Ethnic Stigma as a Contextual Experience: A Possible Selves Perspective

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This article critiques trait views of stigma that suggest that membership in a negatively stereotyped group leads to low self-esteem and self-hatred, and it builds from Erving Goffman's theorizing to define stigma as the expectation of a stereotypical and discrediting judgment of oneself by others in a particular context. Students (40 of color and 46 European American) watched a videotape of a prospective teaching assistant (TA) in an experiment in which ethnic match with the TA and frequency of imagined evaluation by the TA were manipulated. Students of color envisioned less positive views of self in ongoing interactions with a European American TA who would evaluate them in the domain of the stigma. Implications for stigma theory and education are discussed.

Social scientists have primarily defined stigma as an enduring attribute—something constant and pervasively negative about individuals' experiences of themselves. Because stigma is typically associated with characteristics that cannot be eliminated, like ethnic origin, physical scars, or prison records, many theorists have concluded that the negative, self-relevant experience of stigma must also be pervasive (Clark, 1965; Ho, 1985; Isser & Schwartz, 1983; Kardiner & Ovesey, 1951; Kitahara, 1987; Lewin, 1948; Pettigrew, 1964; Poussaint, 1983). In contrast to this view of stigma as a stable attribute, the present research examines the contextual nature of stigma and, in particular, its connection to the self. The view taken here is that a person will experience stigma only in particular social relationships and contexts. When this experience occurs, some aspects of the self, especially the most malleable aspects like possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), may be markedly influenced. But according to this view, people in negatively stereotyped and devalued groups generally should not have more negative self-concepts than people in positively stereotyped and valued groups.

The view of stigma presented here stems from the symbolic interactionist approach of Goffman (1963).

Goffman suggested that stigma is an attribute that is deeply *discrediting* in the context of certain relationships. He further suggested that an attribute gains meaning only in relation to how it is viewed by others in a particular context. For example, a nonnative English speaker may feel very proud speaking English in front of his non-English-speaking parents but may feel uncomfortable meeting Anglophones who may devalue his accent. In both cases, the person speaks English with the same accent, but in the former, his ability is credited, whereas in the latter, it is discredited. Goffman wrote that stigma incorporates "an *undesired differentness* from what we had anticipated" (p. 5, emphasis added). In the case of the person with the accent, people expect others to speak "properly," but the accent is that undesired differentness and is judged as inappropriate and discrediting in that context by those people.

Previous empirical research also suggests the view of stigma as a contextual experience. Researchers generally find that members of negatively stereotyped groups do not have lower self-esteem than members of positively stereotyped groups (Jensen, White, & Galliher, 1982; Porter & Washington, 1979; Stephan & Rosenfield, 1979; for reviews, see Crocker & Major, 1989; Cross, 1985; and Rosenberg, 1989). However, certain contexts seem to provide the conditions that foster the experience of

stigma. For example, Steele and Aronson (1995) found that if students are in a context in which a test is viewed as diagnostic of one's overall intelligence, that context evokes more self-doubt among African American students than among European American students in the same context and among African Americans in a context in which the test is nondiagnostic of intelligence. The implication is that membership in a particular group does not lead to a pervasively negative experience of the self. Rather, certain situations in which a negative stereotype is salient may lead to expectations of being devalued or discredited in that context.

Being Discredited in the Context of an Institution

Although broad in its implications for research, the present theoretical framework suggests, in particular, ways to investigate how the experience of stigma may be envisioned by students of color in the context of specific relationships in an academic setting. An inherent part of the student role is concern with the instructor's evaluation (Snodgrass, 1985, 1992). For students of color in a predominantly White institution, concern with the instructor's evaluation may transform into the experience of stigma because the context may be viewed as an unfriendly one in which students of color are negatively stereotyped (cf. Steele & Aronson, 1995). Specifically, the anticipation of a negative, stereotypical evaluation by the instructor may be associated with a variety of negative self-relevant thoughts about what is possible for students of color in the relevant academic domains. Stigma is then inextricably connected to the social context and to one's relationship to others in that context. For example, when talking about students of color in predominantly White educational institutions, the experience of stigma is not merely centered on the institution, the students, their view of the institution, or their view of themselves but, rather, on their view of themselves in the context of certain relationships in that institution.

The academic context may evoke certain self-relevant stereotypes among students. For example, a persistent and pervasive stereotype[1] in the United States is that people of certain ethnic groups are less intelligent than people of other ethnic groups—specifically, the dominant group of European Americans (Chideya, 1995; Devine, 1989; Katz & Braly, 1947; Niemann, Jennings, Rozelle, Baxter, & Sullivan, 1994). Students of color are aware that other ethnic groups may hold negative views of their groups (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994; Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990) and, specifically, that other ethnic groups may hold stereotypes of the intellectual abilities of their respective groups (Sigelman & Welch, 1991; Steele & Aronson, 1995). This awareness may affect the expectations of students of color for interactions with European Ameri-

can evaluators, especially in educational settings. First, a predominantly White college may be fertile ground for the experience of stigma because the context of the classroom forces one to view its evaluators and its system of evaluation as credible (Rosenberg, 1979), the former being primarily European Americans and the latter being primarily Eurocentric. Unlike high school in which many students of color had at least one teacher of color, had many classmates of color, and went home every day to be validated by their families of color (Jackson, McCullough, & Gurin, 1988), the context in predominantly White institutions is exactly that—predominantly White. Second, the educational context requires the characteristic that the stereotype says certain groups lack—intellectual competence (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Although all students attend to how they are evaluated (Snodgrass, 1985, 1992), students of color in predominantly White institutions may be forced to see themselves through European American eyes that may view them stereotypically. In the nomenclature of Steele and Aronson (1995), such conditions may create the *predicament of stereotype threat*—that is, a situation in which views of oneself and one's performance may suffer because of a concern that one may be viewed stereotypically (for more on the connection between stereotypes and stigma, see Coleman & Veneciano, in press; Crocker, Major, & Steele, in press; Jones et al., 1984). Consequently, students of color are vulnerable to feeling stigmatized when relating to European American instructors in the context of this predominantly White institution.

Such predictions may seem incompatible with the stigma research of Crocker and Major and their colleagues (Crocker, Cornwell, & Major, 1993; Crocker & Major, 1989; Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991). They suggested that people in a stereotyped group may use their group membership to protect self-esteem through three strategies: (a) attributing negative evaluations to prejudice, (b) selectively comparing themselves with ingroup members, and (c) devaluing domains in which their group does not fair well. But these two views of stigma are not incompatible. Crocker and Major recognized that certain negative consequences to the self from stigma remain in spite of its possible self-protective consequences. Many contexts constrain people from the freedom of using one of the three self-protective strategies. The situational press may lead one to value the opinion of the prejudiced other or limit one's range of social comparison targets, or the context may be very central to the self and difficult to devalue. For example, it is often difficult to discount an evaluation from one's instructor because the evaluation is in a self-defining domain, and even if the evaluator is prejudiced, that instructor still has control over one's outcomes. In these

situations, one is forced either to devalue an important part of the self or to accept (at least on a certain level) an evaluation that is very possibly prejudiced, and one chooses the lesser of two evils. In these cases, the consequences of accepting the negative evaluation are believed to be less severe than those associated with disbanding part of the self.

Possible Selves as Contextualized Expectancies

Possible selves are personalized and internalized expectations of the self (Markus & Nurius, 1986); they include views of what people expect to be, what they hope to be, and what they fear becoming. A person's possible selves are highly responsive to the situational context because they are not necessarily firmly grounded in the present or past experience (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Nurius & Markus, 1990). Moreover, certain factors in a specific situation, such as others' expectations, may affect them greatly.

Contextualized possible selves are contextualized expectancies of the self—future views of oneself in particular interactions and certain situations. Because of their specificity, they may not generalize to other interactions, situations, or domains but may have powerful effects on self-evaluation in the specified context once they are evoked into working self-concept (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In certain contexts, the experience of stigma may be displayed in the array of one's contextualized possible selves. When a student of color interacts with a European American instructor, both academic and ethnic identity self-conceptions could be salient, the former because he or she is in an academic context and the latter because she or he is in an interethnic interaction. The connections between academic and ethnic self-conceptions may include how people from another group view one as a member of one's ethnic group in this academic context.

Other theorists also include representations of others in the self (e.g., Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Higgins, 1987; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For example, Higgins's (1987) self-discrepancy theory suggests that people often incorporate the expectations of others into the self. For instance, a discrepancy between one's actual self (e.g., as a musician) and what one feels obligated to become because of others' expectations (i.e., one's "ought" self, for example, as a manager in the family business) may lead to anxiety, anger, and resentment toward family members (Strauman & Higgins, 1988). Similarly, expectations of European American instructors may be peripheral parts of the self-concept of a student of color that become salient during interactions with European American instructors. The discrepancy between one's view of oneself and the other's expectations may influence subsequent expectations for a future interaction (cf. Goffman, 1963).

The present research focuses specifically on expectations of interactions between Latinos/Latinas and European Americans and between African Americans and European Americans. Among students of color, the potential for being stereotyped or unjustly judged is proposed to evoke relatively negative expectations of interactions in which students of color are in a subordinate position relative to a European American. For students of color, the view of the other's perception of themselves may include a belief that the other will stereotype them negatively, which will constrain their positive views of self in the relevant context. However, this effect will exist only when the European American will repeatedly evaluate them in the domain of the stigma. A semester-long interaction can be quite consequential because the student has contact with an instructor every week in a relatively small class and this instructor is evaluating the student continually. By comparison, an instructor's evaluation of a student from a one-time interaction is inconsequential. Therefore, when expecting repeated evaluation from European American instructors, the expectations of students of color may be reflected in a less positive set of contextualized possible selves in the context of the relationship between the student and the European American instructor.

Overview

The present study examined the viability of a contextual view of stigma by manipulating situational factors that may evoke the experience of being stereotyped. Participants imagined interacting with a teaching assistant (TA), and the expectations for the interaction were assessed. Participants imagined being a TA's student, which placed them in a subordinate role. Although the status difference between professors and undergraduates is larger than that between TAs and undergraduates, a TA was the chosen evaluator for the sake of realism. Few small classes in popular majors like psychology are taught by professors at the University of Michigan, whereas virtually all large lecture courses have smaller discussion sections taught by TAs. Students were randomly assigned to be in either the ethnically-matched-with-the-TA condition or the not-ethnically-matched condition. The frequency of imagined evaluation by the TA was also manipulated by randomly assigning students to either a one-time-interaction condition or a semester-long-interaction condition. It was hypothesized that views of an interaction with a TA would differ depending on how consequential the interaction was. Specifically, it was predicted that students of color in the semester-long-interaction condition with a European American TA would envision feeling stigmatized as operationalized by a less positive set of contextualized possible selves. When they believed they would not be routinely evaluated (i.e.,

in the one-time-interaction condition), they would not experience stigma. Neither ethnic match nor frequency of evaluation should affect the self-ratings of European American students.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 86 students (50 female, 36 male) participated in sessions of one to three participants as part of a requirement for an introduction to psychology class. Of the participants, 23 participants were African American, 46 were European American, and 17 were Latino/a. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (participants' ethnicity: of color or European American) × 2 (ethnic match with instructor: matched or not matched) × 2 (frequency of imagined evaluation: one time or semester long) between-subjects design.

Procedure

On arriving at the lab, participants were greeted by a European American female experimenter who described the study as examining different teaching styles. The experimenter told participants that they would each watch a videotape of a graduate student discussing her or his philosophy of teaching. Participants learned that, for financial reasons, it is necessary to rely on TAs to shoulder some of the responsibility of teaching at large universities and that the university wanted input on what students want from a TA. The experimenter explained that the TAs in the videos were "senior TAs"—advanced graduate students who train and supervise other TAs.

Manipulation of Frequency of Evaluation

Participants next received folders containing information about the TA and a questionnaire to be completed after participants viewed the videotape. The folders permitted the study to be run double-blind. The experimenter then escorted each participant to his or her own screening cubicle and gave each participant a videotape. The folders contained an instruction sheet that manipulated the frequency of imagined evaluation by the TA. Participants in the one-time-interaction condition received instructions that they were to imagine being in a review session or group tutoring session with the TA in the video, whereas in the semester-long-interaction condition, participants were told to imagine being in a semester-long class with the TA in the video. In both the one-time-interaction and the semester-long-interaction conditions, the participants were told to imagine being evaluated and graded by the TA. The instructions directed participants to review the information about the TA in the folder, to watch the videotape,

and then to complete the questionnaire enclosed in the folder. The instructions explained that participants may rewatch the videotape if they missed some information during the first viewing.

Manipulation of TA's Ethnicity

Also in the folder, ethnicity of the TA was manipulated on a cover sheet supposedly from the TA's application to graduate school. All information on these sheets was the same except that ethnicity of the TA was varied by having different ethnicity boxes marked on different cover sheets. Students believed the TA was the same ethnicity as themselves (i.e., matched) or of a different ethnicity (i.e., not matched). When students of color were in the not-matched condition, they were always told that the TA was "White." When European American students were in the unmatched condition, it was randomly varied whether they were told the TA was "Chicano" or "Black." Other information that might have influenced the perception of the TA, such as where she or he was from as indicated by hometown or social security number, was blacked out on the cover sheet. Next in the folder, all students received four past teaching evaluations supposedly of the TA, two of which were positive and two of which were average. The last item enclosed in the folder was the measure of contextualized possible selves.

After reviewing the instructions and descriptions of the TA in the folder, participants watched the videotape. The videotapes had been carefully scripted with the TA addressing three questions: (a) What is your philosophy of teaching? (b) What do you expect from yourself as a TA? and (c) What do you expect from your students? The TA's demeanor and script were to display competence but also a little arrogance. All female participants watched a video of a female TA named Robin, whereas all male participants watched a video of a male TA named Scott. The actual first names of the actors were used in case they were recognized by participants. Both Robin and Scott are multiethnic in background and are commonly perceived by others as belonging to any one of many ethnic groups.

After viewing the videotape (which lasted about 5 min), participants responded to the measure of contextualized possible selves. Instead of being a general measure of possible selves, it was a measure of contextualized possible selves focusing on specific views of self in a future interaction in the specified context with the TA. Work by Harter and colleagues (Harter, Marold, Whitesell, & Cobbs, 1996; Harter & Monsour, 1992) uses this level of specificity when focusing on people's self-conceptions in certain roles. This level of specificity seemed appropriate for contextualized possible selves in the present study in light of research across a variety of topics that suggests that general measures of a specific

construct are insensitive (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991; Petty, 1995; Schuman & Johnson, 1976). Participants responded to each item according to how they would view themselves in an interaction with the prospective TA. The 11 items were semantic differentials (well-qualified vs. unqualified, competent vs. incompetent, prepared vs. unprepared, confident vs. scared, calm vs. anxious, similar to the TA vs. different from the TA, motivated to do well vs. not motivated to do well, impressed by the TA vs. turned off by the TA, comfortable vs. uncomfortable, the right person for the class vs. the wrong person for the class, and just the student the TA wanted vs. not the student the TA wanted). The middle option of the scale was always *neither.* The same pairs of items were used in response to the question, "How would the TA view you?" To calculate variable scores, each pair of descriptors was put on a 1 to 5 scale (1 for the negative pole and 5 for the positive pole) and summed, creating two composite variables: view of possible selves (Cronbach's α = .84) and judgment of TA's view of participant (Cronbach's α = .81).

Next, participants responded to three items about the TA: "Do you believe that this TA may treat or grade you unfairly?" "Do you believe that this TA could unintentionally make the class environment somewhat uncomfortable for you?" and "Do you believe that this TA would be extra helpful in seeing that you do well in the class?" All three questions were anchored from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 5 (*very likely*).

RESULTS

ANOVAs With the Three Independent Variables

Data were analyzed using a 2 (ethnic match with the TA: matched vs. not matched) × 2 (participant's ethnicity: African American or Latino/a vs. European American) × 2 (frequency of imagined evaluation by the TA: one-time interaction vs. semester-long interaction) between-subjects, unequal-n ANOVA. For ease of presentation, participants who were either African American or Latino/a are referred to collectively as "students of color" throughout the results section.

View of Possible Selves

To address the question of whether students of color imagining a semester-long interaction with a European American TA envision relatively negative contextualized possible selves, a 2 × 2 × 2 ANOVA was performed on participants' responses to the contextualized possible selves scale. Analyses revealed a significant main effect of participants' ethnicity on views of possible selves, $F(1, 66) = 10.8, p < .01$. Students of color ($M = 45.8$) generally imagined a more positive set of possible selves in a future
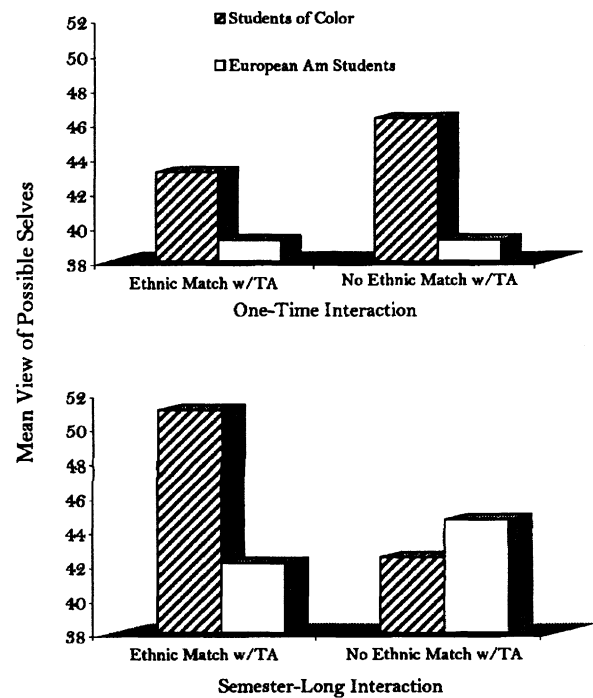

Figure 1   Mean view of possible selves broken down by ethnic match with teaching assistant (TA), participant's ethnicity, and frequency of imagined evaluation.

interaction with a prospective TA than did European American students ($M = 40.7$). More important, the main effect of participant ethnicity was qualified by a significant three-way interaction of ethnic match with TA, participant's ethnicity, and frequency of imagined evaluation, $F(1, 66) = 7.1, p < .03$. As can be seen in Figure 1, students of color generally envisioned a more positive set of possible selves than did European American students. However, there was one exception to this general pattern. Students of color imagined a more positive set of possible selves in every condition except for the condition in which they imagined a semester-long interaction with a European American TA (not-matched condition). Complex contrasts were conducted to determine whether this interaction was driven by the affirming effect of being in the ethnically matched, semester-long condition or the stigmatizing effect of being in the not-matched, semester-long condition. A contrast testing whether the matched, semester-long condition for students of color was more positive than the other three conditions with students of color was significant, $t(66) = -2.7, p < .01$. A second contrast tested whether the not-matched, semester-long condition for students of color was less positive than the other three conditions of students of color. This contrast was marginally significant, $t(66) = 1.8, p = .07$. Thus, it appears that although students of color did expect to experience stigma in the

not-matched, semester-long condition, their expectation of experiencing affirmation in the matched, semester-long condition was greater.[2]

Judgments of TA's View of Participant

Regarding judgments of the TA's view of the participant, it was expected that students of color would expect the TA to have relatively low views of them when they imagined a semester-long interaction with a European American TA. For the variable summarizing participants' beliefs of how the TA would see them in an interaction, there was a main effect for the participant's ethnicity, $F(1, 66) = 11.0$, $p < .01$ ($Ms = 45.9$ for students of color and 41.3 for European American students). There were no other main effects or two-way interaction effects. However, the three-way interaction was significant, $F(1, 66) = 4.8$, $p < .05$ (see Figure 2). As with the view of possible selves, students of color imagined a more positive judgment of the TA's view of themselves than did European American students in every condition except for the condition in which they imagined a semester-long interaction with a European American TA (not-matched condition). As with the view of possible selves, complex contrasts were conducted to test the role of affirmation versus stigmatization in the imagined interaction. A contrast comparing students of color in the matched, semester-long condition with students of color in the other three conditions was marginally significant, $t(66) = 1.9$, $p = .06$. A second contrast testing whether the mean for students of color in the not-matched, semester-long condition was lower than the means for the other three student of color conditions was not significant. Students of color tended to envision that the TA would view them more positively in the matched, semester-long condition, whereas they did not envision that the TA would envision them more negatively in the not-matched, semester-long condition.[3]

Ratings of the TA

Three items assessed participants' views of the TA: (a) belief that the TA may grade them unfairly, (b) belief that the TA may unintentionally make the classroom environment uncomfortable, and (c) belief that the TA would be extra helpful. It was predicted that students of color in the unmatched, semester-long condition would be most likely to believe that the TA may grade unfairly and make the classroom uncomfortable and least likely to believe that the TA would be extra helpful. Although there were no significant effects for the ratings of the likelihood of the TA unintentionally making the classroom uncomfortable or the likelihood of being extra helpful, there was a three-way interaction for whether participants believed that the TA may grade them unfairly, $F(1, 66) = 4.7$, $p < .05$. However, the pattern of
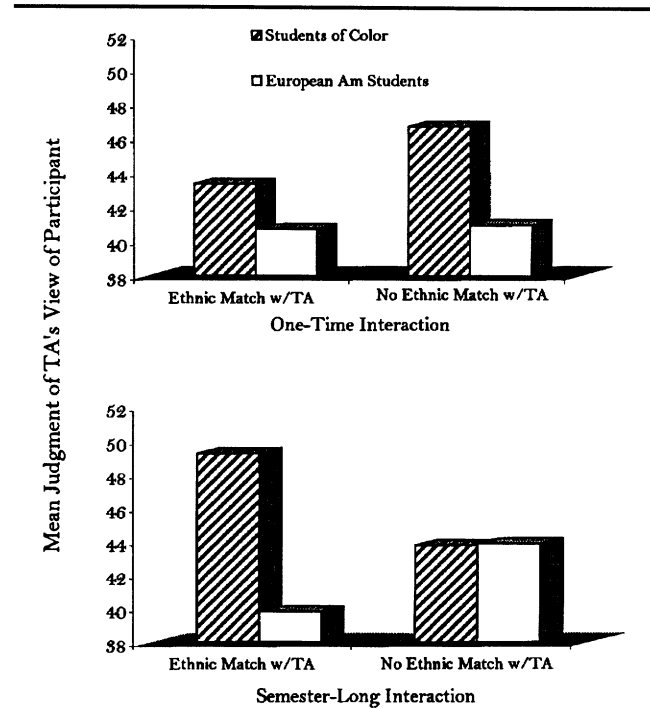

Figure 2   Mean judgments of teaching assistant's (TA's) view of participant broken down by ethnic match with TA, participant's ethnicity, and frequency of imagined evaluation.

means for this variable is slightly different from that of the view of possible selves and judgments of TA's view of participant. As can be seen in Figure 3, students of color rated the TA least likely to grade unfairly when they imagined a semester-long interaction with a TA with whom they were ethnically matched, whereas European American students rated the TA least likely to grade unfairly when they imagined a semester-long interaction with a TA with whom they were not ethnically matched. None of the main effects or two-way interactions was significant on this variable.[4]

DISCUSSION

A contextual view of stigma suggests that members of devalued groups will not have negative views of themselves in general but may have negative views of themselves in the context of certain relationships. Specifically, students of color may envision less positive views of themselves when imagining a consequential interaction in which they are evaluated by a European American instructor. In this study, students of color generally viewed themselves positively—more positively, in fact, than did European American students. The one exception, however, was when students of color imagined a long-term interaction with a European American instructor. Here, students of color imagined less positive views of self. European American students, by contrast,
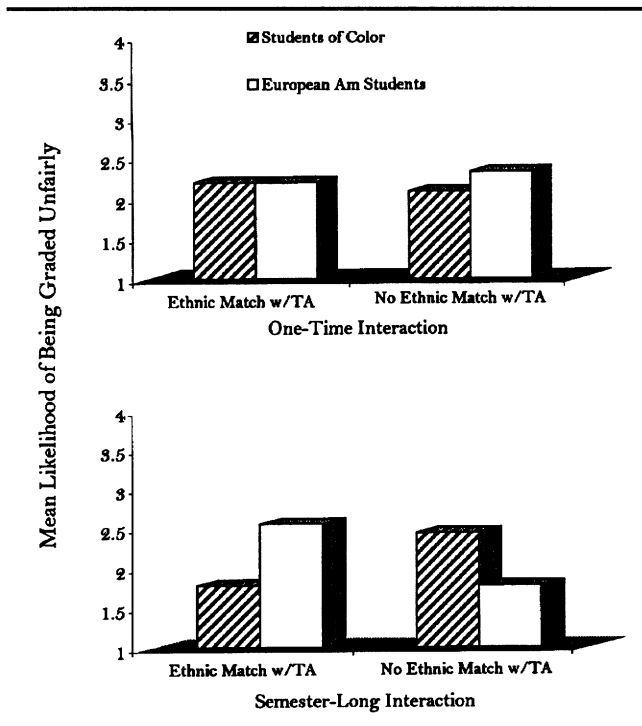
Figure 3   Mean likelihood of being graded or treated unfairly by the teaching assistant (TA) broken down by ethnic match with TA, participant's ethnicity, and frequency of imagined evaluation.

were unaffected by the context. Their views of self did not fluctuate with the ethnic match with the TA or with the frequency of imagined evaluation. Presumably, in the one-time-interaction condition, the consequences of being evaluated by the TA are not severe and may not evoke expectations of a stigma experience among students of color. But in the semester-long-interaction condition, one imagines being evaluated many times and being graded by this evaluator. As a consequence, students of color may envision being judged stereotypically by a European American TA but nonstereotypically by a TA who is of the same ethnicity. In both imagined contexts, ethnicity and academics may be salient, but the connections between them are different, leading to different possible selves.

Students of color generally imagined that a future interaction with the TA would go more positively than did European American students. In certain samples, people of color have higher levels of self-esteem than European Americans (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989; Jensen et al., 1982; Porter & Washington, 1979; Stephan & Rosenfield, 1979). Perhaps this difference in self-esteem led to a more positive set of possible selves that affected their subsequent ratings of the interaction. Perhaps students of color feel more skilled at managing their impression given that they may feel that they may have to compensate for the stereotype that may be im-

posed on them. However, these explanations are purely speculative and further research is necessary to determine the exact nature of this ethnic difference.

One methodological concern of the present research is that type of interaction (i.e., review session vs. a class) is confounded with length of interaction (i.e., one time vs. semester long). In both conditions in the present study, the students imagined being evaluated, which was presumed to be more crucial to hold constant across both conditions than the specific type of class. A group tutoring or review session was chosen because it seemed the most plausible type of one-time teaching situation. Operationalizing the semester-long interaction as repeated tutoring sessions seemed problematic because such a situation may not seem plausible to bright students because it suggests consistently poor performance in a class. But it does remain an empirical question if these factors have independent effects. Future research could address this issue by having students envision being in a one-time seminar versus an ongoing class and also by manipulating the frequency of evaluation in both of those types of classes.

Future Directions

A contextual view of stigma suggests that in the context of certain relationships in particular institutions, differences in the positivity of specific self-conceptions should exist between groups. Members of negatively stereotyped groups may expect to be unjustly judged in situations in which a negative stereotype of their group is applicable. Such expectations should constrain positive views of self in that interaction. It is proposed that certain peripheral, negative, self-relevant views, such as, "This teacher may think I can't cut it," may be evoked in specific contexts. However, if these views become routinely salient across several domains, then they may become more central to the self and perhaps even chronically accessible. In turn, such views may lead one to devalue (Crocker & Major, 1989) or disengage from (Steele, 1992; Steele & Aronson, 1995) the relevant context or may generalize to views of self across a variety of contexts (Higgins, 1987). Strategies of devaluing or disengaging from the domain would maintain self-esteem and positive self-views in other domains, whereas generalizing specific negative views of self to all of the self would not (Jones et al., 1984; Rosenberg, 1979).

Although generally this article has focused on the negative effects of certain interethnic interactions, future research should investigate further the reasons why students of color viewed a long-term interaction with a same-ethnicity TA more positively. One possibility is that students of color assume that shared experiences and socialization lead the ethnically matched TA to identify with them and, consequently, to treat them positively.

Often, there is the assumption that shared ethnic experiences will foster some sense of community and loyalty. In addition, identification with the TA may evoke positive self-images because the TA is an ethnic role model in the academic domain. If only common experience and identity foster positive views of self, then a possible means of improving the classroom environment for students of color at predominantly White institutions would be to increase the number of instructors of color. However, a second explanation for positive expectations for interactions with the same-ethnicity TA may be that students of color believe that the TA will have affirming views of their ethnic group rather than stereotypic views. Consequently, the issue is not the ethnicity of the instructor per se but, rather, one's expectations about the instructor's beliefs about one's ethnic group. If this explanation is true, then one would expect that if students of color believed that a European American TA would not stereotype them and has affirming views of their ethnic group, then negative possible selves would not be evoked and positive possible selves would be. Perhaps if the TA demonstrated a sincere interest in multicultural issues or in equal educational opportunities and outcomes for all students and honestly attempted to engage each student as an individual, students of color would not feel that the TA may judge them stereotypically, and consequently, positive contextualized possible selves would not be constrained by the context.

Although the focus of this article has been on stigmatizing contexts, certain contexts may be very affirming for people who may experience stigma in other contexts. For example, at predominantly Black colleges, African American students do not appear to suffer effects of stereotypic judgments on either self-views or performance (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984). In addition, the results from this study suggest that for students of color, there is an affirming effect of being in a class with an instructor of the same ethnicity. As mentioned above, the presence of such an instructor may evoke positive images of members of one's ethnic group in the academic domain. Moreover, a predominantly non-White academic context might further evoke positive images of one's group in academics, which might inspire views of the self unconstrained by stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Several theories suggest that full ethnic integration under certain conditions will abolish prejudice (e.g., Allport, 1954; Clark, 1965). However, given the levels of prejudice and discrimination that remain in our society and the pragmatic difficulty of fulfilling these conditions, certain amounts of ethnic separation may be necessary so that one is not concerned with being judged unjustly. For example, in predominantly White institutions, perhaps dorms, social clubs, and political organizations that are predominantly non-White allow students of color a respite from the concern of discrimination and prejudice. Such subcontexts may interrupt the perceived pervasiveness of negative views in the larger context so that negative self-views evoked in the institution do not become central to the self. Predominantly non-White institutions may further exemplify an oasis in the midst of a prejudiced society for some students because the potential for stereotype threat to evoke negative self-images is virtually eliminated and the presence of ethnic role models and curricula that emphasize one's ethnic perspective may evoke and actually create certain positive possible selves. Perhaps being engulfed in an affirming context makes certain peripheral positive selves more central to the self.

The results from this study deal solely with perceptions. However, stigma may also affect performance. Steele and Aronson (1995) found that when a test is presented as diagnostic of one's intelligence, African Americans underperform, whereas European Americans do not. This difference is not found when the test is not viewed as diagnostic of intelligence. When the test is diagnostic, it evokes self-doubt and anxiety, which then impedes performance. Similar results have been found with women in the math domain. Spencer and Steele (1994) showed that when the stereotype of gender differences in math is salient, women perform less well than men on math tests even when they are equally prepared in math skills. In this context—that is, one in which women are unjustly judged as less competent—women may feel stigmatized, which may lead to performance deficits. Stigma is not simply feeling a little uncomfortable in class; it is a phenomenon that can have detrimental effects on class performance by evoking self-doubt. For example, students who anticipate a discrediting judgment may be less motivated to participate in class, to ask questions that clarify material, and to approach the instructor for discussion as a means of avoiding the confirmation of certain negative self-views and negative views that the instructor may have of one's group. As a consequence, the instructor overlooks their particular educational needs and may view them as uninvolved students. These mutual perceptions may be spurred on by the confirmation bias (Darley & Gross, 1983; Gilbert, 1989), which may be the foundation for self-fulfilling prophecies (Snyder & Swann, 1978; Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974). Expectancies of negative treatment might prevent one from fully engaging in the interaction. Such behavior might evoke a lack of engagement on the part of the instructor, which, in turn, appears to confirm the student's suspicion of racism. Moreover, if the instructor does have stereotypical views of certain students, the student's lack of engagement appears only to confirm those views.

Just as one's experience in the world is neither stagnant nor constant, so is the experience of stigma. People are influenced by varying affective, cognitive, and motivational pressures that lead the self to operate in a multifaceted way. Who one is is not one entity but a connection of experiences that vary according to what context one is in, with whom one is interacting, how others view one in that context, and how one views oneself in that context. The interaction between these factors can lead to varying experiences and consequences. Seeing that the experience of the self varies so readily, this view of stigma attempts to take into account several of these factors and attempts to incorporate the complexities of social relationships and social context. Stigma, then, is a particular experience of the self being judged as inappropriate by those who are appropriate in a context that they dominate in their institution. It is a complex phenomenon that demonstrates the rich interweavings of the contextual self.

NOTES

1. The term *stereotype* rather than *belief* is used to emphasize the point that people often overgeneralize and overuse this belief. Several authors suggest that the belief is generally accurate (e.g., Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Jensen, 1969, 1987; Rushton, 1988, 1990; for critiques of this view, see Fairchild, 1991; Jones, 1991; Lieberman & Reynolds, 1978; and Zuckerman, 1990); however, this discussion is beyond the scope of this article.

2. Simple effects tests revealed that in the one-time-interaction condition, students of color viewed their possible selves more positively than did European American students, $F(1, 41) = 7.0$, $p < .03$. In the semester-long condition, there was a significant interaction between participant's ethnicity and ethnic match, $F(1, 34) = 8.2$, $p < .01$. Students of color when ethnically matched with the TA viewed themselves more positively than students of color in the not-matched condition or European American students in either condition. In addition, simple effects tests were conducted within ethnic groups. Although there was neither a main effect for ethnic match nor one for frequency of evaluation nor an interaction effect among the European American students, there was an interaction between ethnic match and frequency of evaluation for the students of color, $F(1, 35) = 10.8$, $p < .01$.

3. Simple effects tests revealed that in the one-time-interaction condition, there was only a main effect for ethnicity, $F(1, 42) = 4.8$, $p < .05$, whereas in the semester-long-interaction condition, there was both a main effect for ethnicity, $F(1, 34) = 6.7$, $p < .03$, and an interaction effect between ethnic match and participant's ethnicity, $F(1, 34) = 6.7$, $p < .03$. Simple effects tests within ethnic groups also revealed that there were no significant effects on judgments of TA's view of participant among European American students. However, among students of color, there was a significant interaction effect between ethnic match and frequency of evaluation, $F(1, 34) = 6.0$, $p < .03$. As with the results for participants' view of possible selves, there was a participant's ethnicity main effect on judgments of TA's view of participant in the one-time-interaction condition. In the semester-long-interaction condition, students of color thought that the TA would view them more positively when they were ethnically matched with a TA and believed that the TA would view them relatively less positively when they imagined interacting with a European American TA.

4. Simple effects tests revealed no significant effects of ethnic match, frequency of evaluation, or the interaction between the two variables for either students of color or European American students. In addition, there were no significant effects of ethnic match, participant's ethnicity, or the interaction of the two in the one-time-interaction condition, and only a marginal interaction effect between ethnic match

and participant's ethnicity in the semester-long-interaction condition, $F(1, 37) = 3.6$, $p = .07$.

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