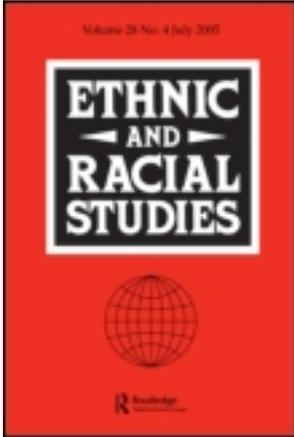


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Ethnic and Racial Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rers20>

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Available online: 01 Aug 2011

To cite this article: Crystal M. Fleming, Michèle Lamont & Jessica S. Welburn (2012): African Americans respond to stigmatization: the meanings and salience of confronting, deflecting conflict, educating the ignorant and 'managing the self', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35:3, 400-417

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.589527>

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African Americans respond to stigmatization: the meanings and salience of confronting, deflecting conflict, educating the ignorant and ‘managing the self’

Crystal M. Fleming, Michèle Lamont and Jessica S. Welburn

(*First submission June 2010; First published July 2011*)

Abstract

Drawing on interviews with 150 randomly sampled African Americans, we analyse how members of a stigmatized group understand their experience of stigmatization and assess appropriate responses when asked about the *best approach* to deal with stigmatization and about responses to specific incidents. Combining in-depth interviews with a systematic coding of the data, we make original contributions to the previous literature by identifying the relative salience of modalities and tools for responding. We also examine closely through qualitative data the two most salient modalities of response, ‘confronting’ and ‘deflating’ conflict, the most salient tools, teaching out-group members about African Americans, and ‘the management of the self’, a rationale for deflating conflict that is largely overlooked in previous studies. We find that ‘confronting’ is the more popular modality for responding to stigmatization among African Americans.

Keywords: African Americans; stigma; identity; boundaries; racial discrimination; anti-racism.

Introduction

Goffman (1963) identified the myriad ways people with ‘discrediting’ attributes manage their spoiled identities. While sociologists and social psychologists have analysed how members of stigmatized ethno-racial

groups manage their stigma, we have yet to develop a systematic survey of the range of strategies that people use, of their relative salience, and of the conditions that elicit some strategies over others. Potential strategies include explicitly confronting stereotypes and prejudices; avoiding conflict by moulding one's self-presentation so as to prevent discomfort in others; offering concrete proof of equality (e.g. through competence or the display of expensive consumer goods); and asserting cultural membership, feelings of self-worth and even superiority over dominant groups. This paper draws on interviews with 150 randomly sampled middle- and working-class African Americans living in the New York suburbs to inform our knowledge of responses to stigmatization. This is crucial given the USA's continued history of racial discrimination. While some celebrated America's colour-blindness and post-racialism after the Obama elections, as survey data and our interviews suggest, African Americans continue to perceive pervasive racism, and to anticipate and respond to stereotyping and discrimination. This emotional work is a crucial part of their daily experience and has a direct impact on racial disparities in health and well-being (Williams, Neighbors and Jackson 2008; Lamont 2009).

Everyday responses to stigmatization are defined as the rhetorical and strategic tools deployed by individual members of stigmatized groups in reaction to perceived stigmatization (including exclusion, misrecognition, racism and discrimination). Psychologists have given consideration to the intra-psychological mechanisms through which members of stigmatized groups cope with perceived stigma (e.g. Crocker, Major and Steele 1998; Clark et al. 1999; Pinel 1999; Oyserman and Swim 2001; for a review of the literature on stigma, see Link and Phelan 2000). They do so by improving subjective well-being through goal attainment and self-enhancement (Oyserman, Coon and Kimmelmeier 2002). Because social psychologists draw on experiments, they bypass a wide range of responses to stigma that inductive analysis reveals. And in contrast to our approach, they do not put meaning-making at the front and centre of their analysis in their concern for in-group and out-group biases (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

Social scientists have documented several aspects of African American anti-racism:¹ oppositional consciousness and anti-racist social movements (e.g. McAdam 1988); everyday struggles and talk (Frederick 2003; Harris-Lacewell 2004); and responses to racism – e.g. how middle-class blacks find allies, downplay differences and denounce abuse (most importantly, Feagin 1991; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Anderson 1999; Lacy 2007). Moreover, research that does not concern everyday anti-racism – for instance, studies of why and how African Americans invest in education (Warikoo and Carter 2009), engage in high culture (Banks 2009), understand mobility (Young 2004), conceptualize racial differences (Morning 2009) and demarcate themselves from 'ghetto blacks'

(Pattillo-McCoy 1999) – informs our understanding of responses to stigmatization. In addition, Lamont and her co-authors have studied how stigmatized groups go about gaining recognition, considering (1) how elite African Americans use religion and competence (Lamont and Fleming 2005), (2) how black marketing specialists use consumption (Lamont and Molnár 2002), (3) how minority workers in France and the USA use a wider range of types of evidence of racial equality than white workers (Lamont 2000; Lamont and Aksartova 2002), and (4) how North African blue-collar workers in France multiply strategies to establish their similarity and cultural compatibility with the French (Lamont, Morning and Mooney 2002). We build on these studies to broaden our theoretical and empirical understanding of responses to stigma.

Our empirical contribution consists in providing detailed knowledge about responses to stigmatization based on a systematically collected and coded data set of interviews with African Americans. These data make it possible to identify the range and relative salience of responses to stigmatization found in this population. We also focus on ‘best approaches’ for dealing with racism, as well as on more subtle responses (i.e. ‘managing the self’) that have not been considered in previous research.²

After describing methods, we open with a description of African Americans experiencing stigma. Then we provide a snapshot of modalities and tools that African Americans say they mobilize to respond to racism and identify their relative salience. We examine closely the two most salient modalities of response, ‘confronting’ and ‘deflating’ conflict, and show that the former is more popular than the latter. Then, we examine the most salient tools, teaching out-group members about African Americans and ‘the management of the self’, a rationale for deflecting conflict that has been by and large overlooked in the literature.

Methods

We draw on open-ended two-hour interviews with 150 working- and middle-class men and women living in the New York suburbs, in towns such as Patterson, Irvington, South Plainfield and South Orange in New Jersey.³ The New York metropolitan area presents a full spectrum of social classes for both majority and minority groups.⁴ Our sample is composed of only native-born individuals and individuals who have been residents of the area for at least five years. It excludes first- and second-generation children of immigrants. A table of respondent characteristics (by occupation, age, gender and class) is available in the appendix, as is information about their recruitment.

We conducted interviews with a relatively large number of respondents (by the standards of qualitative methods), with the goals of uncovering the full range of existing response (which is achieved by interviewing until reaching saturation) and systematically comparing anti-racist strategies across populations. Respondents were interviewed by an African American male or female. Interviews were transcribed and systematically coded by a team of seven trained research assistants with the help of the content-analysis software ATLAS.ti. This software enables us to capture broad patterns in the data, following Miles and Huberman (1994).⁵ These patterns add specificity to our understanding of gender and class variations based on a systematically collected corpus of interviews with African Americans.

We documented responses to stigmatization by asking interviewees about the ideal or 'best approach' for dealing with racism, independently of context, their responses to specific racist incidents, the lessons they teach their children about how to deal with racism, their views on the best tools their group has at its disposal to improve their situation, and their reactions to a list of specific strategies. This paper considers responses to probes about what respondents felt was the 'best approach' to deal with racism as well as descriptions of responses to specific racist incidents. We focus on selected elements from a thematic analysis of the data.

Experiencing stigma: defilement of the self

Respondents perceive racism to be the main problem that African Americans confront (Hirsch and Jack 2010). In line with the literature pointing to a turn from blatant to subtle forms of racism (Kinder and Sears 1981; Bobo, Kluegel and Smith 1997), few report having experienced blatant racism. When probed on past encounters with racism, they also routinely refer to incidents that led them to feel a 'defilement of the self' – to perceive themselves to be over-scrutinized, overlooked, underappreciated, misunderstood and disrespected – in short, defined negatively and/or disadvantageously (also Feagin and Sikes 1994). They convey the pain and anger associated with being excluded or treated unfairly, which contrasts with feelings associated with being inside a boundary (warmth, familiarity, intimacy, 'witness'). These narratives of interiority (Archer 2003), in turn, often draw on widely available cultural repertoires of morality (Hitlin and Vaisey 2010) having to do with fairness, dignity, rights and other similar themes, against a backdrop of heightened awareness of the pervasiveness and illegitimacy of American racism.

An African American lawyer provides a vivid account of experiencing stigma when he describes that he found himself in an elevator with a white woman who, like him, works at the court: ‘She clutches her purse. I almost fainted. I almost fainted . . . It devastated me. But it’s happened to brothers before. Welcome to the black race, brother. You’ve got it. I’ve got it.’ This lawyer interprets the woman’s behaviour as questioning his trustworthiness because he is black, and this, despite their similar professional status. Similarly, a recreation specialist also describes an ‘elevator episode’ in which he finds himself alone with several white men he does not know:

One [of them] made a joke about Blacks and monkeys. I said, ‘Man, listen, I ain’t into jokes.’ . . . His demeanor changed, my demeanor changed. All of the positive energy that was in there was being sucked out because the racial part. And the other guys, you could actually see them shrinking up in the corner because they didn’t want no parts of it . . . [I told myself] get out of it because if I stay in it, I’m going to be in that circle and [won’t be able to] get out . . . The stress level rose. My tolerance was getting thin, my blood pressure peaking and my temper rising. By the grace of God, thank you Jesus, as I stepped off the elevator, there was a black minister walking past. I said, ‘Can I speak to you for a minute because I just encountered something that I got to talk about because I’m this far [to exploding]. . . .’ I had been at the job for a week. This is all I need to get me fired. He said, ‘You’re a better man than me.’ [Now] I’m trying to get through the affair [to decide] if I was to go to the city.

Experiencing stigma has several dimensions as illustrated by the quotes below. Respondents highlight various aspects of this experience, including being over-scrutinized, misunderstood and disrespected.

Over-scrutinized

Middle-class and working-class respondents complain that their supervisors keep a closer eye on them than on their white coworkers – for instance, to make sure that they deliver their work or punch in on time. Such double standards are perceived as both defiling and discriminatory. In one instance, a supervisor insists that Kathy, a waitress, gets rid of her braids, although she wears a net over them. She balks: ‘How differently would I have been treated if [my hair] was teased high?’ She experiences the criticisms as an assault on her dignity because ‘my hair is my hair’. Upon the advice of her pastor she decides

to 'confront' by going to the union and getting a settlement over her right to wear her hair as she wishes.

Misunderstood

Interviewees describe episodes where their interpretation of situations clashed with those of their coworkers – as when a tall and strong African American man jokes with his white female supervisor, while she interprets his behaviour as a threat. Not having one's interpretation of reality validated and corroborated is a particularly painful aspect of stigma, as it can lead to isolation and self-doubt. One respondent explains that he often feels misunderstood at work: '[It's] all the time. I can't even say nothing in a meeting without being misunderstood ... They don't share [my] philosophy, my tastes. ... anything about me. They look at me like I got two heads.' He connects these experiences to pervasive American racism without hesitation.

Disrespected

Unfair treatment in the workplace is compounded by status hierarchies in which blacks often experience being on the lowest rungs of the ladder. For instance, describing the pecking order at her school, Betsy, a teacher explains: 'You can walk into a teachers' room with a white male. If you say "Good morning!", he gets the "good morning" first.' Also pointing to disrespect, an insurance salesman describes a white union employee who delays looking into formal complaints from black workers: 'She always tries to dismiss things. It's just that holier than thou, dismissive attitude, that condescending tone that they take.'

Modalities for responding to stigma: confronting and deflating conflict

When probed about the 'best approach' for dealing with racism (using an open-ended format), three-quarters of the 110 African Americans who answered this question focus on how to respond (what we call 'modalities' of responses) and almost half of them (47 per cent) favour challenging racism and discrimination. They prefer to 'name the problem', 'openly discuss the situation' and 'make others aware that their action makes me uncomfortable'. This compares to just over a third (36 per cent) who prefer conflict-deflecting strategies – believing that it is best to ignore, accept, forgive, tolerate, manage anger or walk away.⁶ The rest favour a mixed strategy – to 'pick my battles'.⁷

When asked what they mean by 'confronting racism', our respondents explain that they feel compelled to speak out when something 'unfair' is happening. This position is illustrated by a prison instructor. When asked how we should deal with racism he responds:

Confront it. 'Cuz people will try to tell you that it doesn't exist and it does exist ... Confront it. Not in a negative way, but just bring it up, discuss it. White folks will try to act like it doesn't exist and then they'll try to reverse it on you, to where, 'You're being a racist.' No, no, no!

Similarly, a city council woman explains that:

... the best way to deal with racism is to confront it, to sit down and have honest conversations about it ... to learn how to coexist. I don't expect [to have] an automatic love fest. You're trying to dispel years and years and years of junk.

And for an educator, 'To deal with racism, you have to open up lines of communication so that you can make it a mitigating factor ... Communication is key but [racism] needs to be dealt with.'

In responses to probes concerning how interviewees had dealt with a racist incident they had experienced in the past, 32 per cent of the 150 respondents refer to confrontation (e.g. speaking out, using violence, insulting, suing, lodging a formal complaint, intimidating).⁸ However, 27 per cent of these responses point to conflict deflation – observing, adopting strategic silence, walking away and ignoring. Smaller numbers refer to a range of other less salient responses, including the absence of reaction due to shock, surprise or other circumstances.

Those who favour deflecting conflict as an ideal response often explain why they prefer to walk away in order to 'manage their self' or their emotional energy. For instance, this talent agent does not like confronting:

Racism ... you just know it's there, and decide if you want to challenge it. Nine out of ten, I don't... Why waste my time? ... Don't spend a lot of time on the negative things. Just move on ... I used to find myself getting more frustrated trying to get even ... to change somebody's mind. Let it go!

A city employee has a similar perspective:

Never will I fight because of racism ... It's just not an honorable thing ... It's not who I am, and I won't accomplish anything by it. You say what you have to say and I say what I have to say, and that's it. I don't raise my voice, I don't argue. It's not a debate.

In many cases, deflecting conflict is explained not by a desire to 'defer' but by alternative priorities: finding comfort, saving emotional energy,

avoiding aggravation, anger and violence, and focusing on professional and other goals. Others 'manage the self' to avoid confirming stereotypes about 'angry blacks'. Yet other 'conflict deflectors' want to avoid confrontation because they do not trust non-blacks or are pessimistic about improving the situation. Mixing explanations, a teacher for instance states plainly: 'Why waste my time; I just don't give them the chance to make me angry.'

Tools for gaining recognition: education and management of the self

When questioned about 'the best way to respond to racism', two-thirds of our interviewees (65 per cent) focus not on modality but on what they consider the 'best tools', which include religion, integration, 'dressing up' (one respondent mentioned wearing Gucci when shopping to avoid police profiling), sarcasm and joking to prevent escalation, and 'getting used to it'. For about a third (37 per cent), the best tool is 'teaching the ignorant', this being the most popular strategy.⁹ Below we examine this anti-racist tool, along with 'managing the self'. While the first one is concerned primarily with managing perception or the external self (or social categorization), the second one is also oriented toward the management of the internal self (including self-identification; see Jenkins 1996; Cornell and Hartman 1997).

Teaching the ignorant

Interviews are replete with statements about the need to educate non-blacks about African Americans and their culture and history. Respondents believe they can gain recognition by challenging stereotypes and diffusing a more complex and detailed portrait of black people. This is illustrated by a female minister who believes that racism is passed on from generation to generation. She emphasizes the importance of taking time to explain the history of blacks to other Americans so that they can move beyond a 'majority/minority framework'. Expressing her desire for greater social inclusion, she states that she would like to 'Stomp [racism] in the ground ... we really need to stop the "them/us" mentality and develop a "we" mentality, [explain] that the race is human.'

African American respondents are particularly aggravated by white ignorance about blacks. Turning a familiar stereotype about African Americans on its head, one explains: 'I feel sorry for you. Pick up a book and read. Understand my history as well as I understand yours.' Suburban whites are often singled out for their ignorance and for being out of touch and isolated from the 'real world'. For instance, one insurance salesman says of someone who grew up in the white suburb of Westfield: 'You really need to go out here and experience life. Get

out the four walls that you're accustomed to and go outside that box and deal with people in a different light.' Lack of awareness of class diversity among blacks is a particular concern (also Lacy 2007). As an entrepreneur puts it, speaking about whites:

[They think] there are some good blacks and there's bad blacks. 'You're one of the good ones, Darren.' I've even had people interview me, 'Is there anyone else kind of like yourself?' What does that mean? I got a thousand people like me. All of my friends are like me. We've all been to college. We all drive nice cars if we've been working and got a little money.

Respondents tell us that teaching non-blacks about blacks is a daunting challenge, and not one that should not be pursued at any price: it has to be balanced against other considerations, including that of 'managing the self'.

Managing the self

While 'informal teaching' aims to challenge how the out-group views the in-group, the management of the self has to do with (1) projecting an image of oneself that is positive or conform to out-group norms, so as to gain recognition, and (2) self-protection and the development of various aspects of identity.¹⁰

Our respondents explain that managing the self is essential in order to avoid confirming racial stereotypes or being perceived as incarnating them – stereotypes like that of the 'angry blacks' for instance. This is a challenge because stigmatization often triggers indignation. An educator who works in a white environment explains how he changed in response to feedback he received:

I was told 'We're looking for someone who is not confrontational . . . Our family backgrounds, similar upbringings, mean we deal from that viewpoint.' . . . I'm modifying my behavior. I'm Bo-Jangling and tap dancing, more smiling . . . You want to be liked, so that you'll debunk the stereotype that they inevitably have of you being hostile . . . You smile, because, you find yourself not having the economic roots to be in a position to say, 'You know what, I don't need this, and I can be free to say what I want' . . . You say, 'OK, well, I'll keep that in mind. I won't send any more [angry] emails.

Similarly, many describe having to learn to contain emotions (especially in response to feelings of injustice) and maintain control ('thinking about my upbringing', 'not being a jerk') in work settings. One explains the need to contain his anger when a waitress attended to whites who

walked in a restaurant after him: 'I said [to myself]: diffuse this because I don't want to go to where she's at, because it would get out of control ... I'm not going to make an idiot out of myself, but I make sure that I'm treated fairly.' Similarly, upon learning that one of his coworkers thought he was not qualified for a job, a technician explains that he resisted getting angry and instead '[tried] to learn these lessons. Instead of reacting, I like to do my own thing. I talked to some people [to figure out how to get promoted].' The opposite response is exemplified by an African American construction worker who was the only person to be written up because he did not wear the standard hat: 'I exploded. Honestly, yes, I exploded. There was a lot of foul language being used and things of that nature. Nothing as far as physical violence though.'

Against a background of pervasive racism, some believe it is essential to 'manage the self' in all interactions with non-blacks whom they don't trust. This is to avoid being 'trampled over'. In the words of an insurance salesman, this requires vigilance: '[At work] if you show a sign of weakness, they are going to keep on doing "it". When you're strong and you exude that confidence, it's hard for them ... They look for you to be unsure of yourself.'

The management of the self may also require pragmatic 'role distance': dealing with each situation without investing one's ego, as explained by a managing partner in a law firm who describes how his white clients turn to his white subordinates for solutions, instead of to him:

The bodies shift, the questions. Hey. I'm not here to change their minds, to disagree with them, give them a social agenda, or try to bring them to a certain level of consciousness. [I think] 'What I need you to do is agree with whatever they say. And let them know that you're going to have your guy work on [it]. And I'm going to be your guy, for this meeting.' Because he's going to feel more comfortable, knowing this.

The professional role of this manager gives him a way out through competence and service delivery. But it is not without a cost:

There are so many [instances], I look at [my clients] and [feel like saying], 'Listen, how dare you?' For people like me, who are in finance or something like that, numbers are numbers. You can hide behind them as long as people don't see you. When they see you, it's like, 'Was it you I was trusting?'

Such management of self requires a great deal of self-control and is an added source of stress that contributes to racial disparities in health (Williams, Neighbors and Jackson 2008).

‘Managing the self’ may also mean performing emotional work aimed at making professional identity more salient than racial identity at work. This effort can also be taxing, as described by an entertainer:

There have been times in my past employment, when you’re working together with people [of different race]. I always try to make them understand . . . It’s not all about race all the time. It’s about working together no matter who you are. That’s where I’m at . . . In the 60s, it was a little different, everything was ‘Black Power!’ That was the time for it.

This interviewee exemplifies that ‘managing the self’ can be spurred by motivations other than a need for destigmatization. It can also be driven by a desire to develop working relationships with a range of people. Lamont, Fleming and Welburn (2011a) explore other motivations described by respondents, such as a wish to construct an identity that is not primarily defined by race, a concern with the preservation of energy and psychological resources through lowering stress and refusing to be baited, and a will to enjoy the rewards of professional success while forgetting racial struggles.

Conclusion

This paper moves beyond the social psychological literature on coping with racism and the sociological literature on responses to racism by documenting the relative salience of modalities and tools for responding to stigmatization, with a focus on ‘best approaches’. We found that African Americans are somewhat more likely to favour ‘confronting’ racism over ‘deflating conflicts’ as a modality for responding to racism, and that ‘teaching the ignorant’ is the most valued tool. We found that deflating conflict is often motivated by a concern for ‘managing the self’, which takes a range of meanings.

A better understanding of the daily management of inter- and intra-group relations is essential if we are to fully comprehend the mechanisms behind the making and unmaking of group boundaries (Todd 2004; Lamont and Bail 2005; Wimmer 2008). One cannot understand the process of ethno-racial identity formation without considering the dialogue members of stigmatized groups carry out (privately or publicly) with the dominant meanings associated with their group. Responses to stigma can weaken symbolic boundaries between groups (by downplaying differences), but they may also result in their greater rigidity (when group membership is affirmed and defined in opposition to that of out-groups). This in turn can affect social boundaries (residential segregation, intermarriage and access to a range of resources).

Responses to stigmatization are enabled by the cultural repertoires provided to African Americans as well as by their remote and proximate

circumstances (Lamont 2000). Indeed, Lamont et al. (2011a) show how responses are fed by collective myths and memories about national identity (including the American dream and the civil rights movements); by repertoires about matrixes of human worth favoured by neo-liberalism that emphasize competition, consumption, individualization and personal achievement; and by repertoires tied to the shared history and identity of the African Americans as resilient and moral people. How the individual defines the situation – what one thinks is possible or doable in a specific situation – and what one values also shapes how the individual ‘copes’ (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004).

Many questions remain – unanswered questions that can be systematically addressed with our data (see Lamont et al. 2001b). Are women more likely to confront racism than men, given that black men are more readily associated with violence and aggression? Are working-class individuals less likely to confront than middle-class individuals, given their greater vulnerability in the labour market? How do responses to racism vary with past experiences with discrimination? Are individuals who have frequent encounters with discrimination more prone to ‘manage the self’ and avoid costly direct confrontation? Whereas Hochschild (1979) connects emotion rules to institutions and mode of production, we also need to explore more closely the impact of context on responses, including definitions of the situation, and compare our results with the literature. For instance, how are responses affected by the nature of incident (e.g. assault on dignity, discrimination in the workplace, violence), the context in which it occurs (at work, in restaurants, in search for employment or housing, while interacting with police officers, etc.), and whether individuals live in a

Table 1 *Sample characteristics*

Occupation of respondents	Male	Female	Total
<i>Middle class</i>			
Executive, admin and managerial	11	7	18
Professional and technical	16	31	47
Sales	4	1	5
Other	2	2	4
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>Working class</i>			
Admin support (including clerical)	6	11	17
Precision occupations, crafts and repair	10	0	10
Sales	0	3	3
Service occupations	18	16	34
Labourers	3	0	3
Other	7	2	9
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>76</i>
Total	77	73	150

predominantly white, black or mixed environment. Finally, more conceptual work is needed to make explicit how a cultural sociology approach to responses to stigmatization differs from and complements social psychological approaches to coping.

Experiencing stigmatization has been shown to cause feelings of worthlessness that affects health and well-being (Williams, Neighbors and Jackson 2008). However, social scientists have not fully considered how *responses* to these experiences can moderate this impact – shaping how the ‘wear and tear’ of inequality gets under the skin and become ‘embodied’ (Hertzman and Boyce 2010). This question will motivate our future agenda (see Hall and Lamont 2009).

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the National Science Foundation (grant # SES-0701542). We thank Steven K. Brown for his assistance with statistical analysis and Travis Clough for his technical assistance. This paper has benefitted from comments from Stanley Bailey, Christopher Bail, Karyn Lacy, Nissim Mizrahi, Hilary Silver, David Williams, Andreas Wimmer and two anonymous reviewers.

Notes

1. Inspired by Essed (1991), we define ‘everyday anti-racism’ as the rhetoric and strategic resources deployed by individual members of stigmatized groups to rebut the notion of their inferiority in the course of their daily life (also Lamont and Fleming 2005). This expands on Aptheker’s (1992) definition of anti-racism as rhetoric aimed at disproving racial inferiority. Studies on white anti-racism have developed rapidly in recent years (O’Brien 2007; Warren 2010), unlike studies of black anti-racism, which mostly pertains to the black middle class.
2. Feagin (1991; also Feagin and Sikes 1994) concerns accounts of racism in public places by middle-class African Americans. He provides evidence pertaining to emotional responses (especially anger) but does not examine the management of emotions (and the self) in a sustained way. The main argument is that blacks no longer simply ‘defer’ to whites and have coping strategies that range from confrontation to withdrawal. This research does not document the full range of responses, their frequency or salience, and ideal responses. Moreover, it does not examine in detail intermediate strategies such as accommodation in which blacks contain/manage their emotions and/or their appearance in order to respond to and/or avoid racism.
3. While the first group is composed of college-educated entrepreneurs, professionals and managers (with at least a two-year degree), the second group is composed of high school graduates or general education degree (GED) holders with stable employment as blue-collar workers or low-status white-collar workers.
4. Logan and Deane (2003) compare African Americans living in the New York area and their national counterparts.
5. We do not claim that our data are nationally representative.
6. Conflict-deflaters may under-report their responses compared to confronters. We consider narratives of responses – what respondents believe and remember – and not responses themselves.
7. Space constraints prevent a discussion of mixed-strategies adopters.

8. We coded 642 responses to this question. Respondents were free to mention as many instances as they wished.
9. Other tools were mentioned by only a few respondents and thus not reported here.
10. Goffman (1959) on 'presentation of self' is crucial to analyse how African Americans manage stigma. Picca and Feagin (2007) and Eliasoph (1999) wrote about front-stage and backstage performance among whites in interracial relationships, but treatments of the management of self among blacks are few.

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Methodological appendix*Site selection*

Interviews were conducted with African Americans living in northern New Jersey. This region was chosen as a research site for four reasons. As part of the New York Statistical Metropolitan Area (SMA), northern New Jersey has historically had one of the largest African American populations in the northeast. In addition, this area of the country was one of the most popular for African Americans during the first wave of the Great Migration, which is significant because of this study's focus on native-born blacks. The northeast, particularly the New York SMA, continued to draw large numbers of African Americans during the second wave of the Great Migration. Second, northern New Jersey is ideal because African Americans reside in communities with varying levels of racial residential segregation. For example, while African Americans in communities such as Newark experience levels of residential segregation and isolation on a par with African Americans living in highly segregated cities, African Americans living in other communities are relatively less segregated. Therefore, because of this study's focus on experiences with racial discrimination and the negotiation of racial boundaries, northern New Jersey provides the opportunity to draw respondents from varying communities.

Sampling

Respondents were recruited using two primary techniques. First, we employed a survey research company to recruit participants. The company used census track and marketing data to identify potential participants and mailed letters to randomly sampled African Americans living in northern New Jersey. Potential participants received follow-up phone calls from the company to encourage participation and confirm their eligibility for the study. Second, in order to increase our sample size, we employed snowball sampling techniques.

In order to reduce the level of endogeneity in our sample, we used no more than three referrals per participant. This method was particularly fruitful for recruiting working-class respondents and men, who were less likely to respond to requests from our survey

research company. Respondents were paid \$20 for their participation. Each interview was conducted in a location of the respondent's choosing and was confidential and recorded on a rechargeable digital tape-recorder with the interviewee's consent.