

Coping with Marketplace Discrimination: An Exploration of the Experiences of Black Men

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Differential treatment in the marketplace based on group membership rather than individual differences, which we refer to as marketplace discrimination, has been noted to occur across a multitude of consumption contexts, ranging from purchasing automobiles and real estate to browsing at retail stores or even hailing a taxicab. While evidence of marketplace discrimination has been widely reported and need not be reproduced here, the important related question of how consumers perceive and cope with the internal strains produced by discrimination remains an under-investigated topic in marketing. This is an important oversight, as research in sociology, anthropology and psychology has demonstrated how both stereotypes and perceptions of marketplace discrimination can largely structure customer-service provider interactions involving racial/ethnic minorities. Thus we present findings from an exploratory investigation of consumer perceptions of marketplace discrimination and subsequent coping strategies.

We begin our analysis by developing a conceptualization of marketplace discrimination, drawing from extant research on race-related stressors, strains, and perceived discrimination, as well as literature on coping strategies. We then describe and present the results of in-depth interviews with a group of African-American males. These results are discussed in light of their illustration of race-related strain resulting from perceived marketplace discrimination, as well as the emergent coping strategies these men employ in response. Finally, the implications of this research for consumer behavior scholarship and public policy are addressed.

Based on these interviews, we propose that attributions about marketplace discrimination are self-protective in nature, exhibiting aspects of both the attributional ambiguity and person/group discrimination discrepancy perspectives identified in prior research. Attributional ambiguity specifies that individuals make discriminatory attributions in order to explain their inability to attain some goal. Such attributions actively protect the self from feelings of failure by identifying a culprit responsible for failure. The informants in this sample attribute marketplace discrimination to stereotyped racial profil-

ing and negative interactions with employees consistent with this perspective. Person/group discrimination discrepancy specifies that individuals are likely to understate their personal susceptibility to discrimination relative to the group's susceptibility. This serves to distance the self from feelings of victimization. Consistent with this perspective, informants were cautious about making discriminatory attributions, and in some instances did not feel they had enough evidence to attribute discriminatory intent to the poor service they had received. Nonetheless, they were unanimous in their belief that marketplace discrimination directed at African Americans as a group is widespread.

The data revealed that these men engaged in primarily problem-focused and emotion-focused coping responses to perceived marketplace discrimination. Problem-focused coping responses directly confront perceived discrimination, often seeking immediate redress of grievances. These coping responses include the practice of outing, i.e. calling public attention to perceived mistreatment, formal complaints to store or company management, and employing word-of-mouth primarily to caution others about particular service providers. Emotion-focused coping responses emotionally or cognitively reposition informants to address perceived discrimination. These responses included creating emotional distance (often through the use of humor), to trivialize or minimize the psychological and emotional strain of perceived discrimination, and internalization. Internalization is a coping response where informants reassert control by internalizing the responsibility for preparedness for perceived discriminatory treatment.

The data provide insight into the phenomenological structuring of marketplace discrimination. First, the implied racial meaning, articulated across consumption contexts, of marketplace discrimination is one of perceived consumer inferiority (e.g. "not having enough money to buy", "a shoplifter", "a threat") rather than out-group racial hostility. Informants saw their treatment as fundamentally grounded in stereotypes about Black men, driven by mass media. They interpreted profile-driven oversurveillance (e.g. being tailed as a potential security risk) as the foreseeable consequence of widely known and accepted stereotypes about Black males, crime and status. Second, they see status oriented consumption as key to combating stereotypes about their presumed low status. Yet the strongly held cognitive associations between Blacks, crime, and low status often manifest themselves in policies and interactions that reduce the effectiveness of these efforts. Stated another way, presumptions about the ability to pay and criminal likelihood of Black men, even those of high social status, suggest the extent to which status signaling efforts can simply be read racially, i.e., in a manner consistent with prevailing stereotypes. Consequently, these informants experience marketplace discrimination as both frustrating and ironic despite their general sense that it is not at root hostile. Third, consistent with attributional ambiguity and person/group discrimination discrepancy perspectives, these men make discriminatory attributions in ways that suggest their primary function to be self-protective.

The data also suggest that Black men alter their behavior (e.g. dress differently to go shopping) to lower the likelihood of marketplace discrimination. Their behavior begs the question of the effectiveness of such responses. It is possible that coping strategies function to actually reduce the impact of discriminatory treatment, or alternatively, constitute a short-term adjustment to such treatment, allowing its cumulative effects to support and reinforce economic disadvantage, psychological and physiological stress. However, it is their belief in the efficacy of status oriented consumption to alter prevalent stereotypes about criminal likelihood and socioeconomic status that must be most called into question. These men's narratives demonstrate the ease with which traditional consumption status markers can be interpreted in a manner consistent with prevailing racial stereotypes.

In closing, we highlight possibilities for future research. Some have argued that the presence of disproportionate numbers of Black males involved in deviant behavior gives vendors an incentive to spread their risk across the entire category of Black males. Understanding the frequency and intensity of this approach through descriptive and explanatory research should prove fruitful. For instance, given the legitimacy of security concerns, future research might examine how consumers interpret the fairness of commonly employed security measures, like surveillance, and how those interpretations might vary with the race of the shopper. Future research might also explore other racially and ethnically stratified settings across cultures (e.g. South Africa, the Middle East). Further, while engagement in broader collective action (boycotts, demonstrations, etc.) in the face of perceived marketplace discrimination was absent among these men, it remains an important response. Additionally, Bristor and Fischer (1995) have argued that in order to inform public policy on marketing issues, researchers must think systematically about the way racial discrimination interacts with sexual discrimination. To this end, an investigation across different genders would also shed light on perceived discrimination and coping. Finally,

we propose that perceived marketplace discrimination remains a salient and stressful feature of the lived experiences of this sample of Black men, and a persistent social problem that has been much understudied. Our analysis of their understanding of marketplace discrimination and subsequent coping responses addresses this void.

Keywords: Coping, Discrimination, Race, Black (African-American), Stress

Coping with Marketplace Discrimination: An Exploration of the Experiences of Black Men

In *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (1992), author Derrick Bell describes the passage of the fictitious “Racial Realism Act”. This act of Congress extends personal association rights typically accorded to individuals, to private businesses. In effect, the new law gives businesses and other private organizations the right to practice racial discrimination, provided that they purchase a license for such activity from the government. The imagery conjured up by Bell is a provocative one from a consumer behavior perspective, particularly in light of recurring publicized incidents of marketplace discrimination. For example, the current controversy surrounding gender exclusive membership at Augusta National, given its status as host of Professional Golfer’s Association (PGA) events, highlights the persistence of perceived discrimination in businesses and other private associations. For racial and ethnic minorities, the need to cope with potentially discriminatory interactions is seen as an almost inevitable aspect of “everyday” commercial transactions in the United States (e.g. Feagin and Sikes 1994). This contention runs counter to the neo-classical assumption that competition between sellers should lessen, if not altogether eliminate incentives to discriminate, rendering all buyers equal in the eyes of the market. That is, only one’s relative store of human and financial capital should determine success in acquiring goods and services (see Becker 1957). Yet, survey evidence, field experiments, journalistic narratives, and judicial opinions in cases about racial discrimination in the marketplace provide ample evidence of actual discrimination faced by racial/ethnic minorities and other groups in the procurement of goods and services. For instance, in a poll conducted by Harvard University and the Kaiser Foundation substantial majorities of Blacks, Latinos and Asians report they at least occasionally experience poor service in stores or restaurants that they attribute to race or ethnicity (Morin and Cottman 2001).

Differential treatment in the marketplace based on group membership rather than individual differences, which we refer to as marketplace discrimination, has been noted to occur across a multitude of consumption contexts, ranging from purchasing automobiles and real estate to browsing at retail stores or even hailing a taxicab (Williams, Henderson, and Harris 2001; Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Feagin and Sikes 1994). While evidence of marketplace discrimination has been widely reported and need not be reproduced here, the important related question of how consumers perceive and cope with the internal strains produced by discrimination remains an under-investigated topic in marketing. This is an important oversight, as research in sociology, anthropology and psychology has demonstrated how both stereotypes and perceptions of marketplace discrimination can largely structure customer-service provider interactions involving racial/ethnic minorities (e.g. Lee 2002; Chin 1998; Inman, Huerta, and Oh 1996). Thus we present findings from an exploratory investigation of consumer perceptions of marketplace discrimination and subsequent coping strategies.

We begin our analysis by developing a conceptualization of marketplace discrimination, drawing from extant research on race-related stressors, strains, and perceived discrimination, as well as literature on coping strategies. We then describe and present the results of in-depth interviews with a group of African-American males. These results are discussed in light of their illustration of race-related strain resulting from perceived marketplace discrimination, as well as the emergent coping strategies these men employ in response. Finally, the implications of this research for consumer behavior scholarship and public policy are addressed.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF MARKETPLACE DISCRIMINATION: RACE-RELATED STRESS AND PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION

The investigation of discriminatory treatment involving in-groups and out-groups, particularly based on “master status” social categories, i.e. race, class, and gender, is foundational in sociological analysis. Sociologists discuss discrimination as consisting of “imposing differential treatment on the group in various fields of social life, a treatment in which the group itself participates, along lines which render it inferior” (Wieviorka 1995, p. 54). Following this definition, marketplace discrimination involves the differential treatment of customers in the marketplace based on perceived group-level traits that produce outcomes favorable to “in-groups” and unfavorable to

“out-groups”. Importantly, the arrangement of in-groups and out-groups is likely to be consistent with the existing structure of racial inequality, such that Whites receive the most favorable treatment and Blacks the least (see Bobo and Massagali 2001). Of course in a context where such treatment runs counter to articulated social norms regarding fairness at least some aspects of marketplace discrimination are based on the situated perspective of its recipients. As such, where marketplace discrimination actually occurs it is often subtle and elusive, making its effects difficult to verify and difficult to document except through the eyes of its victims (Dovidio and Gaertner 1999, 1991).

Marketplace discrimination may occur in the context of interpersonal interactions between customers and service providers. Such interactions may serve to disadvantage out-group members, favor in-group members, or both. To illustrate, in a study of helping behavior in convenience stores, Black and White customers (both male and female) tried to purchase a product for less than the marked price (Brigham and Richardson 1979). Results indicated that Black male customers were helped least often, controlling for style of dress (an indicator of status). In a study investigating the reporting of clearly observed thefts by Black and White male and female confederates, the researchers found that Blacks were reported most often for theft (Dertke, Penner and Ulrich 1974). In more recent research, Ainscough and Motley (2000) show that men typically experience the longest waiting times in queues, with Black males experiencing the longest waits. While this study, like those cited above, is primarily concerned with marketplace discrimination in interpersonal interactions, it also occurs at the institutional level. Inequality is often embedded within social institutions like the marketplace in ways that render some groups disadvantaged apart from their interactions with service providers (c.f. Hill 2001). The material advantage in product quality and price enjoyed by grocery shoppers in predominantly White, suburban neighborhoods is an example (c.f. Bell and Burlin 1993).

Race-Related Stress

The primary focus of this study is at the individual level on stressors that emerge from negative interpersonal interactions between customers and service providers. Stressors are the conditions, threats, or cues that give rise to psychological or physiological reactions called strains (Wolfe and Lazarus 1966). Current stress research connects both psychological and sociological stressors to physiological/biological responses. For instance, some stressors such as a sense of loss, unfulfilled needs, or violations of self-image are classically psychological, but social-psychological phenomena like blocked aspirations, or perceived physical harm are also included (e.g. Pearlin 1989). The basic components of the stress process include (1) objective and perceived stressors, (2) experienced strain and global stress outcomes, and (3) stress moderators such as individual differences and coping mechanisms.

Race-related strain occurs as the result of both acute and chronic encounters with racial discrimination at all levels (Utsey and Ponterotto 1996). Harrell (2000) describes race-related strain as the interaction between individuals (or groups) and their environment that emerge from the dynamics of racism and discrimination. Race-related strain may tax or exceed existing individual and collective resources or threaten well-being. A number of scholars have elucidated the exact physiological and psychological mechanisms associated with the stress response in relation to racism and discrimination (see Clark, Anderson, Clark and Williams 1999). At the psychological level, perceptions that a stressful situation taxes or exceeds one’s ability to cope may result in feelings of anger, anxiety, paranoia, helplessness, hopelessness, frustration, resentment, and fear. Physiological reactions to stress are thought to occur as a result of unsuccessful coping responses. The primary physiological stress reaction involves immune, neuroendocrine and cardiovascular system functioning. Clinical researchers have found connections between racial stressors and medical ailments such as hypertension, high blood pressure, and cardiovascular disease (Krieger and Signey 1996; Fray 1993) and low levels of life satisfaction (Phillipp 1998).

Other research on racial discrimination describes its acute and chronic psychological consequences, citing frequently expressed feelings of being looked down upon, worthlessness, helplessness, powerlessness, sadness, and fearfulness (e.g. Feagin and Sikes 1994; Essed 1991). Population surveys conducted in a diverse array of American communities have consistently demonstrated a positive association between self-reported experiences with racial discrimination and psychological and physiological distress (e.g. Williams, Yu and Jackson 1997; Sanders-

Thompson 1996; Rumbaut 1994; Amaro, Russo, and Johnson 1987; Salgado de Snyder 1987). Geronimus (1992) suggests that compared to other racial/ethnic groups, racial and other forms of discrimination for African-Americans are more prevalent, more chronic, and its effects more likely to be cumulative.

The cited empirical evidence supports the contention that perceived discrimination constitutes a significant stressor, potentially jeopardizing the physical and mental health of racial minority group members, particularly African-Americans. However, this literature has typically not been concerned with (1) the conditions under which discrimination is attributed to particular interpersonal interactions; and (2) the sources of individual variability in response to these stressors (e.g. coping mechanisms). Yet in the context of marketplace discrimination such considerations are paramount. Thus, we turn our attention briefly to extant literature on perceived discrimination and coping.

Perceiving Discrimination

People frequently encounter marketplace interactions that could potentially be interpreted as discriminatory, for instance being treated rudely at a restaurant, preempted in service by another customer, or asked for what seems an unreasonable amount of identification. These everyday interactions may not simply be perceived as unpleasant and negative, but also as discriminatory treatment. Several research streams focus on the perceptions of potential victims of discrimination. These research streams are particularly interesting because they suggest quite different conceptualizations of how minorities perceive potential discrimination.

One conceptualization, termed attributional ambiguity, proposes that minorities will attribute negative interactions to discrimination as a self-protective function, resulting in higher self-esteem (Crocker and Major 1989). Evidence for the self-protective function of attribution to discrimination is provided by experiments in which members of minority groups receive negative feedback from an evaluator who is known to be biased, or is known to be unbiased. The results show that minority group members who received negative feedback from a prejudiced evaluator attribute negative feedback to discrimination and have higher self-esteem. A second conceptualization of perceived discrimination is termed the person/group discrimination discrepancy (Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, and Lalonde 1990). Across a wide variety of minority groups, individuals consistently rate discrimination directed at their group as a whole substantially higher than discrimination aimed at themselves, as a member of the group. This research suggests that minorities deny, or at least minimize, their personal experience with discrimination as a self-protective and esteem-building function. Ruggiero and Taylor (1997) found conditional support for both in their attempt to resolve these competing conceptualizations. That is, minorities attributed their personal failure to discrimination only in the condition where the probability for discrimination was certain, suggesting an attributional ambiguity approach. However, the results provided more substantial support for the person/group discrimination discrepancy approach. Across conditions where the probability for discrimination was less certain (75%, 50% and 25%), subjects minimized their personal experience with discrimination. Consistent with these findings, the marketplace is likely to be a context where attributional ambiguity and person-group discrepancy complement rather than compete against each other. Given persistent reports of perceived marketplace discrimination, it is a context with a high (but uncertain) probability of experiencing discrimination. Yet it can be safely assumed that consumers also act in their own self-interest, seeking to protect themselves from discrimination and disadvantage (Andreasen 1975; 1993). A third conceptualization suggests an asymmetry in discrimination attributions, where certain perpetrators are seen as more likely to discriminate than others. Rodin, Price, Bryson, and Sanchez (1990) found that "powerful" perpetrators (e.g., whites, males, heterosexuals, the young) were seen as more likely to discriminate than less powerful ones (e.g., African-Americans, females, gays, the elderly). Power is defined as control over the rewards, punishments, and resources for one's own and other groups. The authors also found strong victim effects, such that when resources were denied to less empowered groups more bias was perceived than when resources were denied to the more empowered groups. In support of the asymmetry in attribution, Inman and Baron (1996) found that certain perpetrator-race/victim-race combinations (e.g., white/black, male/female) are seen as more prejudiced than other combinations (e.g., white/white, black/white, black/black, male/male, female/male and female/female).

Attribution research specifies these three primary routes to making discriminatory attributions. However, this stream of research, often conducted experimentally, has been generally unconcerned with the phenomenology of such attributions. That is, how is perceived discrimination constructed in encounters where its perceived likelihood is high but uncertain? Subsequently, how do consumers respond to perceived discrimination? For this discussion we turn to literature on coping.

Coping with Marketplace Discrimination

The stress process paradigm acknowledges that variability in experienced strain outcomes is due to differential vulnerability to stressors (i.e. individual differences in personality traits, susceptibility to stressors) and the availability of coping strategies. Although there would most likely be considerable variability in the individual differences that moderate the stressor-strain relationship, review of that research is beyond the scope of this research. Based on our interest in consumer responses to marketplace encounters, we summarize current research on individual coping mechanisms.

Responses to stress that function to eliminate or reduce psychological and physiological strain have been termed “coping” (e.g. Wolfe and Lazarus 1966). For example, if a consumer feels she has been charged unfairly for a product, she may choose to ignore the treatment, become upset, demand to speak with a store manager, and/or return the product. Coping illustrates how consumers react to perceived marketplace discrimination. Three psycho-social categories of coping responses are cited in the extant literature: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and social support (Pearlin 1989; Folkman and Lazarus 1988). Problem-focused coping, or confrontation, functions to minimize the harmful effects of a perceived stressor through retrieval of personal control over the stressful situation. Emotion-focused coping, or forbearance, is an attempt to regulate manifested emotional symptoms (Folkman and Lazarus 1980). Social support that emerges from a social network is seen as a critical moderator of experienced strain and global stress outcomes in addition to problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Stress researchers have tended to ignore social networks and their structure, focusing solely on support as it is perceived by the individual (Pearlin 1989, p. 251).

The limited literature on coping with perceived discrimination suggests that problem-focused coping is more adaptive than emotion-focused coping. For example, Kriger (1990) found that African-American women who employed passive responses to racial discrimination had higher blood pressure levels than those who coped through more active, direct approaches, including talking to others about the situation or taking action to address the problem. In addition, previous studies suggest that culture may influence the choice of coping response. Davidson (2001) examines how aspects of African American culture may imply prescriptions for handling conflict. The first cultural theme examined is emotional expressiveness. Emotional expression is the capacity to express one’s feelings with authenticity. Cultures that sanction emotional expressiveness, often manifested in animated speech and nonverbal behavior, may choose to protest mistreatment verbally, report incidents to authorities, or reason with the offender when encountering racially-based incidents. Though responding to conflict with overt expressions of anger can reinforce prevailing racial stereotypes, it nonetheless suggests a strategy for coping with marketplace stressors. An additional cultural theme identified by Davidson (2001) is collective kinship and community. Gaines and Reed (1995) suggest that many African-Americans draw psychological and existential resilience from the awareness that each is part of a larger community rather than from a specific individual achievement, endowment, or struggle. Nonetheless, in situations that are difficult to change, the use of problem-focused coping may not always be a realistic option. In Western societies characterized by persistent color-based divisions of power and influence, as well as subtle (rather than overt) discriminatory practices, there may be limited opportunities to directly confront perceived marketplace discrimination. Other factors inhibiting problem-focused coping strategies may include the fear of causing further trouble, the absence of institutional support for direct complaints, a lack of social skills for negotiation, and skepticism about the effectiveness of official procedures. These factors in tandem can result in a reluctance to report incidents to appropriate authorities or engage in other direct forms of action against perceived marketplace discrimination.

On the basis of the premise that African-American customers are likely to have perceived marketplace discrimination, this study seeks to explore their experiences. That is, we investigate the phenomenological structuring of

perceived marketplace discrimination, with particular focus on how these consumers come to attribute discriminatory intent in customer service interactions and the strategies they employ to cope with marketplace discrimination.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

This data consists of a set of exploratory, in-depth interviews with a group of ten (10) African-American males about their marketplace experiences, their perceptions of those experiences including marketplace discrimination, and their responses to these experiences. Consumer researchers have argued that consumer's subjective experiences influence consumption-related behaviors (e.g. Mick and Buhl 1992; Solomon 1983). Given the general absence of marketing research on African-American males and their consumption related thoughts directly relevant to the topic, as a first step we investigate their phenomenological understanding of their experiences with marketplace discrimination (c.f. Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1989). As a group, African American males are statistically overrepresented as both the victims and perpetrators of violent crime (US Department of Justice 1999), as well as in the ranks of the unemployed (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2001). Frequently, these group characterizations translate to low perceived status in the marketplace, potentially marring their marketplace experiences. Given the preponderance of particularly negative perceptions and characterizations of African-American males, we find their experiences to be an appropriate basis for investigating perceived marketplace discrimination and coping mechanisms. Further, given that issues relating to identity and discrimination tend to be highly involving, emotionally charged, and generally sensitive, this study requires a method which allows in-depth exploration of thoughts, feelings and behaviors associated with experience. Therefore, as in similar research, in-depth interviews were utilized to gain insight into informant consumption experiences (e.g. Mick and Fournier 1998). To aid the in-depth interview we employed an open-ended interviewer guide designed to give the investigator an efficient instrument of inquiry (McCracken 1988).

Interview Guide and Procedure – The interviews, directed via an interviewer guide, were designed to encourage participants to freely discuss their perceptions, experiences, and feelings. At the start of each interview session, informants were told that the general purpose of the study was to “gain insight into their marketing-related behaviors”. The questions and probes used were aimed at eliciting informant self-perceptions, and increasing their descriptions of their marketing-related experiences including general marketplace attitudes and perceptions, product and service-related consumption encounters, coping strategies and situation outcomes. Interviews averaged 45 minutes to 1 hour. Additionally, because race and gender have such wide-ranging impacts on social interaction (Collins 1988), and particularly researcher-informant interactions (c.f. Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1941; Griffin 1961; MacLeod 1995 [1987]; and Edin and Lein 1997), it is worth noting that the first author is an African-American male, while the second and third authors are African-American females.

Sample – These informants comprise a purposive sample of African-American men. They were recruited to participate in a “marketing study” through posted flyers on the campus of a large state university in the Southwest, and surrounding areas of the city. Further, informants were recruited to ensure a broad range of marketplace experiences. In particular, criteria for sample inclusion were based on falling within a specific age range and meeting minimum income and educational levels. We targeted a broad age range (16-40) to allow for diversity in the types of insights garnered from interviews. Prior research has demonstrated generational differences in materialism, such that the types of products, and the meaning attributed to them, may vary by age group (e.g. Belk 1985). Further, the age range was developed to encompass various transition periods people encounter. Within the time span, men and women will traverse multiple stages of the family lifecycle, typically establishing their own households, pursuing higher education and/or entering the workforce, as well as purchasing their own convenience and specialty products (Ritchie 1995; Strauss and Howe 1991). The actual sample of ten informants ranged in age from 20 to 37, with a median of 33. Each informant had at least some college education, with 8 of 10 having completed a bachelor's degree. Their annual income ranged from just under \$15,000 to \$70,000. Given the high status of this group relative to African-American men generally, we expect them to have a broad range of product

experiences. Also, given persistent stereotypes about the low socioeconomic status and propensity towards crime involving African-American men (c.f. Hutchinson 1994; Dyson 1993) we expect these men to be likely to have perceived marketplace discrimination.

Data Analysis

The interviews were analyzed using a comparative technique similar to Strauss and Corbin (1990). We analyzed interview data during and after data collection, triangulating across the three authors, as in prior research (e.g. Mick and Fournier 1998). We began by employing routes to making discriminatory attributions, using prior literature as a priori codes, with specific coping strategies as emergent codes. Interviews were transcribed, and analysis was based on the transcripts, as well as considered within the context of previous literature. Verbatim comments are identified by pseudonyms to preserve the anonymity of the men.

FINDINGS

Making Discriminatory Attributions

The informants have in large part come to define their marketplace experiences by the presence or absence of discriminatory treatment. They each cite encounters with the two most prevalent forms of marketplace discrimination typically identified by African American consumers, namely diminished service and profiling (typically in the form of oversurveillance). Attribution research cited earlier theorizes that discriminatory attributions are made primarily for self-protective purposes. Individuals may turn to discriminatory attributions as an explanation for an inability to obtain some goal, or to shield themselves from the psychologically corrosive effects of victimization. This data reveals three basic narratives about perceived discrimination that serve the self-protective functions highlighted in prior research by the attributional ambiguity and person/group discrimination discrepancy perspectives.

Profile-Based Attributions – Attributions of marketplace discrimination, in the most obvious sense, are made to explain less-than-satisfactory treatment. However among this sample of men they also appear as causal narratives about their perceived low status as consumers specifically, and as African American males more generally. Scott, a substance abuse counselor, makes reference to the stigma of criminality and wider perceptions about the low socioeconomic status of African American males to explain why he felt he was being tailed around a shopping mall.

I: Can you tell me about that experience?

Scott: When I went to St. Louis, me and some other friends of mine went out to this one mall... which is out in... an area which is in the top five upper income socioeconomic areas in the country. At least it was at this time. So this mall... [has] a lot of stores like Saks Fifth Avenue, Brooks Brothers. I've only been a couple of times... [W]e ended up going in Lord and Taylor's and the security guard followed us around the whole time we were in the store.

I: How do you know it was about race?

Scott: There's a certain stigma that runs through most of America about the young Black male being involved in a lot of crime. Statistics came out a number of years ago that one in five Black males would spend a night in prison before the age of 25. So you hear those kinds of things, and everybody else hears those kinds of things. So it kind of makes everybody's awareness perk up. This is something that you're aware of being a young Black male. This is what you deal with. Everybody else has heard the same sort of thing, and they're going to be looking at you, especially when you're in places where you are obviously different than everybody else there.

Scott, aware of the prevalent role played by young Black males as both victims and perpetrators of crime, sees this kind of profile-driven, or statistical discrimination as unpleasant, but wholly foreseeable. That is, his membership in a group thought likely to commit crime automatically arouses suspicion, if not precipitates outright differential treatment, from others. Statistics about African American males and crime, typically disseminated through media outlets without regard to individual variance, underlie the practice of racial profiling. Thus, the function of discriminatory attribution in this instance, consistent with the attributional ambiguity perspective, is to establish a causal narrative about profiling that highlights racial stereotypes that dismiss or underemphasize individual factors that decrease criminal likelihood.

Interaction-Based Attributions – The data suggest that informants felt that profile-based marketplace discrimination is partially offset by status signaling consumption efforts. That is, by employing consumption markers that signal high-status informants can distance themselves from prevailing stereotypes about African American males. Indeed, the men in this sample are very conscious that their appearance and behavior actively disaffirm prevailing stereotypes as a strategy for lowering the likelihood of experiencing marketplace discrimination, a coping strategy that we will address elsewhere. Thus, when their attempts to acquire status signaling goods that counter perceptions of low status are frustrated (or thwarted) by sellers who make presumptions about their status, it is experienced as bitterly ironic. In this instance from the data, Kevin, a librarian, relates an experience at two different car dealerships where the dealers kept trying to sell him a lower cost, lower status version of the model than he wanted to purchase.

Kevin: Actually when I bought my car I had a bad experience... I went on a weekend and I was dressed in a t-shirt and hat. I was wearing what you call a student [look]. But anyway, I was standing in the lot for a good 30 minutes before I kind of woke up and said, “You know, no one’s coming out.” So I just went to the office and grabbed one [a salesperson], and of course when I told them what I was looking for they immediately went and tried to talk me down to a more reasonable – I guess in their impression – model, not even asking me how much I make a year, or where I work, or anything like that. And one thing led to another and I ended up not buying the car from them.

I: Do you think if you had been dressed differently their response would have been different?

Kevin: I don’t think so because I went to another place and I was thinking, “OK maybe I have to dress up.” So I dressed up, and [the service] was quicker, but it was the same thing in trying to talk me down into those other models.

I: Tell me about how you felt when you left the first place.

Kevin: Mad, upset. How dare they make “guesstimates” on who I was and what I could afford?

The irony is that at least part of the benefit associated with status signaling goods is that they invite others to make precisely such “guesstimates”, but perceived marketplace discrimination in this instance manifests itself in the form of frustrated attempts to acquire such goods. Consistent with attributional ambiguity, attribution in this instance serves a self-protective function. It identifies a culprit, one who is responsible for frustrating informant attempts at status oriented consumption.

Non-Attributions – The men exercised a surprising degree of conservatism and caution in how they made attributions. Kevin, for instance, attributed his initial treatment at the car dealership solely to low status signals he sent with his casual dress. It was not until after dressing up, and receiving roughly similar treatment that he made discriminatory attributions. In another instance from the data, Mark, a confident, corporate executive, talked about very poor service he received at a restaurant, prompting him to contact upper management.

I: What do you think was one of the things that motivated her to treat you the way she did?

Mark: I don't know. I mean, I don't know if she was just having a bad day. You know, in a situation like that you don't know. I mean, clearly as an African American, your being African American or my being African American is always an issue, or it could be an issue, or at least it's a consideration. So you, in trying to go through and tabulate... that may be [number] ten in a list of ten or eleven reasons. I don't know if she was just having a bad day.

I: Why would you say that being an African American is something that ends up on the list of considerations?

Mark: Well, inasmuch as people are aware of my African Americanness [sic], I think it's an issue. I think people have a tendency to be attracted and drawn to those things, [and] people like them[selves]. And clearly I'm not of the majority, so those individuals would maybe be more attracted to the majority and/or conversely unattracted to someone of the minority. So I think, you know, there's maybe a natural selection process that goes on there.

This instance from the data illustrates the functioning of person/group discrimination discrepancy in the marketplace. Mark, confronted with poor treatment, but lacking evidence about its cause, is reluctant to make discriminatory attributions. He acknowledges that race can be a factor in how he is treated in the marketplace, a perspective that emphasizes in-group favoritism over out-group hostility, but does not necessarily see himself as a victim of marketplace discrimination. In this sense he is able to distance himself from potentially discriminatory behavior by not assigning it any further significance.

The literature on discriminatory attributions highlights attributional ambiguity and person/group discrimination discrepancy as the two basic approaches to self-protection in the face of perceived discrimination. Not surprisingly, both appear to be operating in this context. These informants make attributions as a means of erecting causal narratives about their frustrated attempts to construct themselves through consumption. These narratives emphasize the role played by other Black males, whose actual overrepresentation in crime underlies strong perceived associations with criminality, in their marketplace treatment. Their narratives also highlight the role of specific service providers, whose inability or unwillingness to recognize variation in criminal likelihood and personal biases frustrate their attempts to meet their consumption goals. Finally, these narratives emphasize the degree of caution employed by the men in making attributions, both in pursuit of accuracy and as a means of limiting the significance of unpleasant treatment. It is within the confines of these basic narratives that informants construct strategies to cope with marketplace discrimination.

Coping Strategies

Prior research highlights three broad approaches to coping, namely problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and social support, with the first two as primary (Pearlin 1989; Folkman and Lazarus 1988). Problem-focused coping strategies emphasize efforts aimed at confrontation and problem resolution. Emotion-focused coping strategies emphasize the management of emotions and self-image. These informants reveal a set of coping strategies, emergent from the causal narratives about marketplace discrimination, that correspond to these two broad categories. Problem-focused strategies include outing, formal complaints, and word of mouth. Emotion-focused strategies include creating emotional distance and internalization. Each is discussed in detail employing data from interviews.

Problem-Focused Coping Strategies – One means of coping with perceived marketplace discrimination employed by informants is to directly and publicly confront their treatment. Outing refers to such public confrontation. It is employed by informants to publicly remove the often thin veneer of subtlety that can distinguish legitimate security policy from unfair racial profiling. In this instance from the data James discusses his response to being tailed in retail establishments.

James: You walk into a store and some undercover guy is following [me] around. I just call them over and say, "If you're going to follow me why don't you help me shop?" It makes them laugh and they feel embarrassed.

I: What made you decide that was the best way?

James: That way I'm not uncomfortable and maybe they'll learn not to judge people who look a certain way, and all is well at the end. Or, [I] just make them feel as uncomfortable as they're making me feel. I know they're watching me and they're supposed to be undercover.

Central to profile-based discriminatory attributions is the notion that surveillance is triggered by the presence of an African American male without regard to individual differences in his likelihood of committing crime. Consequently, legitimate concerns about crime are imposed as a cost on all African American male shoppers, often generating feelings of discomfort, embarrassment, and anger. As a response, James directly and publicly acknowledges surveillance personnel as a way to redistribute the costs of crime prevention. Through direct contact with store personnel he in essence announces his intention not to shoplift, or commit some other crime. But he also subverts the traditional relationship from one where paid staff observes customers to deter them from shoplifting, to one where he observes staff to deter them from watching him, sometimes interjecting humor as a way to "humanize us both." Store personnel, based on unconscious biases or explicit training, can be embarrassed by their use of racial cues when their use is made apparent.

A second problem-focused strategy is the use of formal complaints about unacceptable treatment. Robert complained to a store manager about being followed in a department store.

Robert: And so from that point on they were all over me. I mean, I could tell the people were watching me and that they sensed [I was] shoplifting. If you suspect [that] someone [is] shoplifting you put a salesperson in their face. So from that point on, I had a salesperson all over. I went from not getting any help to way too much. And I felt harassed by that situation – harassed and pissed off I guess. So I ended up calling the store manager over it, and having a discussion with the store manager about my experience.

I: What made you decide to approach the store manager versus leaving or something like that?

Robert: Because I felt if I would have left, my message wouldn't have been heard by anyone. [...] I think I was so incensed by that action, because it rarely happens, and then I was so upset I had to talk. I was so pissed off, she probably thought, "Why is this man mumbling?" Because I was so upset that I really couldn't communicate well. And I wanted to try to – instead of storming out of the store, I wanted to express my concerns to the manager. [...] I'm real good about talking to someone. I usually voice my concerns. Either voice them or write a letter.

I: And what impact do you think that has?

Robert: I think it's an awareness issue. I think that even though their actions might not change, probably the biggest impact is being able to release that feeling from me. And I think it's just an awareness issue. I think that more people need to voice [their] concerns to people who can actually count. The salesperson usually can't make any decisions yea or nay, but I think if you've got some concerns you need to let some people, policy people, know about the concerns – people who set policy, people who train the [employees]. And so I find myself being a stickler for customer service because of all my [negative] experiences from restaurants to retail have usually been with customer service.

Formal complaints emerge primarily as a coping strategy intended to produce some sense of retribution for perceived mistreatment. Unlike the practice of outing, which seeks to expose the discriminatory impact of ostensibly legitimate treatment, formal complaints are responses to interpersonal treatment thought to be explicitly illegitimate. When informants formally complain they presume that their received treatment is inconsistent with company policy. Complaints are frequent responses to interaction-based attributions about marketplace discrimination, where mistreatment occurs at the hands of an identifiable culprit.

Finally, these informants also employ word-of-mouth as a problem-focused coping strategy. In several instances the men reported talking about marketplace discrimination with others as a way of delivering store-specific or broader warnings about the potential for mistreatment.

Steve: I share events with friends, especially if they are going to the same store... It is important to share knowledge so that others don't get burned.

John: I told my mother and my cousin, who was looking for a car, so they wouldn't have the same experience. Don't go to these Honda dealers, because we'll get messed over.

Theo: I tell the young in a teaching manner. I have been taught not to get upset, and so knowing those situations will come up, I try to use my personal experiences to help others.

Irrespective of the causal features of attribution, word-of-mouth is used to relay warnings about egregious behavior, as well as to compare notes about treatment in specific stores. Despite the fact that these men articulated it as a means of preventing future problems for others, it is also quite likely that verbalizing these events with others acts as a social support mechanism.

Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies – An additional means of responding to perceived marketplace discrimination is the use of coping strategies designed to reposition the self cognitively and emotionally in the face of perceived harm. Creating emotional distance acknowledges the persistence of marketplace discrimination, and seeks to protect victims from its harmful psychological consequences. One of the ways that informants created emotional distance is by taking non-confrontational stances that trivialize their experience. For some men, non-confrontation is simply a concession that constant confrontation is impossible or too costly.

Mark: You should take action. [But] I don't take action every time I feel that I should, and I don't react every time I think there's something racial happening. If I was doing something every time I thought something racial was happening, I would be crazy by now... It's a never-ending concern. It's always there, just to different degrees.

Non-confrontation as a coping strategy helps manage doubts about the overall efficacy of confrontation. Confronting perceived discrimination is not without costs in time and energy. It is also risky because of the inherent uncertainty in making discriminatory attributions, but also because the primary form of marketplace discrimination mentioned by these men, profile-based oversurveillance, is rarely overtly intrusive. Thus a public confrontation can seem an overly costly response to what could be a simple annoyance. Non-confrontational coping also emerged as a means for managing the strain of negative expectations contained in popular stereotypes about Black men, conflict and violence.

Scott: We felt that it would be best not to be confrontational because that would just give them an excuse to say, 'See there you go. You Black people just came here causing problems.' That would've just added fuel to the fire. It would have been a much bigger situation that it needed to be. So we just walked around a bit, until we realized that we were being followed. They didn't trust us to be in their stores, so my position has always been I don't want to be where people don't want me, so we just left. I just try to forget the bad experiences.

Walking away and forgetting about the experience is a strategy for minimizing its salience. That is, this strategy is a response to real fears that confronting perceived discrimination can reinforce prevailing stereotypes about hyperaggressive Black males, potentially escalating a minor inconvenience into full-blown conflict. The men are explicitly cognizant of reinforcing stereotypes that portray them as physically intimidating or aggressive, consequently shying away from immediate confrontation.

Bill: I generally try not to get aggressive simply because a lot of people look at me as an intimidating factor

and I don't understand it. People look, "Ah, the big Black guy," you know. Since I know this I always just say, "OK give me what I paid for," and I take off.

Non-confrontation strategies among these men reveal their muted sense of efficacy, both because they are skeptical about the impact of such efforts in the face of widespread (and often legitimized) marketplace discrimination and because confrontation itself can confirm the stereotypes on which discrimination is based. These strategies reposition the men emotionally and cognitively, focusing their efforts on trivializing or ensuring that no further damage is done by marketplace discrimination.

A second emotion-focused coping strategy is internalization. This is a coping strategy whereby the perceived victim of marketplace discrimination bears some or all of the psychological responsibility for being sufficiently prepared to avoid victimization.

Steve: I think often too, because we live in the United States, I think ethnicity comes into play as well. They view me as an African-American. "Ah, but we're not really sure if this is a professional, or possibly a shop-lifter. We really don't know." Again, the style of dress can help that as well. Possibly dressing in shorts and tennis shoes and maybe a baseball cap is a lot more suspicious, whereas if I come in dressed in a nice Polo shirt, expensive pair of jeans – let's say – and shoes, well, "He's probably a customer – just a professional on the weekend looking to shop and spend money." [...] Often times too, even if you are a professional, you come in and you are well dressed, you are still perceived as [a suspected thief].

In this excerpt from the data, Steve, a computer analyst, goes beyond mere acknowledgement of prevailing stereotypes about criminal likelihood and low socioeconomic status to highlighting the role he might play in avoiding marketplace stereotypes. The role of dress in discriminatory treatment appeared in a number of these men's narratives. Casual dress, variously described as "workout clothes" or the "student look", is widely seen as a reinforcement of existing stereotypes about Black criminality and low status. Professional dress, particularly in retail settings, which signals higher income status to salespersons, security staff, and fellow shoppers, also signals likelihood of purchase. This can offset the impact of stereotyped associations by visually disconfirming them, though admittedly only partially. Steve also recounted a story of purchasing an expensive bottle of perfume where he felt the salesperson assumed that he could not afford the product, and subsequently directed him toward a less expensive alternative.

Steve: And at the time we told the saleswoman what we wanted... she said, "Joy? You mean an ounce? Well, we have these lower costing brands over here." We said, "No, we want the Joy." She says, "Well, that costs \$150 per ounce." We said, "Yes, we know that." And you could see right then and there that she automatically perceived that we didn't have the money to purchase the item.

I: How did that make you feel?

Steve: Uh, well it wasn't so much uncomfortable as surprising. What made me feel good is that I had the money. That was the best feeling – that I had the money to buy it. I had the credit card there. I could go with cash or with credit card. That was the great feeling.

In this excerpt Steve mentions his satisfaction at carrying two forms of money (cash and credit) sufficient to pay for his purchase. He is satisfied at having been prepared, despite being caught off guard with the service provider's presumptions about his ability to pay. He subsequently recounted an earlier incident where his personal check was refused despite the absence of any posted policy, prompting him to carry multiple forms of payment. These internalization coping strategies provide informants with a sense of control over marketplace discrimination. That is, since informants cannot with accuracy predict when and where marketplace discrimination will occur, they internalize their own responsibility for preparedness. Armed with the presumed certainty that they will be discriminated against, they nonetheless seek to lower its likelihood through their visual presentation and their ability to adapt to changing conditions.

DISCUSSION

The findings presented here suggest that the Black men in this sample regularly perceive encounters with marketplace discrimination, and accept such treatment as an inevitable aspect of their marketing-related experiences. Further, this exploratory research suggests that discriminatory acts are perceived primarily in the form of narratives that highlight the causal roles of stereotype-driven racial profiling or racially biased interpersonal interactions with store personnel. That the relatively high status men in this sample primarily recall marketplace interactions that called their status into question suggests these types of incidents are either the most frequent, and/or the most salient to the respondents. However, this does not necessarily imply that a systematic sample of African American men might not yield data revealing quite different perceptions about marketplace discrimination. Nonetheless, the data presented here does provide insight into the phenomenological structuring of marketplace discrimination. First, the implied racial meaning, articulated across consumption contexts, of marketplace discrimination is one of perceived consumer inferiority (e.g. “not having enough money to buy”, “a shoplifter”, “a threat”) rather than out-group racial hostility. Informants saw their treatment as fundamentally grounded in stereotypes about Black men, driven by mass media. They interpreted profile-driven oversurveillance (e.g. being tailed as a potential security risk) as the foreseeable consequence of widely known and accepted stereotypes about Black males, crime and status. Second, they see status oriented consumption as key to combating stereotypes about their presumed low status. Yet the strongly held cognitive associations between Blacks, crime, and low status often manifest themselves in policies and interactions that reduce the effectiveness of these efforts. Stated another way, presumptions about their ability to pay and criminal likelihood, even while shopping in professional dress, suggest the extent to which status signaling efforts can simply be read racially, i.e. in a manner consistent with prevailing stereotypes. Consequently, these men experience marketplace discrimination as both frustrating and ironic despite their general sense that it is not at root hostile. Third, consistent with attributional ambiguity and person/group discrimination discrepancy perspectives, these men make discriminatory attributions in ways that suggest their primary function to be self-protective.

This data reveals a primary reliance on problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies in the face of perceived marketplace discrimination. These coping strategies place less emphasis on high level or collective change efforts such as changing the stressor, but focus instead on localizing the perceived problem, seeking localized retribution, and managing psychological or emotional discomfort. The widespread awareness of negative stereotypes regarding Black men and violence appear to serve as internalized constraints on the informants’ emotional and behavioral responses, as they express deep concern about perpetuating existing stereotypes in conflict. Prior coping research notes that the coping strategies used in an encounter depend on whether the encounter is viewed as amenable to change (Folkman and Lazarus 1988). Thus, the sheer perceived prevalence of such situations, and/or beliefs regarding the “permanence of racism” (e.g. Hutchinson 1994; Bell 1992) may serve to create some level of acceptance of these incidents. As a result of this acceptance, these men quite explicitly favor emotion-focused strategies that are non-confrontational.

In summary, these findings reveal the range of strategies consumers invoke to cope with marketplace discrimination. More specifically, since mass media and popular culture frequently portray African American men as “menaces to society” (c.f. Hoberman 1997; Hutchinson 1994; Entman 1992) much of their coping effort can be usefully described as a set of responses to differential treatment in the marketplace driven by this imagery.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The central question underlying this research is, how is discrimination perceived and responded to? The theoretical discussion of racial discrimination as a marketplace stressor, activated by a self-protective, attributional process, highlights how racial inequality and its accompanying social-psychology creates conditions amenable to treating Black consumers differently than other consumers. Results of the investigation of Black men’s coping

strategies imply that Black men are subject to discrimination that hinders their ability to gain fair exchange for their dollar, at minimum by adding to emotional and psychological costs. Further, stereotypes about Black men and Blacks generally have direct implications for their use of traditional consumption markers to counter broader perceptions of low status. While these results are not intended as an attempt to quantify the extent to which Black men face marketplace discrimination, the present research supports the notion that they perceive that the phenomena is widespread despite exercising a good deal of caution in making such attributions. Consequently, these men leave many of their marketplace interactions less than satisfied. As one informant noted, "It's a lot more work to get the same attention."

The data also suggest that Black men alter their behavior (e.g. dress differently to go shopping) to lower the likelihood of marketplace discrimination. Their behavior begs the question of the effectiveness of such responses. It is possible that coping strategies function to actually reduce the impact of discriminatory treatment, or alternatively, constitute a short-term adjustment to such treatment, allowing its cumulative effects to support and reinforce economic disadvantage, psychological and physiological stress. Research previously cited in this paper has claimed that active or confrontational strategies are superior with respect to reducing stress-based outcomes. However, based on this data, we speculate that problem-focused strategies do not appear inherently more adaptive than emotion-focused strategies. For example, emotion-focused strategies like non-confrontation may actually limit potentially negative stress outcomes that might emerge from confrontations with police or other authorities more effectively than direct confrontation of perceived mistreatment. Additionally, the experiences of these Black men of disproportionately high income and occupational status suggest their own belief in the market's efficacy in lowering racial status distinctions. Yet the ability of status oriented consumption to hide or even blur distinctions must be called into question. These men's experiences indicate the ease with which status markers are easily ignored or simply incorporated into existing racial narratives.

These findings suggest that marketers, policy-makers, and all those concerned with socially constructed inequalities in the marketplace should be alert to larger social forces that transfer racial meaning to marketplace contexts. Recent work on stereotypes in multiple and multi-racial metropolitan areas demonstrates that across all races racial stereotypes appear to adhere to a specific racial ordering that places Whites on the perceptual "top" and Blacks on the perceptual "bottom", rather than mere in-group favoritism/out-group hostility (Bobo and Massagali 2001). Entman (1992) notes that scholars have barely begun to develop the tools needed to understand the impact of corresponding media images of Blacks – in news reports, television entertainment, movies, TV coverage of sports events, popular music, or even printed fiction – on White attitudes and Black self-esteem. However, his study of local TV found frequent use of images that cast Blacks as disproportionately threatening or demanding. Thus, concerned parties might monitor and facilitate correction of media images of Blacks, particularly Black males, as unduly threatening and damaging. And indeed, recent research has noted that African American images in the mass media, particularly in advertising, have improved (e.g. Stevenson and Swayne 1999; Elliott 1995). However, as Andreasen (1993) and Bristor, Lee and Hunt (1995) note, solutions to this dilemma cannot be limited to regulatory intervention. The support of the proactive use of positive imagery can also serve to hinder the impact of profile-based marketplace discrimination on Black consumers.

Similarly, marketers should be aware of customer sensitivity to surveillance techniques and assumptions of wrongdoing by merchants and service providers (Lee 2002; Dertke, Penner, and Ulrich 1974). At the individual customer-clerk interaction level sensitivity training may be necessary, with role playing as a vital ingredient (Brigham and Richardson 1979). Also, at the marketing policy level, even simple claims of a firm's commitment to anti-discrimination prior to publicized incidents can lower the level of "stereotype threat" (see Steele 1999; Steele and Aronson 1995) faced by customers before even entering the store. For researchers, this study provides an initial exploration of the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and Black consumer responses. The utilization of qualitative data analysis techniques facilitated an examination of the lived experiences of Black men in marketing contexts.

Additional research may look towards further explicating and explaining these relationships. Consumer researchers can provide theoretical and applied insights into profile and interaction driven marketplace discrimination.

Finally, African American males represent a significant portion of American society with consumption needs and material acquisition experiences of which little is known. This research begins to address this void. However, this research also highlights other related and intriguing research possibilities. Some have argued that the presence of disproportionate numbers of Black males involved in deviant behavior gives vendors an incentive to spread their risk across the entire category of Black males. Understanding the frequency and intensity of this approach through descriptive and explanatory research should prove fruitful. For instance, given the legitimacy of security concerns, future research might examine how consumers interpret the fairness of commonly employed security measures, like surveillance, and how those interpretations might vary with the race of the shopper. Future research might also explore other racially and ethnically stratified settings across cultures (e.g. South Africa, the Middle East). Further, while engagement in broader collective action (boycotts, demonstrations, etc.) in the face of perceived marketplace discrimination was absent among these men, it remains an important response. Additionally, Bristor and Fischer (1995) have argued that in order to inform public policy on marketing issues, researchers must think systematically about the way racial discrimination interacts with sexual discrimination. To this end, an investigation across different genders would also shed light on perceived discrimination and coping. In closing, we propose that perceived marketplace discrimination remains a salient and stressful feature of the lived experiences of this sample of Black men, and a persistent social problem that has been much underresearched. This analysis of their understanding of marketplace discrimination and subsequent coping responses addresses this void.

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