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ABSTRACT
Two studies examined preferences for second-generation African immigrants over Black American natives in a college admission simulation. Study 1 showed that a Black American native applicant was less likely to be admitted when his competitor was a second-generation African immigrant applicant relative to a White American competitor. Study 2 showed that this preference did not occur when the two applicants of color were not in competition. Stereotypes and perceived SES did not explain these findings. Discussion suggests that accepting second-generation African immigrants may cover for prejudice by providing a socially desirable alternative to accepting Black American native applicants.

In May 2014, CNN announced that eight Ivy League colleges in the United States had accepted an African American high school student, Kwasi Enin, for admission. Enin’s credentials were strong; however, media coverage attributed his success to his status as a first-generation immigrant from Ghana. Katherine Cohen, an executive with Ivy Wise, a company that provides educational consulting to elite educational institutions, stated, “He’s not a typical African-American kid” (Toppo, 2014).

Between 2000 and 2010 the African foreign-born population in the United States nearly doubled (Gambino, Trevelyan, & Fitzwater, 2014). African immigrants have more college education and higher rates of degree attainment than any other immigrant group in the United States, with 43.8% of African first- and second-generation immigrants attaining a college degree as compared to 42.5% of Asian immigrants; 28.9% of immigrants from Europe, Russia, and Canada; and 23.1% of the U.S population as a whole (Page, 2007, pg. 1). According to the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshman, first- and second-generation African/Caribbean immigrants make up only 13% of the nation’s college-age Black population but account for more than one fourth of Black students at Ivy League and other selective colleges and universities (Massey, Mooney, Torres, & Charles, 2007). African/Caribbean immigrants and Black American natives do not differ on most key predictors of college preparation including socioeconomic status (SES), social preparation, psychological readiness, and academic training. Moreover, the few differences that do occur (e.g., African/Caribbean immigrants were more likely than Black American natives to come from a two-parent household and to have a father with an advanced degree) were unrelated to indicators of academic success in college such as grade point average (GPA). These findings raise the question of what may account for the disproportionate representation of Black immigrants at elite institutions.

The current study empirically investigated whether there is a preference for Blacks whose families have a short history living in the United States (hereafter referred to as second-generation African immigrants) over Black American natives (born to families that span generations within the United States who are largely descended from slaves) in the context of evaluations of applicants for admission to an elite Ivy League university.

Massey and colleagues (2007) theorized three potential explanations as to why second-generation African immigrants may come to be overrepresented in selective institutions of higher education. The first is “statistical discrimination,” which these researchers describe as favoritism toward second-generation African immigrants over Black American natives. Conscious and unconscious bias against Black American natives is pervasive in American society (Banks, Eberhardt, & Ross, 2006; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002).

The second theoretical explanation as to why second-generation African immigrants may come to be overrepresented in selective institutions of higher education is that their objective characteristics (e.g., high school GPA, ...
standardized test scores) make them more competitive applicants. Logically, highly selective institutions would favor the more competitive applicant. Therefore, they would be more likely to admit applicants who have better objective characteristics. However, Massey and colleagues (2007) found that none of the objective characteristics measured by the national longitudinal survey could account for the disproportionate representation of second-generation African immigrants at elite institutions.

Finally, Massey and colleagues (2007) hypothesized that stereotypes may play a role in the preference for second-generation African immigrants over Black American natives in elite institutions. Although second-generation African immigrants and Black American natives are perceived to be members of the same racial group, stereotypes about their ethnic attributes differ sharply. Research has shown that African immigrants are stereotyped as more polite, less hostile, and easier to get along with than Black American natives (Foner & Fredrickson, 2004). Black American natives are stereotyped as hostile, criminal, uneducated, rude, and dangerous (Bergsieker, Leslie, Constantine, & Fiske, 2012; Devine & Elliot, 1995; Zou & Cheryan, 2017). Lee and Fiske (2006) found that stereotypes about most immigrant groups may reflect stereotypes about their nationality and SES. Voluntary African immigrants and second-generation African immigrants are perceived to have higher SES than Black American natives (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Prevailing positive stereotypes about African immigrants have led some scholars to describe them as “an invisible model minority” (Page, 2007). Thus admission officers may stereotype second-generation African immigrants more positively than Black American natives (Massey et al., 2007).

Although Massey and colleagues (2007) created a framework for understanding why first- and second-generation African immigrants are overrepresented at elite universities, the data available from the survey they examined did not directly test how favoritism toward African immigrants and positive stereotypes about them may affect admissions decisions. In addition, because the survey included only students currently enrolled in universities, the finding that there were few differences in objective characteristics is not informative about whether the pool of African immigrant applicants differed from the pool of native Black applicants. The current studies address this gap in the literature by examining the choices people make to similarly qualified second-generation African immigrants and native Black applicants to an elite university. By holding constant the objective qualifications of the applicants, we were able to examine the role that favoritism toward African immigrants may play in admission decisions.

Massey et al. (2007) also did not directly examine stereotypes that people have about African immigrants and native Black Americans. The current study expanded on their research by directly assessing people’s evaluations of African immigrants and native Black applicants.

Throughout the study we avoided using the terms African American and Black American because prior research shows that these labels by themselves evoke sharply different stereotypes even when both terms referred to native Black Americans. Philogène (2001) found that the term Americans of African descent evoked thoughts of integration, equality, and assimilation, whereas the term Black American was associated with thoughts of exclusion, failure to adjust, and negative status. Hall, Phillips, and Townsend (2015) found that using the label Black versus African American to refer to native Blacks signaled lower social class, evoked more negative emotions, received more negative evaluations (e.g., less competence and warmth), and resulted in participants perceiving individuals described in a business article or criminal report more negatively.

The first hypothesis examined in this study was that a second-generation African immigrant would be more likely to be admitted to an elite university than a native Black applicant with the same objective qualifications. The second hypothesis was that evaluations of objectively similar applicants would show more positive stereotyping of second-generation African immigrants than of native Black applicants and that these differences would account for a tendency to show favoritism in admission decisions to the second-generation African immigrant applicant.

**Study 1**

We tested the preference for second-generation African immigrants over Black American natives by comparing decisions about admitting a Black American native male applicant to an elite Ivy League university in conditions in which he is competing with a similarly qualified (a) Black American native, (b) a second-generation African immigrant born and raised in the United States whose parents immigrated from Nigeria, or (c) a White American.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Two hundred thirty American participants were recruited through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) for the ostensible purpose of evaluating résumé design.
This study used an online participant pool rather than an undergraduate sample because MTurk participants should share more characteristics to admission officers (e.g., work experience, age) than an undergraduate population. Participants were compensated $0.75.

One hundred seventy-four participants identified as Caucasian, 23 as Asian, 18 as Black American, 15 as Hispanic, five as other, and two as Native American. Because the focus of the analysis was on the target Black American native applicant, the 18 participants who identified as Black American were excluded from analysis. In addition, about midway through the study an attention check directed participants to select the response “disagree” from a list ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Participants who failed to follow this instruction (n = 10) were dropped from all analyses, leaving a total of 209 participants (93 male, 116 female). Their mean age was between 35 and 44 years. The majority of participants had earned a 4-year college degree or more (57.5%), and 41% reported having a career in management or professional service.

**Design**

Participants evaluated the application of a Black American native college applicant along with an application from a second-generation African immigrant competitor, another Black American native competitor, or a White American competitor. Thus the study design was a 3 (competitor applicant: Black American native, second-generation African immigrant, or White American) × 2 (standard Black native applicant vs. competitor applicant) factorial with the second factor treated as a repeated measure.

**Procedures**

After informed consent was obtained through the online interface, participants were asked to imagine that they were evaluating applications to an Ivy League school. After selecting their elite school, participants were first prompted to view two applicant résumés of students who had already been accepted, both of whom had White American names. We incorporated this feature into the study design to simulate an aspect of the admissions process that commonly occurs: The majority of those admitted to elite institutions are White.

Participants then viewed the essay excerpt and application résumé for two students who were being considered for admission: the target Black American native and a second-generation African immigrant, White American, or another Black American native (depending on condition). Participants then chose which of the two applicants should be admitted. Participants also rated both the target Black American and the competitor on their impressions of the applicant’s likability, competence, and how much monetary aid the applicant should receive. The main dependent variable was which *one applicant* they actually would admit—the target Black American native or the competitor.

**Manipulation of ethnicity**

Because Hall and colleagues (2015) found that term *Black American* had a more negative stereotype content than the term *African American* even when both terms were used to refer to native Blacks, none of the materials that the participants saw used these terms to refer to the applicants.

Instead we adapted the manipulation of ethnicity from previous studies (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004) in which ethnicity was communicated by using names that people identify as African, Black, or White. Names were selected in a pilot study in which 44 adults (15 female, 28 male, 93% Caucasian) indicated the ethnicity of 45 male first and last names. Female names were not used due to difficulty in pilot participants accurately identifying female African first names. Over 99% of participants identified Bodua and Idogbe as Black men’s first names, Ke’Shawn and Raheem as Black American native men’s first names, and Connor and Wyatt as White American men’s first names. Nzegwu was identified as an African last name, Washington and Jackson as Black American native last names, and Schepers as a White American last name. These names (e.g., Ke’Shawn Washington, Bodua Nzegwu, Connor Schepers) were added to applications that were fabricated to serve the purposes of this study.

In addition to the applicant names, ethnicity of the target Black American native and his competitor was communicated by including a brief 100-word excerpt from the applicants’ personal statement that accompanied the application of both the target Black American native and his competitor. Each essay, fabricated for the study, supposedly was the applicant’s answer to the prompt, “Discuss an accomplishment, interest, and talent, formal or informal that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.” These prompts were pilot ed for equality in perceived emotionality, SES, and hardship. The essay associated with the target Black American applicant described a family member who was a musician during the Harlem Renaissance.

The competitor applicants’ essays depended on their supposed ethnicity. The excerpt associated with the second-generation African immigrant described a visit
from the applicant’s family members, who are from an African country, and the aspects of their culture that he admires. The essay excerpt associated with the Black American native competitor described a summer of community service with the family. The excerpt associated with the White American discussed a family tradition of visiting a farm (see supplemental material).

The résumés also included applicant high school, hometown, GPA, SAT scores, previous experience, extracurricular activities, organizations, and awards (see supplemental material). All résumés were piloted for competitiveness, impressiveness, and overall design. The name on the résumé and the essay excerpt were the only information manipulated between conditions to represent the target Black American native applicant and his Black American native, second-generation African immigrant, or White American competitor. All other information was relatively similar. The particular résumé associated with the Black American native and the Black American native, second-generation African immigrant, and White American competitor was counterbalanced within each condition so that each résumé appeared an approximately equal number of times with each type of name. Participants in each ethnic condition received résumés that identified the applicant’s ethnicity with one of two first and last names that people associated with that ethnicity. The two first and last name pairs for each ethnic group were randomly assigned to résumés within that ethnic condition.

**Measures**

The main dependent measure was participants’ answer to the question, “Now that you have carefully evaluated both students, which one of the two do you choose for admittance?” Thus, the dependent variable was a dichotomous choice between the target Black American native applicant and his competitor for admission.

Impressions of applicants were assessed using 7-point Likert scales from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). High scores indicated more favorable impressions of the applicant. Evaluations of the applicants’ likeability and competence were included as indicators of participants’ justification for their decision about admitting the applicant. Likeability included six items: “This student will be easy to get along with,” “How much do you like this student?” “How unique is this student?” “This student would be a perfect ‘fit’ with the university,” “This student would be a valuable asset to the school,” and “Our school would be lucky to have this student.” Scores were averaged across the six items to compute the overall liking score for each participant. Perceived competence of the applicant was assessed across four items: “How intelligent is this student?” “How competent is this student?” “How competitive is this student?” and “How impressive is this student?” Higher scores on each scale reflected stronger agreement with the given statement. Scores were averaged across the four items to compute the overall competence score for each participant.

Participants’ recommendations about whether the applicant should receive a scholarship and financial aid were used as additional indices of how much they wanted the applicant to be admitted into the participants’ respective school. These questions were “How much scholarship would you give ___?” (1 = I would not give a scholarship; 5 = full scholarship) and “How much financial aid would ___ need?” (sliding scale from $1,000 to $100,000).

Participants’ perceptions of the applicant’s SES (1 = lower class; 5 = upper class) were measured as a potential mediator between ethnicity and admittance. This question was “What is ___ SES?” To maintain consistency with the ostensible purpose of the study, participants also rated the résumé design on the extent to which they liked the font, spacing, organization, formatting, and style.

**Results**

Reliability analyses on the items used to compute the liking and competence scores yielded Cronbach’s alphas of .91 for ratings of liking and .90 for ratings of competence for the target Black American applicant. Cronbach’s alphas for ratings of the competitor applicant were .90 for liking and .88 for competence.

Preliminary univariate analysis of variance was conducted to examine whether the participants’ own race had an effect on whether they admitted the Black American target or his competitor. The effect size of the main effect of race on admission decision was \( \eta^2 = .02 \), and the interaction between experimental condition and participant race was \( \eta^2 = .06 \).

**Main dependent measure**

The participants’ choice of the target Black American applicant versus the competitor applicant was analyzed with two logistic regression analyses. Ethnicity of the competitor was dummy-coded such that 1 indicated the White competitor in both analyses and 0 indicated the second-generation African immigrant competitor in one analysis and the Black competitor in the second analysis. In other words, the first dummy-coded variable examines how the odds of admission for a native
Black target are affected by competition against a second-generation African versus a White competitor, and the second dummy-coded variable examines how these odds are affected by competition with another Black American native versus a White competitor. In both analyses, the decision to admit the competitor was coded as 0, and the decision to admit the target Black American native was coded as 1. Thus, means approaching 1 indicate that the Black American target applicant was admitted over his competitor, and means approaching 0 indicate a preference for the competitor.

For the White competitor versus the second-generation African immigrant competitor, the overall model explained between 4.6% (Cox and Snell $R^2$) and 6.2% (Nagelkerke $R^2$) of the variance in admission decisions and correctly classified 60.8% of cases. The target Black American native was 2.4 times more likely to be admitted when competing against a White American versus a second-generation African immigrant competitor, $\exp(\beta) = 2.42$, 95% confidence interval (CI) [1.19, 4.90] (see Figure 1).

Results of the logistic regression that compared the odds of the Black American target being admitted when competing against another Black American native versus a White competitor indicated that the overall model explained a negligible amount of the variance .9% (Cox and Snell $R^2$) and 1.3% (Nagelkerke $R^2$) of the variance in admission decisions and correctly classified 56.9% of cases. The target Black American native was 1.5 times as likely to be admitted when competing against a White American versus a second-generation African immigrant competitor, $\exp(\beta) = 1.49$, 95% CI [0.75, 2.95] (see Figure 1).

The proportion of participants who chose the Black native target versus his competitor in each competitor ethnicity condition was compared with z-scores. Participants chose the second-generation African immigrant competitor more often than the Black native target ($z = -2.21, d = -0.55$). They also chose the target Black American native more than they chose the White American competitor ($z = 2.72, d = 0.74$). There was only a negligible difference between participants’ choice between the Black American native competitor and the target Black American native ($z = 0.65, d = 0.15$).

**Results for other evaluations of the applicants**

Participants’ evaluations of liking for the applicants, perceived competence, recommendations about receiving scholarship and financial aid, and SES were analyzed with a 3 (competitor applicant: Black American native, second-generation African immigrant, or White American) × 2 (standard Black native applicant vs. competitor applicant) analysis of variance with the second factor treated as a repeated measure. The between-subjects main effect indicates whether competitor and target applicant in a given competitor ethnicity condition differ from each other. The within-subjects main effect indicates whether overall the competitor was rated differently from the target. Both the between-subjects and within-subjects main effects are uninformative, and therefore results will report only the interactions.

The interaction effect size for evaluation of liking and competence were negligible ($\eta^2 = .01$ and $\eta^2 = .00$, respectively). Thus, applicants were rated similarly on liking and competence regardless of applicant ethnicity and regardless of whether he was the competitor or the native Black applicant.

The interaction effect size between competitor ethnicity and SES was $\eta^2 = .08$. The White American competitor ($M = 3.20, SD = .65$) was perceived as

![Figure 1](image-url). Decision to admit the target Black American native target or his competitor by competitor ethnicity.
having a higher SES than the Black American native competitor \((M = 2.66, SD = .76, d = .76)\), the second-generation African immigrant competitor \((M = 2.61, SD = .77, d = .83)\), and the Black American native target \((M = 2.59, SD = .62, d = .96)\). All other comparisons produced small \(d\)s, ranging from .03 to .09.

For ratings of financial aid, the interaction effect size between competitor ethnicity and financial aid was \(\eta^2 = .05\). The Black American native competitor \((M = 52,670, SD = 25,800)\) received more financial aid than the White American competitor \((M = 43,730, SD = 21,440, d = .38)\) and the second-generation African competitor \((M = 49,340, SD = 26,180, d = .13)\). The target Black American native \((M = 54,360, SD = 23,340)\) received more financial aid when his competitor was a White American \((d = .47)\). All other comparisons produced relatively small \(d\)s ranging from .05 to .08.

For ratings of scholarship recommendations, the interaction effect size between competitor ethnicity and scholarship was \(\eta^2 = .04\). The Black American native competitor \((M = 3.33, SD = 1.02)\) received more scholarship than the White American competitor \((M = 3.13, SD = .83, d = .22)\). The second-generation African immigrant competitor \((M = 3.42, SD = .96)\) received more scholarship than the White American competitor \((d = .32)\). The target Black American native \((M = 3.28, SD = 1.10)\) received more scholarship when his competitor was a White American \((d = .42)\) than when he was competing against another Black American native \((M = 3.28, SD = 1.11, d = .22)\). The target Black American native received less scholarship when competing against a second-generation African immigrant \((d = −.14)\). All other comparisons produced relatively small \(d\)s, ranging from .03 to .09.

**Mediation analyses**

Although Massey and colleagues (2007) found that second-generation African immigrants and Black American natives were similar in SES, it is possible that the applicants’ names and/or their ethnicity led participants to make inferences about their SES, which may explain their recommendations about admitting them. To explore this possibility, mediation analysis with bootstrapped confidence intervals was conducted using Hayes’s (2012) categorical procedure. Applicant ethnicity was dummy-coded into two comparisons, with the White American competitor coded as 0 for the reference group. The first comparison was second-generation African immigrant competitor versus White competitor, and the second comparison was a Black American native competitor versus White competitor. For each comparison, one mediation analysis was conducted using target SES as the mediator and a second analysis used competitor SES as a mediator.

For the second-generation African immigrant competitor versus the White competitor, neither the target Black American native’s SES \((β = .00, SE = .02), 95\% CI [−.03, .04],\) nor the competitor’s SES \((β = .00, SE = .05), 95\% CI [−.08, .06],\) mediated the effect of ethnicity on admission decision. For the Black American native competitor versus the White competitor, neither the target Black American native’s SES \((β = .00, SE = .02), 95\% CI [−.11, .01],\) nor the competitor’s SES \((β = .10, SE = .05), 95\% CI [−.10, .08],\) mediated the effect of ethnicity on admission decision.

**Discussion**

Consistent with real-world phenomenon, the current study demonstrated a preference for second-generation African immigrants over Black American natives. The Black American applicant had a worse chance of being admitted when his competitor was a second-generation African immigrant applicant relative to when the competitor was another Black American applicant or a White American applicant.

This study directly tested two of the three possible explanations that Massey and colleagues (2007) theorized for the overrepresentation of second-generation African immigrants over Black American natives. Participants had a great deal of objective information about the applicants’ background from the application materials they received. Except for the information used to manipulate ethnicity, applicant qualifications were counterbalanced to be the same in quality across ethnicity of the competitor and across target applicant versus competitor. Consequently, differences between evaluations of the target applicant as a function of his competitor’s ethnicity could not have resulted from objective differences in these application materials. Given that the applicants were equally qualified, results of this study indicate that objective differences in credentials do not explain why participants favored the African American immigrant applicant.

Findings of this study also indicate that stereotyping does not appear to account for the favoritism shown to the second-generation African immigrant applicant. Participants rated the applicants as similarly competent and likable regardless of their ethnicity. This is not consistent with prior research indicating that stereotypes about native Black Americans are more negative than those about African immigrants (Foner & Fredrickson, 2004) and White Americans (Devine & Elliot, 1995). This may be because people are less likely to use stereotypes about a group to evaluate individual members of
the group when they have information about them (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Trope & Thompson, 1997). Participants in this study had a great deal of information about the applicants’ qualifications, which may have reduced their tendency to engage in stereotyping. Nonetheless, the native Black applicant was at a disadvantage when his competitor was a second-generation African immigrant.

Results also showed that participants did make inferences about applicant SES from ethnicity. The White American competitor was perceived as having a higher SES than the Black American competitor, the second-generation African immigrant competitor, and the Black American native target. However, neither perceived target SES nor perceived competitor SES mediated the effect of competitor ethnicity on admission preferences.

One unexpected finding was that the target Black American native had the greatest chance of admittance when competing against a White American native. Modern theoretical approaches to prejudice assume that people are motivated to suppress or hide prejudice from themselves and other people (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Plant & Devine, 1998). This may explain why the native Black applicant fared so well when his competitor was a White American. To choose a White applicant over an equally qualified native Black applicant would risk appearing to be prejudiced.

Prior research suggests that when circumstances provide some sort of justification or opportunity to express prejudice without suffering social disapproval or disappointment with oneself (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003), people are more likely to negatively evaluate or discriminate against native Black Americans. Covering is a form of justification in which the underlying prejudice that motivates an emotion, behavior, or cognition is concealed by focusing attention on a plausible alternative motivation that is socially or personally acceptable (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). When a discriminatory behavior can masquerade as a more benignly motivated act, then prejudice may be released (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). In the current study, when the Black American native was competing against an equally qualified White American, participants may have been hesitant to choose the White American because to do so risked appearing to be prejudiced. In contrast, accepting a second-generation African immigrant over an equally qualified Black American native poses little threat to an egalitarian image because participants were accepting someone who is a member of the same racial group as a native Black American.

### Study 2

#### Methods

If the opportunity to admit a second-generation African immigrant provided a cover for prejudice toward a native Black applicant in Study 1, then removing this opportunity should eliminate the tendency to admit the African immigrant more than the Black native applicant. We did this by having participants evaluate a single applicant who was a second-generation African immigrant, a Black American native, or White American without directly comparing him to another applicant. We hypothesized that favoritism toward the second-generation African immigrant applicant would not occur when this choice could not be a cover for prejudice against the Black native applicant. In addition, we eliminated the procedure of having participants first view the applications of two already accepted White applicants. We did this because including the already accepted White applicants may have served as a prime for White privilege, which might explain why the White competitor in Study 1 was least likely to be admitted.1

#### Participants

Two hundred fifty White American participants were recruited through MTurk for the ostensible purpose of evaluating résumé design. Participants were compensated $0.50.

Participants were screened to ensure that they were paying attention to the experimental materials. This screen involved asking participants midway through the protocol to select the response “disagree” from a list ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Thirty-eight participants failed the attention check (same as Study 1) leaving 212 (105 male, 107 female) White American participants. The mean age was between 35 and 44 years. Nearly half of participants had earned a 4-year college degree or more (51.5%), with 34% having a career in management or professional service. This is a closer representation of admission officers than an undergraduate sample.

#### Procedure

In an online experiment, participants were told they are participating in an experiment about perceptions of résumé design. Participants were randomly assigned to receive an application résumé for a Black American native, Black African, or White American. All participants received the same instructions:
Please imagine yourself as an application evaluator for an Ivy League university in the United States. You will be presented with an application of a prospective undergraduate student for your respective university. It is your job to review and evaluate the application. Please select the name of the Ivy League university you are an evaluator for.

After selecting their respective highly competitive university, participants read the essay excerpt and résumé of a student with a second-generation African, Black American native, or White American name. After thoroughly reviewing the application, participants completed the measures described in Study 1.

Results

The effect size for the effect of applicant ethnicity on admission was $\eta^2 = .03$. Participants were more likely to admit both the second-generation African immigrant applicant ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.19$) and Black American native applicant ($M = 5.27$, $SD = 1.38$) than the White American applicant ($M = 4.79$, $SD = 1.54$, $d = .40$ and .33, respectively; see Figure 2). The second-generation African immigrant was not more likely to be admitted than the Black American native ($d = .05$).

The effect size for liking was $\eta^2 = .07$. Overall, participants liked the second-generation African immigrant applicant ($M = 5.72$, $SD = .77$) more than the White American applicant ($M = 5.20$, $SD = .96$, $d = .60$). The Black American native applicant ($M = 5.69$, $SD = .96$) also was better liked than the White American applicant ($d = .51$). The second-generation African immigrant was not more liked than the Black American native ($d = .03$).

The effect size for competence was $\eta^2 = .04$. Overall, participants perceived the second-generation African immigrant applicant as more competent ($M = 6.09$, $SD = .81$) than the White American applicant ($M = 5.76$, $SD = .83$, $d = .40$). The Black American native applicant ($M = 6.08$, $SD = .83$) was perceived to be more competent than the White American applicant ($d = .39$). The second-generation African immigrant was not perceived to be more competent than the Black American native ($d = .01$).

The effect size for SES was $\eta^2 = .05$. The second-generation African immigrant applicant ($M = 2.98$, $SD = .67$) was perceived to have a somewhat higher SES than the Black American native applicant ($M = 2.93$, $SD = .79$, $d = .07$) but a lower SES than the White American applicant ($M = 3.31$, $SD = .84$, $d = -.43$). The Black American native applicant was also perceived to have a lower SES than the White American applicant ($d = -.47$).

The effect size for financial aid was $\eta^2 = .01$. The second-generation African immigrant applicant ($M = 48.48$, $SD = 28.47$) received more financial aid than the White American applicant ($M = 46.01$, $SD = 23.04$, $d = .10$) but less financial aid than the Black American native applicant ($M = 51.13$, $SD = 22.83$, $d = -.10$). The Black American native applicant received more financial aid than the White American applicant ($d = .22$).

The effect size for scholarship was $\eta^2 = .02$. Overall, the second-generation African immigrant applicant ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.09$) received more scholarship than the White American applicant ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.26$, $d = .25$) but somewhat less than the Black American native applicant ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.22$, $d = -.07$). The Black American native applicant received more
financial aid than the White American applicant ($d = .31$).

**Mediation analyses**

Because applicants’ ethnicity led participants to make some inferences about their SES, perceived SES may explain their recommendations about admitting them. To explore this possibility, mediation analysis with bootstrapped CIs was conducted using Hayes’s (2012) categorical procedure.

Results revealed that for the second-generation African immigrant versus White American comparison and the Black American native versus White comparison, SES did not substantially mediate decisions about admission evaluations of liking or competency, or the amount of financial aid and scholarship offered. Table 1 presents the estimates for the indirect effect of SES as a mediator of the effects of applicant ethnicity on evaluations of the applicants.

In our main analysis, the White American applicant was perceived to be less likeable and less competent than both the Black American native and second-generation African immigrant. We used the same mediation analysis just described to examine if these evaluations affected the relationship between applicant ethnicity and admission decisions.

For the second-generation African immigrant competitor versus the White competitor, both liking ($\beta = -.40$, $SE = .11$), 95% CI $[-.62, -.19]$, and competence ($\beta = -.26$, $SE = .09$), 95% CI $[-.45, -.08]$, mediated the relationship between applicant ethnicity and admission decision such that those who evaluated the second-generation African immigrant applicant rated him as more likeable and more competent than those who evaluated the White American applicant, which in turn were associated with being more likely to admit the African applicant. In contrast, the comparison of the Black American native applicant versus the White applicant showed that neither liking ($\beta = .18$, $SE = .11$), 95% CI $[-.01, .41]$, nor competence ($\beta = .12$, $SE = .09$), 95% CI $[-.05, .32]$, mediated the relationship between applicant ethnicity and decision to admit.

Table 1. Betas from regression model examining whether SES mediates the relationship of applicant ethnicity on evaluations of the applicant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African vs. White</th>
<th>Black vs. White</th>
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<td>Likelihood of admission</td>
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<td>$-.03 [-.13, .00]$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liking</td>
<td>$-.02 [-.06, .00]$</td>
<td>$-.02 [-.08, .00]$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>$-.02 [-.06, .01]$</td>
<td>$-.03 [-.08, .00]$</td>
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<td>Financial aid</td>
<td>$.34 [-.19, 1.42]$</td>
<td>$.60 [-.03, 2.11]$</td>
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<td>Scholarship</td>
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<td>$.02 [-.09, .00]$</td>
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Note. Numbers in brackets are the 95% confidence intervals for the betas of the indirect effects.

**Discussion**

Results revealed that when the second-generation African immigrant and the Black American native applicant were evaluated individually, there was no preference for the second-generation African immigrant over the Black American native applicant. Moreover, participant ratings of competence, liking, SES, financial aid, and scholarship for the second-generation African immigrant applicant and Black American native applicant were similar.

The main difference in design of this study was that participants did not have a choice between competing applicants, whereas in Study 1 opting for one applicant ruled out admitting the other. This indicates that Black American native applicants are at a disadvantage in the admission process only when decision makers can choose between them and second-generation African immigrant applicants. This is consistent with the notion that people are careful to show enthusiasm for native Black applicants in circumstances such as those in Study 2, where anything less than a positive response might be taken as a sign of prejudice.

Similar to Study 1, participants in Study 2 did make inference about applicant SES from ethnicity. The White American competitor was perceived as having a significantly higher SES than the Black American native and the second-generation African immigrant competitor. However, consistent with Study 1, perceived SES did not mediate the effect of ethnicity on admission preferences. Moreover, SES did not mediate the relationship between applicant ethnicity and any other evaluation of the applicant.

In Study 1, evaluations of the applicants’ competence and likability did not explain differences about admitting them. In contrast, in Study 2 the greater perceived competence and likability of the second-generation African immigrant applicant relative to the White applicant did mediate the decision to admit the second-generation African immigrant applicant more than the White applicant. However, even though the Black native applicant was perceived as more competent and likeable than the White applicant (and similarly competent and likeable compared to the second-generation African immigrant applicant), these positive perceptions about him did not mediate participants’ recommendations to accept him more so than the White applicant. In other words, the strength of the recommendation to admit both applicants of color was greater than the recommendation for the White
applicant, but positive stereotyping of the African immigrant applicant appeared to account for his standing relative to the White applicant but not for the Black American native’s standing relative to the White applicant.

**Overall discussion**

Study 1 directly examined the preference for second-generation African immigrants over Black American natives by asking participants to decide between the same target Black American native applicant when his competitor is a similarly qualified second-generation African immigrant, Black American native, or White applicant. The target Black American native was significantly less likely to be admitted when competing against a second-generation African immigrant than a White American. In Study 2, we found that when each applicant was evaluated individually, the Black American native and the second-generation African immigrant were admitted equally.

The results of this study cannot be due to the semantic associations that people have to the terms *Black American* and *African American* because the participants themselves never saw these terms. Moreover, participants in Study 1 perceived no differences between or within the competitor ethnicity conditions in applicant competence or likability.

Massey and colleagues (2007) suggested that second-generation African immigrants may be perceived to be more “likeable” than Black American natives, but our results did not support this hypothesis. The Black American native and second-generation African immigrant were perceived as similarly competent and likeable in both studies. This suggests that the present findings are not consistent with a positive stereotype explanation for why a native Black American applicant fared worst when his competitor was a second-generation African immigrant.

In addition, in both studies the applicants’ objective qualifications were similar for all applicants and were counterbalanced across applicant ethnicity. Thus, objective differences between the qualifications of second-generation African immigrant and the native Black applicants cannot explain the preference for the African immigrant relative to the native Black shown in Study 1 and the absence of this preference in Study 2.

Across both studies, perceptions of SES were relatively similar for Black American native applicant and second-generation African immigrant applicant, with the second-generation African immigrant being perceived as having a slightly higher SES. However, this perceived difference did not mediate the preferences for the second-generation African immigrant relative to the native Black applicant. Massey et al. (2007) suggested that ethnicity may signal other qualities that college admission officers prefer, such as characteristics associated with higher SES. Not only were differences in perceived SES relatively small, but SES did not mediate the preferences for African immigrant applicant relative to the native Black applicant.

One possible explanation for our findings is that participants were freer to express subtle prejudice against native Black applicants when the circumstances provided an acceptable justification for not recommending that they be admitted. Snyder, Kleck, Strenta, and Mentzer (1979) created a situation in which the meaning of choosing to avoid a stigmatized person (in their study, a person with a visible physical disability) differed depending on whether avoidance had a plausible explanation except avoiding the person with a disability or whether there was a plausible alternative explanation for avoidance. They did this by having participants choose between two movies that supposedly would be shown in adjacent rooms—one occupied by a person with a visible physical disability and the other occupied by a person without a visible disability. Participants were told that the same movie was being shown in both rooms or that a different movie would be shown in each room. The researchers reasoned that when the same movie was offered in both rooms, choosing to sit with the person without a disability would make the participants look prejudiced. When faced with this choice, 58% of participants chose to sit in the room with the confederate who supposedly had a disability stigma, whereas only 17% chose to view the movie in the room occupied by the person with the disability when they could choose to watch a different movie in the other room. In other words, having the option of choosing between two movies provided participants with a socially acceptable motive that could explain their decision to sit with the confederate without a stigma.

In Study 1, we showed that when a Black American native applicant competed against a second-generation African immigrant (i.e., analogous to choosing between different movies), participants could avoid admitting the Black American native applicant because the second-generation African immigrant could “cover” this motive. Although the condition in which the Black American native applicant is competing against a White American is also similar in some respects to the choosing between different movies, there is one critical difference. Not choosing a well-qualified Black American native applicant over a White applicant leaves the decision maker open to the charge of prejudice. Results of Study 2 also are consistent with this
explanation because participants who might be inclined not to admit the Black American native target applicant had no readily apparent way to disguise their motivation, as the second-generation African immigrant was not there to provide a foil.

Across both studies, the White American applicant was least likely to be admitted. In Study 1, before viewing the materials of the target Black American applicant and the competitor applicant, participants first viewed materials from two previously admitted applicants, both of whom were White. This was included to replicate an aspect of admission that occurs in the real world. Given this, participants were likely to feel that they should pay special attention to applicants of color. However in Study 2, participants did not view two already admitted White American applicants. The White American was still least likely to be admitted compared to the Black American native and second-generation African immigrant. Of interest, the equally qualified White American applicant was seen as less likeable and less competent than both applicants of color.

It is also possible that participants may have found the résumés for the Black American native and second-generation African immigrant to be stronger than expected, which inflated their evaluations of the applicants’ credentials. This explanation is consistent with the shifting standard model (Biernat & Manis, 1994), which proposes that perceivers make evaluations about members of social groups on a stereotype-relevant dimension by comparing them to a within-group standard. For example, Black American natives are stereotyped as being poor in academics. Consequently, when participants received a résumé of a highly credentialed Black American native applicant, it exceeded their expectations for a Black American applicant. Because White American applicants are stereotyped as strong in academics, a strongly credentialed résumé may be perceived as less exceptional when the applicant was White.

Generalization of our findings is limited because all of the applicants were male. In addition, researchers also have contended that names chosen to communicate a Black American identity may also imply lower SES. However, the difference between perceived SES of the second-generation African immigrant and Black American native applicants were on the small side and did not mediate the relationship between applicant/competitor ethnicity and admission. Thus, the current findings do not seem to have occurred because the names themselves conveyed SES information. Another limitation of these studies was that the applications included only a résumé and personal statement. Undergraduate applications typically consist of multiple documents, including recommendation letters and grade transcripts. The absence of recommendation letters allowed the participants to draw their own conclusions based on the qualifications rather than being guided by another person’s viewpoint. Furthermore, in the real world, admission officers are given numerous applications to compare, whereas in the present study they were choosing between only two applicants. Future research should examine whether similar effects occur when participants are given more materials, genders, and applicants to choose from.

Another limitation was that our sample did not include people who actually make college admission decisions. The majority had earned a bachelor’s degree or more, and a substantial minority was employed in management or professional services. Thus, this sample may be a closer representation of the actual population of admission officers than would be an undergraduate population. There also is some concern that MTurk workers may be less likely to express prejudice due to knowledge about study design as a result of participation in multiple studies (Marder & Fritz, 2015). However, many convenience samples including college students (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) are more reluctant to express prejudice than the general population.

Implications

Many institutions, including colleges and universities, are committed to expanding opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups. One of the original intents of programs and policies aimed at increasing the number of students of color attending institutions of higher education was to make restitution for the pernicious effects of a deeply embedded history of racism in America (Massey et al., 2007). However, in recent years the emphasis has shifted from restitution to increasing the diversity in the student body. Ironically, the shift toward valuing racial and ethnic diversity for its own sake, coupled with a growing population of children of African immigrants, may perpetuate the disadvantaged position of native Black Americans. Second-generation African immigrants provide not only racial diversity but also a type of ethnic diversity that may be perceived as adding greater diversity than native Black American culture does.

We hasten to add that there is no reason why decision makers must choose between ethnic groups. Both African offspring of immigrant families and Black Americans who trace their family history to American slavery bring important perspectives and experiences. But as institutions try to gauge their progress toward
achieving diversity goals, it may be useful to consider ethnic background as well as the race of those seeking to join the academic community.

Note

1. We are indebted to an anonymous reviewer for making this suggestion.

References


