represent a first step in understanding what constitutes effective social support for dealing with everyday instances of racial discrimination.
References


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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE AND INSTRUMENTS

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to understand more about the everyday social interactions of people who belong to ethnic minority groups. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the items. Please try to answer all items honestly. However, if you consider any specific item to be too personal or sensitive, feel free to skip that item and continue with the remainder of the survey. We are interested in your perceptions. Your responses will help us understand the different ways people approach communication situations and the different ways people view others. So, thank you very much for participating!

This questionnaire is divided into five parts:
1. First we’d like you to provide information about yourself such as your age, gender, etc.
2. Second we’d like you to read about a situation that has been documented to occur in everyday social interactions of people who belong to ethnic minority groups. We’d like you to imagine that you’re experiencing the situation and then answer some questions about it.
3. Third, we’d like you to imagine that you’ve disclosed your experience about the situation to a friend of yours. Since we are unable to bring a friend of yours into this study, we’ll present you a photograph of a person. We’d like you to imagine that this is a friend that you can trust and feel comfortable talking to. We’d like you to answer a few questions to tell us what goals you’d want to accomplish from a conversation with this friend.
4. Next you’ll read a message said by the friend. We’d like you to answer some questions and tell us what you think about the message.
5. Finally, we’d like you to answer a few more questions that relate to the situation and your experiences with similar incidents.

Thank you again!

Part 1: Demographic Information
Please provide some information about yourself. (This information will be kept confidential and will be used only for the purposes of this research)

1.1 Gender:
   - Male
   - Female

1.2 Which category below includes your age?
   - 18-20 years
   - 21-29 years
   - 30-39 years
   - 40-49 years
1.3 Which of the following racial/ethnic groups do you identify with?
- Black, African, or African American
- Asian or Pacific Islander
  (If Asian, could you please specify the country of origin, e.g., Chinese, Indian, Japanese, etc.)

1.4 What is your marital status?
- Married
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated
- Never married

1.5 What is the highest degree you have received?
- Less than a high school degree
- High school degree or equivalent
- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Graduate degree

1.6 How many of your friends are:
(0= none, 1= at least one, 2= two or more, 3= more than 5)
  i. The same race/ethnicity as me
  ii. White/Caucasian
  iii. Other racial/ethnic groups

Part 2: Scenario Realism, Severity and Emotional Response
In this section we’d like you to read a description of a situation that has been documented to occur in everyday social interactions of people who belong to ethnic minority groups. We’d like you to imagine that you are experiencing the situation and then answer some questions about this situation.

2.1 Perceived Scenario Realism (Holmstrom & Kim, 2012)
Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the scenario you just read (1=strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)
  a. This scenario is realistic
  b. This scenario is believable
  c. This scenario describes a situation that could happen in real life
d. This scenario describes a situation that has happened to me in real life.

2.2 Perceived Severity of the Racism Scenarios (Holmstrom, 2012)
Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the scenario you just read (1=strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)

   i. The act was distressful
   ii. The act was problematic
   iii. The act was severe
   iv. The act was upsetting

2.3 Emotional Response to the scenario (Dillard & Peck, 2000)
Considering that you just experienced the discrimination scenario that you just read, indicate what your immediate emotional reaction would be:
(0=none of this feeling, 1 = a little bit of this feeling, 2= A moderate amount of this feeling, 3= A lot of this feeling, 4 = A great deal of this feeling)

   i. Surprise
   ii. Anger
   iii. Fear
   iv. Sadness
   v. Guilt
   vi. Contentment
   vii. Happiness

Part 3: Goal Importance Measures
Now that you’ve read and thought about the situation, we’d like you to imagine that you’ve disclosed your experience about the situation to a friend of yours. Since we are unable to bring a friend of yours into this study, here is a photograph of a person.
We’d like you to imagine that the person in this photo is your friend, Jen, who you trust and feel comfortable talking to. We’d like you to think about how you’d talk to Jen about this incident. Now we’d like you to answer some questions and tell us what goals you’d like to accomplish in this conversation with your friend Jen.
Please indicate your level of agreement on the following sentences to indicate what you’d expect from your conversation with the friend. (Responses measured on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from 1/strongly disagree to 7 / strongly agree)

3.1 Instrumental Goals
   i. I would want to describe and share my experience with my friend.
   ii. I would want to have a conversation that makes me feel better.
   iii. I would want to know how to deal with the incident.
   iv. I would want to get a better perspective of the incident.
   v. I would want reassurance that my perspective of the incident is correct.
3.2 Identity Goals (Adapted from Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 2006; Wilson & Feng, 2007)
   i. I would want to feel valued.
   ii. I would want to restore my sense of self.
   iii. I would want to feel confident about myself.
   iv. I would want to feel liked and socially accepted.
   v. I would want to feel proud about my racial/ethnic identity.
   vi. I would want to feel positively about the status of my racial/ethnic group in society.

3.3 Relationship Goals (Shrader & Dillard, 1998; Bevan et al., 2004)
   i. I would want to preserve a positive relationship with my friend.
   ii. I would want to feel closer to my friend.
   iii. I would want to enhance my relationship with my friend.
   iv. I would not be willing to risk my relationship with my friend.

Part 4: Message manipulation and Message outcomes.
After having disclosed your experience to your friend, we’d like you to imagine that your friend says the following message to you. We’d like you read the message and then answer some questions about it.
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about the message you just read. (Responses measured on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from 1/strongly disagree to 7 / strongly agree)

4.1 Message Realism
   i. This message is believable
   ii. This message sounds similar to what I would hear from a friend/family member
   iii. It’s possible that a person could encounter a message like this in real life
   iv. It is hard for me to imagine a person hearing this message

4.2 Message Effectiveness (Goldsmith, McDermott, & Alexander, 2000)
This message was:
   i. Helpful/unhelpful
   ii. Appropriate/inappropriate
   iii. Sensitive/Insensitive
   iv. Supportive/Unsupportive
   v. Effective/Ineffective
   vi. Successful/unsuccessful

4.3 Message Quality: Person-Centeredness (Jones, 2004)
   i. This message focused on my feelings.
   ii. This message validated my feelings about the situations.
iii. This message made me feel the support provider understands my perspective.
iv. This message criticized my feelings. (reverse)
v. This message made me feel that the support provider was concerned about me.

4.4 Message Quality: Social Identity-Focused Support
This message made me think that:
i. I am a successful member of my racial/ethnic group.
ii. I am a respected member of my racial/ethnic group.
iii. I am a worthy member of my racial/ethnic group.
iv. Nothing can change how proud I feel about my racial/ethnic group.
v. My racial/ethnic group is valued and respected by other people.

4.5 Affect Change (Jones, 2004)
i. This message would make me feel more optimistic.
ii. This message would help me understand the situation better.
iii. This message would make me feel better about myself.
iv. This message would make me feel better.
v. This message would help me get my mind off the discrimination experience.

4.6 Collective Self Esteem (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992)
i. This message would make me feel proud about belonging to the racial/ethnic group that I belong to.
ii. This message would make me feel that others consider members of my racial/ethnic group as unworthy. (reverse)
iii. This message would make me feel good about the race/ethnicity I belong to.
iv. This message would make me feel that others respect my race/ethnicity.
v. This message would make me feel that I am a worthy member of my racial/ethnic group.

4.7 Reappraisal (Jones & Wirtz, 2006)
i. This message made me think differently about the discrimination incident.
ii. This message made me re-evaluate how I feel about the discrimination incident.
iii. This message made me see the discrimination incident in a different light.
iv. This message helped me get my mind off the racism scenario.
v. The message made me understand the racism scenario situation better.

4.7 Reattribution (Jones & Kim, 2012)
i. This message made me think that this incident can’t affect me.
ii. This message made me think that such incidents are unlikely to persist.
iii. This message made me think that I am not the cause of this problem.
iv. This message made me think that this incident reflects on the person engaged in the discriminatory behavior.
v. This message made me think that people respect me, and recognize my achievements in various situations.

4.8 Instrumental Goal Achievement
i. This message would help me feel better.
ii. This message would help me deal with the incident.
iii. This message would give me a better perspective about the incident.
iv. This message would reassure me that my perspective about the incident is correct.

4.9 Positive Face Goals (Goldsmith, 2000)
i. This message would make me feel criticized.
ii. This message would make me feel liked.
iii. This message would make me feel accepted.
iv. This message would make me feel approved of.

4.10 Negative Face Goals (Goldsmith, 2000)
i. This message would make me feel competent.
ii. This message would not impose on me.
iii. This message would make me feel respected.
iv. This message would make me feel like I’m free to do what I want.

4.11 Identity Goal Achievement (Wilson & Feng, 2007)
i. This message would make me feel valued.
ii. This message would restore my own sense of self.
iii. This message would make me feel confident about myself.
iv. This message would make me feel liked and accepted.
v. This message would make me feel more proud about my racial/ethnic identity.
vi. This message would make me feel positively about the status of my racial/ethnic group in society.

4.12 Relationship Goal Achievement (Holmstrom, Burleson, & Jones, 2005)
i. This message would preserve a positive relationship with my friend.
ii. This message would make me feel closer to my friend.
iii. This message would enhance the relationship between me and my friend.
iv. This message would not risk my relationship with my friend.
4.13 Perceived Communication Competence

i. My friend said some things in the message that should not have been said.
ii. Some of the things my friend said in the message would be embarrassing to me.
iii. The things my friend said in the message were all in good taste.
iv. Everything that my friend said in the message was appropriate.
v. My friend’s remarks in the message were suitable for the situation.
vi. My friend’s communication in the message was very proper.

Part Five: Prior Experiences with Racism and Racial/Ethnic Identity Scale

In this last section, we’d like you to answer a few more questions about your prior experiences with some incidents and your views about your ethnic/racial group membership.

5.1 Prior Experiences with Interpersonal Racism (Brondolo et al, 2005)

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements to let us know how often you’ve encountered the following situations: (1= Never happened, 2= Rarely happened, 3= Occasionally happened, 4= Happened often, 5= Happened very often)

i. People have been nice to my face, but said bad things behind my back.
ii. Others made me feel like an outsider.
iii. Those speaking a different language made me feel like an outsider.
iv. People ignored me.
v. Others hinted I was stupid.
vi. A clerk or waiter ignored me.
vii. Someone called me bad names.
viii. Someone made rude gestures.
ix. A person hinted I must be lazy.
x. A person hinted that I must not be clean.
xi. A person hinted I was dishonest.
xii. Someone did not trust me.
xiii. A person hinted I must be violent.
xiv. Someone did not take me seriously.
xv. A boss or supervisor was unfair to me.
xvi. Someone thought I couldn’t do things.
xvii. Someone thought I couldn’t handle a job.
xviii. A person actually hurt me.
xix. A person threatened to hurt me.
xx. Someone actually damaged my property.
xxi. Someone threatened to damage my property.

5.2 Ethnic/Racial Identity Scale (Phinney, 1992)
Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements
(1=strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)

i. I have spent time trying to find out more about my racial group, such as its history and traditions.
ii. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own racial group.
iii. I have a clear sense of my racial background and what it means for me.
iv. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my racial group membership.
v. I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.
vi. I have a strong sense of belonging to my own racial group.

vii. I understand pretty well what my racial group membership means to me.
viii. In order to learn more about my racial background, I have often talked to other people about my racial group.
ix. I have a lot of pride in my racial group.
x. I participate in practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.
xi. I feel a strong attachment towards my own racial group.

xii. I feel good about my racial background.
APPENDIX B: SCENARIOS AND MESSAGES

Avoidance Scenario 1

Scenario: You are sitting in a bus. The bus is almost full but the seat next to you is empty. A white man enters the bus. He looks at the empty seat next to you. You smile and make eye contact. The man looks away and does not smile back. He stands for the rest of the time you are in the bus. As your stop approaches you get up from your seat and stand next to the exit door. As you walk out you see the man sit on the empty seat that was next to you.

HPC1: I can understand how angry and upset you are. It’s outrageous that people might still act this way today! It is disappointing as it seems he was avoiding sitting next to you because you aren’t white. So it is natural that you’d feel upset about this incident. But you know sometimes people grow up with these biased attitudes and they might not even realize how their actions can be seen as offensive. I’ve been in a similar situation and I felt terrible too. But then I realized I could feel better if I could consider this as their ignorance and move on.

LPC1: I think it’s ridiculous you are still thinking about this. You can’t get upset about who sits where on the bus. You are an adult and you shouldn’t get upset over such petty issues. Just stop imagining that people are always avoiding you because of your ethnicity. It’s just wrong for you to overanalyze a situation like this. Maybe you were putting out a weird vibe that prevented people from sitting next to you. You know, buses aren’t the most efficient public transport in this city. I don’t like riding the bus. Forget about that man, and forget about the bus.

HSIA1: You know this is not about you, right? It’s not your fault that some people can’t get past your ethnicity. Other people and I respect you for who you are. As a member of your ethnicity, you have so many achievements in your personal and professional life to be proud of. So, incidents like these won’t harm your strong heritage and your rich culture. Maybe if we explain to people that their actions can be seen as offensive, they might not act that way again. I think things are changing because people are becoming more aware of such biases. Incidents like these might become less frequent in the future.

LSIA1: Unfortunately, people tend to make so many assumptions about you because of your ethnicity. That’s why some people might not sit next to you on the bus or socialize with you in other situations. I know that you can’t easily succeed at work or even expect great service at a restaurant because of your ethnicity. People treat you differently because of your ethnicity all the time. But we can’t change everyone’s
mindset and make them treat everyone equally. People will continue to behave like this because such biases don’t go away quickly. I think such incidents will continue to happen in the future.

**HComb1:** I know that you are upset. It’s disappointing as it seems like he was avoiding sitting next to you because you aren’t white. Sometimes people grow up with these biases and don’t even realize how inappropriate their actions are. Letting it go might help. When I encountered a similar situation I realized I could feel better by not focusing on how people treat me, but on how I react to people’s actions. And this is not about you. Other people and I respect you for who you are. Incidents like these won’t harm your strong heritage and your rich culture. I think things are changing and such incidents will become less frequent.

**LComb1:** I think it’s ridiculous that you are still moping about this. You can’t be upset about who sits where on the bus. Just stop imagining that people are always avoiding you because of your ethnicity. It’s just wrong for you to overanalyze this situation. Forget about that man, and forget about the bus. Unfortunately, your ethnicity prevents some people from sitting next to you on the bus or being your friend. People will treat you differently because of your ethnicity all the time, so I think we can’t change people’s mindsets and make them treat everyone equally. I think such incidents will continue to happen in the future.

**Avoidance Scenario 2**

**Scenario:** At your job, you are a part of a team where all of your team members are white. Everybody is always cordial with you at work but no one socializes with you outside work. One day, during lunchtime a colleague announces that they are going to a happy hour after work. She then individually walks up to everyone’s desk and personally invites him or her to the party. Everybody gets invited except you.

**HPC2:** I understand that you are upset about this. You’ve worked with these people for so long. Obviously you’d expect that they would invite you to the happy hour. I know you must be feeling terrible as it seems like they didn’t invite you because of your ethnicity. As upsetting as this is, it’s possible that your colleagues don’t even realize how their actions can come across as offensive. When I had a similar experience, I felt terrible just like you. But I realized I could feel better by being the bigger person and treating others just the way I’d want to be treated.

**LPC2:** You weren’t invited to a happy hour after work. So what? That’s no reason for you to be so angry! I don’t understand why you need to react to this. You should understand that you can’t be upset about such petty incidents. Stop imagining that everyone is isolating you because of your ethnicity. I think that going to a bar and
socializing with people after work is such a waste of time. You know I hate going to happy hours. Don’t over analyze such small issues. You shouldn’t care about this incident at all. Forget about the happy hour and forget about your co-workers.

**HSIA1:** This is not about you. It isn’t your fault that some people cannot move past your ethnicity. So many people, including me, respect you for who you are. As a member of your ethnicity, you’ve achieved a lot in your work, have great friends and a loving family. An incident like this won’t hurt your strong heritage and rich culture. But maybe if we explain to people why their actions can seem offensive, they might not act that way. I think things are changing and people are becoming more mindful of such biases. I think incidents like these won’t occur as frequently in the future.

**LSIA1:** Unfortunately your ethnicity will always invite incidents like these, and will be a barrier for socializing with some people. There always seem to be so many obstacles for your success at work or in other social situations. Your colleagues or other people always tend to treat you differently because of your ethnicity. But I think you can’t avoid such incidents or make people socialize with you. You cannot change people’s mindsets. Some people will always want to avoid mingling with the ethnic minorities. It seem likely that these types of incidents might keep happening because biases like these don’t go away very quickly.

**HComb2:** I understand that you are upset. You’ve worked with these people for so long. Obviously you’d expect to be invited. It is disappointing as it seems like they didn’t invite you because of your ethnicity. Maybe your colleagues don’t realize how their actions can come across as offensive. When I had a similar experience, I too felt terrible. But I realized I could feel better by being the bigger person and treating others just the way I’d want to be treated. This is not about you, So many people, including me, respect you for who you are. Such incidents won’t harm your rich heritage. So, incidents like these won’t happen that often.

**LComb2:** There is no reason for you to be so angry! I don’t understand why you need to react to this. You should understand that you can’t be upset about such petty incidents. Stop imagining that everyone is isolating you because of your ethnicity. Forget about the happy hour and forget about you co-workers. Your ethnicity will always prevent some people from socializing with you. There always seem to be so many obstacles for your success at work or in other social situations. Sadly you can’t avoid such incidents or make people socialize with you. This is how things are. Some people will always avoid mingling with the ethnic minorities.
Derogation Scenario 1

Scenario: You hold a managerial position at a big corporation. You are going to an important client meeting and ask one of your employees to accompany you to the meeting. The employee is a white man. When you arrive at the meeting, the client assumes that the white employee is the manager and starts talking to him. You have to interrupt and clarify that you are the manager.

HPC1: I know you’re very upset. It’s really frustrating because no matter how hard you work, or what you accomplish, someone assumes you’re less successful because of your ethnicity. It’s annoying that people still act so ignorantly today! It’s natural that you’d be upset about such incidents. But, it is possible that your clients grew up with these prejudiced beliefs and don’t even realize how their actions can be seen as offensive. When I had a similar experience I too felt terrible. But then I felt better when I realized that their misperceptions can’t interfere with my managerial skills.

LPC1: So what? Your clients didn’t think you were the manager. I find it ridiculous that you are still moping over this. There is nothing to be upset about. Listen to me, don’t make a big deal about a small issue. Maybe you weren’t dressed nicely enough for a manager. In my opinion you should stop imagining that people are always mistreating you because of your ethnicity. Thinking about work related stuff is so boring and such a waste of time. You should not spend so much time in thinking about this incident. Forget about the client, and forget about what they said.

HSIA1: This is not about you. It’s not your fault that your clients acted in an ignorant way. Other people and I respect you for who you are. As a member of your ethnicity, you have achieved so much in your professional and personal life. An incident like this won’t harm your strong heritage and rich cultural background. Maybe if we explain to people how such behavior could be seen as offensive, it might prevent them from making such mistakes in the future. I think that our society is changing as more people are coming together to eliminate different kinds of prejudice. So, incidents like these will become less frequent.

LSIA1: Your ethnicity will always determine what people think you can achieve. People see you as an ethnic minority and assume you aren’t a very successful person. You always have to work harder than others do to become successful at work or command respect in social situations. It’s unfortunate that people always treat you as being less worthy than others. You can’t avoid incidents like these, and can’t prevent people from making judgments based on your ethnicity. Incidents like these will continue to happen. No matter how egalitarian people think they are, prejudice of this kind is going to last forever.
**HComb1:** I know you’re upset. It’s really frustrating because no matter how hard you work, or what you accomplish, someone assumes you are less successful because of your ethnicity. Maybe your clients grew up with these biases and don’t realize how their actions can be seen as offensive. When I had a similar experience I too felt terrible. But then I felt better when I realized that their misperceptions can’t interfere with my managerial skills. Also, this isn’t about you. Other people and I respect you for who you are. Incidents like these can’t harm your strong heritage. Our society is changing and such incidents will become rarer.

**LComb1:** There is nothing to be upset about a silly thing like this. I find it ridiculous that you are still moping over this. Listen to me, don’t make a big deal about a small issue. Forget about the client, and forget about what they said. Your ethnicity will always determine what people think you can achieve. People see you as an ethnic minority and assume you aren’t a very successful person. You always have to work harder than others to become successful at work or command respect in social situations. You can’t prevent people from making judgments based on your ethnicity. Incidents like these will continue to happen.

**Derogation Scenario 2**

**Scenario:** You are at a high-end apparel store in the mall. There are a few white customers browsing through the store. As you enter the store a store attendant who is sitting at the check out counter starts staring at you. As you begin to browse she gets up and starts following you. The attendant then comes up to you and says “This is actually our designer collection. It is very expensive. Maybe you want to check the clearance items on the other side?”

**HPC2:** I understand you’re very upset about this. It’s frustrating that regardless of how you dress or what your job is, people tend to judge you based on your ethnicity and think less of you. It’s outrageous that people would still act so ignorantly today! It’s only natural for you to be upset about such incidents. Unfortunately it is possible that the store attendant grew up with such biases attitudes and doesn’t even realize that her actions can be seen as offensive. When I had a similar experience I too felt terrible. But then I realized that I can’t let a stranger’s ignorance make me feel bad about myself.

**LPC2:** The store attendant directed you to the clearance section. So what? There is nothing to be upset about. Maybe you didn’t dress nicely enough like the other customers in the store. I think it is ridiculous that you are still moping over this. You are wrong to think that this behavior was offensive. Stop telling yourself that you were mistreated in the store because of your ethnicity. Don’t read too much into this
incident. You know, I hate going to the mall nowadays. It is always so crowded. You should just forget about the store attendant and what she said.

HSIA1: You know this is not about you, right? It’s not your fault that some people are fixated on your ethnicity. Other people and I respect you for who you are. As a member of your ethnicity, you’ve achieved so much in your professional and personal life. An incident like this won’t harm your strong heritage and your rich cultural background. Maybe if we explain to people how these actions can be seen as offensive, they might not act this way again. I think things are changing and people are becoming more aware of such subtle biases in day to day life. So such incidents will become less frequent in the future.

LSIA1: I think your ethnicity will always influence people’s perceptions about you in this country. Your ethnicity always seems to evoke negative treatment from others. I realize that you have always faced so many obstacles in the society because of your ethnicity. It’s sad that people tend to treat you as being less worthy in all situations. But you get rid of people’s biased mindsets. You can’t control the way people judge you based on your ethnicity. Incidents like these will continue to occur because it is unlikely that people will suddenly stop acting out their biases. People will continue to behave this way.

HComb2: I understand you’re upset. It’s frustrating that regardless of how you dress or what your job is, people tend to judge you based on your ethnicity and think less of you. The store attendant might not even realize that her actions can be seen as offensive. When I had a similar experience I too felt terrible. But then I realized I can’t let a stranger’s ignorance make me feel bad about myself. Also, this is not your fault. Other people and I respect you for who you are. So, such incidents won’t harm your strong heritage. I think incidents like these will become less frequent in the future.

LComb2: The store attendant directed you to the clearance section. So what? Don’t make a big deal about this! Maybe you didn’t dress nicely enough like the other customers in the store. Stop imagining that you were mistreated in the store because of your ethnicity. You should just forget about the store attendant and what she said. I think your ethnicity will always influence people’s perceptions about your status in this country. I realize that you have always faced many obstacles in society because of your ethnicity. But you can’t control people’s judgments about your ethnicity. Unfortunately, such incidents will continue to occur in the future.
Categorization Scenario 1 (African American)

Scenario: You are walking on the sidewalk of a busy street. A white woman is walking towards you on the sidewalk. She walks past some white men and women and is approaching you. She looks at you and clutches her purse and looks away from you. She has an expression of fear on her face. She moves away from you while you pass her.

HPC1: I can understand how angry and disappointed you are. It is outrageous that some people still behave like this today! It must be frustrating that no matter what you do, some people will only see you as dangerous and scary. So it’s natural for you to be upset about incidents like this. Maybe that woman grew up with such biased attitudes and doesn’t even realize that her actions can come across as offensive. When I had a similar experience I felt terrible just like you. But then I felt better after I realized that other people’s stereotypes don’t change who I am.

LPC1: Just snap out of it! I think it is really stupid that you are still thinking about this incident and overanalyzing it. People can walk however they want on a sidewalk. There are no rules about how to behave while walking on the sidewalk. I don’t think there is any reason for you to be upset about incidents like this. Maybe you did something that came across as being dangerous or shady. There is no need to take this personally and assume this was an insult. You should stop imagining that people are always mistreating you because of your ethnicity. Forget about that lady, and forget about what happened.

HSIA1: You know this is not about you, right? It’s not your fault that people have stereotypes about your ethnicity. So many people, including me, respect you for who you are. As a member of your ethnicity, you have achieved a lot in your professional and your personal life. An incident like this won’t harm your strong heritage and rich cultural background. Maybe the next time this happens you can just smile and say hello. You can break their stereotype then and there! Also, things are changing and people are becoming more mindful of such biases and stereotypes. I think incidents like these won’t happen as frequently in the future.

LSIA1: You know that your ethnicity will determine how people see you. People see you as a black person and that tends to evoke negative stereotypes about you. It is unfortunate that you always face so many obstacles in your work and your social life. People always treat you as being less worthy than others. But I think that incidents like these are inevitable. You cannot stop people from stereotyping black people. This is the way things are and will be for a long time. It seems unlikely that such incidents will stop occurring because stereotypes and biases don’t go away quickly.
HComb1 I can understand you are upset. It’s frustrating that no matter what you do, some people only see you as dangerous and scary. Maybe that woman grew up with such biased attitudes and doesn’t even realize that her actions can come across as offensive. When I had a similar experience I felt terrible just like you. But then I felt better after I realized that other people’s stereotypes don’t change who I am. This is not about you. So many people, including me, respect you for who you are. An incident like this won’t harm your strong heritage. I think incidents like these won’t happen as frequently in the future.

LComb1: Just snap out of it. I think it is really stupid that you are still thinking about this incident and overanalyzing it. People can walk however they want on a sidewalk. Stop imagining that people are mistreating you because of your ethnicity. Forget about that lady, and forget about what happened. People see you as a black person and that tends to evoke negative stereotypes about you. People always treat you as being less worthy than others. But I think that incidents like these are unavoidable. It seems unlikely that such incidents will stop occurring because stereotypes and biases don’t go away quickly.

Categorization Scenario 2 (African American)

Scenario: You are out for dinner with a group of colleagues from work. During the conversation someone asks you where you did your undergraduate program. You mention the name of the prestigious university that you attended. The person responds with, “Oh! I didn’t know they have affirmative action at that university?”

HPC2: I know you are very upset. It’s terrible that people say such things in this day and age. It’s disappointing because no matter how hard you’ve worked to get where you are, some people assume you made it because of affirmative action. It’s natural for you to get upset about this. But maybe your colleague grew up with these biased attitudes and doesn’t even realize how offensive that comment was. When I had a similar experience I felt terrible just like you. But then I realized that I could be a happier person if I could see this as their ignorance and move on.

LPC2: Just snap out of it! Don’t be upset because someone thought you got into a school because of affirmative action. Affirmative action is just a fact of life. Many people get accepted into colleges because of affirmative action. Don’t be oversensitive. It’s not a big deal. You can’t take offense at every question that is asked of you. It is wrong to keep imagining that people are always trying to put you down because of your ethnicity. I hate going out with my work colleagues. Forget about what your colleague said or what it meant, and forget about affirmative action.

HSIA2: You know this is not about you, right? It’s not your fault that some people have such stereotypes about black people. So many people, including me, respect you
for who you are and what you do. As a member of your ethnic group, you’ve achieved a lot in your personal and professional life. An incident like this won’t harm your strong heritage and rich cultural background. Maybe if we explain to people why such comments are offensive, it might prevent them from making these mistakes in the future. However, I think things are changing slowly and people are becoming more mindful of such stereotypes and biases. Incidents like these are unlikely to persist.

LSIA2: Your ethnicity will determine how people see you. People see you as a black person and make assumptions about what you can do or what you can achieve. You always have to work harder than others to become successful. No matter what situation you are in, people always treat you as being less worthy than others. But, I think incidents like these are unavoidable. You can’t get rid of people’s stereotypes about African Americans. It doesn’t seem like people will stop stereotyping others based on race or ethnicity. Unfortunately, it is possible that such incidents continue to happen in the future too.

HComb2: I know you are upset. It’s disappointing because no matter how hard you’ve worked to get where you are, some people assume you made it because of affirmative action. But maybe your colleague doesn’t realize how offensive that comment was. When I had a similar experience I too felt terrible. But then I realized I could be happier if I see this incident as their ignorance and move on. Also, this is not your fault. So many people, including me, respect you for who you are and what you do. An incident like this won’t harm your strong heritage. Incidents like these are unlikely to continue in the future too.

LComb2: Just snap out of it! Don’t be upset because someone thought you got into a school because of affirmative action. It is wrong to keep imagining that people are always trying to put you down because of your ethnicity. Forget about what your colleague said or what it meant, and forget about affirmative action. People see you as a black person and make assumptions about what you can do or what you achieve. You always have to work harder than others to become successful. But, I think incidents like these are unavoidable. Unfortunately, it is possible that such incidents continue to happen in the future too.

Categorization Scenario 1 (Asian American)

Scenario: You are meeting your white friend’s sister for the first time. After your friend introduces you and you spend a couple of minutes talking about how you met your friend, the sister interrupts and says, “Wow, your English is perfect, where are you from?” You tell her that you are from San Diego, California. Not satisfied with the answer she asks, “No where are you really from?”
**HPC1:** I understand that you are upset about this. It’s sad that some people still think of all Asians as foreigners. It’s frustrating that despite being born and lived here your entire life, you are still seen as an outsider. It’s only natural that you’d feel upset about incidents like this. But maybe your friend’s sister grew up with these biased attitudes and doesn’t even realize why her behavior could be seen as offensive. When I experienced a similar situation, I too felt terrible. But then I felt a lot better after I realized that other people’s assumptions or misperceptions won’t change who I am.

**LPC1:** Come on, she asked you where you are from. Why is that such a big deal? There is nothing to be upset about. It’s just ridiculous that you are still thinking about this. I think you are being too sensitive about a stupid question. You are Asian so naturally people don’t quickly see you as American. You don’t have any basis to claim this was an insult and get all worked up. I don’t like that friend of yours anyway. Forget about what she asked you and stop thinking about what it meant. Stop moping over such small comments.

**HSIA1:** You know this is not about you, right? It’s not your fault that some people have such stereotypes about Asians. So many people, including me, respect you for who you are. As a member of your ethnicity, you’ve achieved so much success in your professional and personal life. Incidents like these won’t harm your strong heritage and rich cultural background. But maybe if we explain to people why such comments can be seen as offensive they might not act this way again. However, I think things are changing and people are becoming mindful of such subtle biases in day-to-day life. Incidents like these will become less frequent in the future.

**LSIA1:** Sadly, your ethnicity will always make people hesitant in instantly recognizing you as an American. People tend to look at you and see you as an Asian but not necessarily an American. It is always harder for you to command respect or be recognized as an American. No matter what your story is, people see you as an outsider. But I think stereotypical comments and assumptions like these are unavoidable. You can’t stop people from stereotyping you as just another Asian. I think incidents like these will continue to happen in the future because such ethnic stereotypes don’t go away quickly.

**HComb1:** I understand that you are upset. It’s frustrating that despite of being born and lived here for your entire life, you are still seen as an outsider. Sometimes people grow up with these biases and don’t realize how their behavior could be seen as offensive. When I experienced a similar situation, I too felt terrible. But I felt a lot better when I realized that other people’s misperceptions won’t change who I am. Also, this is not about you. So many people, including me, respect you and love you.
for who you are. Incidents like these won’t harm your strong heritage and rich culture. I think things such incidents will become less frequent.

**LComb1:** Just snap out of it! There is nothing to be upset about. It’s just ridiculous that you are still thinking about this. You don’t have any basis to claim this was an insult and get all worked up. Forget about what she asked you and stop thinking about what it meant. Stop moping over such small comments. Sadly, your ethnicity will always make people hesitant in instantly recognizing you as an American. No matter what your story is, people see you as an outsider. But stereotypical comments and assumptions like these are unavoidable. I think incidents like these will continue to happen in the future because stereotypes don’t go away very quickly.

**Categorization Scenario 2 (Asian American)**

*Scenario: You are at a restaurant with a group of white co-workers. When the check arrives, you ask your coworker what would be 15% of $46. She then looks at you and says, “Oh common now, you are Asian, how come you can’t do the math? “*

**HPC1:** I understand how frustrated this must make you feel. It’s terrible your colleague said that. It’s disappointing because such comments tell you that people don’t see you as an individual but just another Asian. It’s natural that you’d be upset about this. But your colleague may have grown up with these stereotypes about Asians and might not even realize why the comment could be seen as offensive. When I had a similar experience I too felt terrible. But then I felt a lot better after I realized that I am a unique individual and not just a stereotype of my ethnicity.

**LPC1:** She made a comment about Asians being good at math. That’s it? There is no reason for you to upset about that. Stereotypical jokes and comments are just a fact of life. I think you are crazy to think that this was an insult and get so upset about it. In my opinion you should stop over analyzing small issues. It is wrong for you to keep imagining that people are being rude to you because of your ethnicity. Don’t waste time thinking about tips and math. I always use my phone to calculate how much I should tip. Forget about what your colleague said, and quit moping over such small issues.

**HSIA2:** You know this is not your fault, right? It’s not your fault that some people think all Asians are the same. So many people, including me, respect you for who you are. You have achieved so much in your professional and your personal life. An ignorant comment won’t harm your strong heritage and rich cultural background. But maybe if we explain to people why such comments can be offensive, they might not act in the same manner again. However, things are changing and people are getting
more mindful about such stereotypes and biases. So, I think incidents like these won’t happen as frequently in the future.

LSIA2: Unfortunately your ethnicity tends to prevent people from instantly recognizing you as an American. People look at you and see you as an Asian but not necessarily an American. No matter where you were born, or what your story is, people just see you as a foreigner. People always patronize you, or think less of you because they think you are just another Asian. But incidents like these are unavoidable. You can’t get rid of people’s stereotypes about Asians. I think that incidents like these will continue to happen in the future because stereotypes and biases don’t go away very quickly.

HComb2: I understand how upset you are. It’s disappointing because such comments tell you that people don’t see you as an individual but just another Asian. Sometimes people grow up with these stereotypes and don’t realize such comments could be seen as offensive. When I had a similar experience I too felt terrible. But then I felt a lot better after I realized that I am a unique individual and not just a stereotype of my ethnicity. This is not about you. So many people, including me, respect you for who you are. An ignorant comment won’t harm your strong heritage. I think incidents like these won’t happen as frequently in the future.

LComb2: There is no reason for you to upset about that. In my opinion you should stop over analyzing small issues. Forget about what your colleague said, and quit moping over such small issues. Unfortunately your ethnicity tends to prevent people from instantly recognizing you as an American. People always patronize you, or think less of you because they think you are just another Asian. But incidents like these are unavoidable. You can’t get rid of people’s stereotypes about Asians. I think that incidents like these will continue to happen in the future because stereotypes and biases don’t go away very quickly.
APPENDIX C: PHOTOGRAPHS USED FOR SOURCE ETHNICITY MANIPULATION
APPENDIX D: REALISM SCORES FOR THE FINAL 48 MESSAGES

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Note: HPC= High person-centeredness, LPC=Low person-centeredness, HSIA= High social-identity affirmation, LSIA= Low social-identity affirmation, HCOMB= High combination message, LCOMB=Low combination message, AV1=Avoidance Scenario 1, AV2= Avoidance Scenario 2, DER1= Derogation Scenario 1, DER2= Derogation Scenario 2, CATAF1= Categorization Scenario 1 for African American Participants, CATAF2= Categorization Scenario 2 for African American Participants, CATAS1=Categorization Scenario 1 for Asian American Participants, CATAS2=Categorization Scenario 2 for Asian American Participants.