

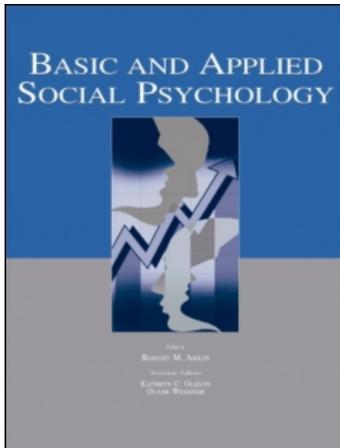
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Making the Best of a Bad Situation: Proactive Coping with Racial Discrimination

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Proactive coping with racial discrimination takes three forms: self-focused coping, situation-focused coping, and avoidance. Overall, African Americans used self-focused coping more than situation-focused coping or physical avoidance, though there were interesting differences between retrospective recall of racial discrimination and daily reports. Relative to reports during the diary week, when recalling how they typically dealt with racial discrimination, African Americans overestimated their use of situation-focused strategies and underestimated their use of self-focused strategies. For both retrospective and daily reports, proactive coping was positively related to primary appraisals of harm but unrelated to secondary appraisals of resources. African American identification, but not stigma consciousness or optimism, was uniquely associated with proactive coping. We discuss the potential benefits and limitations of proactive coping with racial discrimination.

It's the added weight that many minorities, especially African-Americans, so often describe in their daily round—the feeling that as a group we have no store of goodwill in America's accounts, that as individuals we must prove ourselves anew each day, that we will rarely get the benefit of the doubt and will have little margin for error.

—Barack Obama (2006, p. 236)

Carrying the added weight of stress due to racial discrimination is associated with a host of negative mental and physical consequences (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Jackson et al., 1996; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Most research examines how reactive coping facilitates recovery from a stressor (Allison, 1998; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Miller & Major, 2000), but proactive coping, used before or during a stressful event, has the potential to reduce or eliminate those negative consequences (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Mallett & Swim, 2005; Miller, Rothblum, Felicio, & Brand, 1995). Using a combination of retrospective

recall and daily diary reports, the present research examines the way that situational appraisals and individual differences shape the nature of proactive coping. Investigating factors that affect African American's proactive coping may reveal ways to reduce or manage the burden of racial discrimination.

PROACTIVE COPING WITH DISCRIMINATION

Stigmatized group members use a variety of skills to counter discrimination in their daily lives (Mallett & Swim, 2005; Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Miller et al., 1995). Most research examines how African Americans *reactively* cope with nondiscriminatory (Chandra & Batada, 2006; Gaylord-Hardin, Gipson, Mance, & Grant, 2008) and discriminatory stressors (Lewis-Coles & Constantine, 2006; Outlaw, 1993; Plummer & Slane, 1996). Although reactive coping is often an effective way to recover from racial discrimination, proactive coping has the potential to prevent discrimination or to reduce the severity of a discriminatory stressor. By the time a discriminatory event has run its course, the amount of harm is fixed

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and one can only attempt to repair the damage (Allison, 1998; Chandra & Batada, 2006). In comparison, if one can see a potential stressor coming, then proactive coping can change the nature of the stressor or even prevent it from happening (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). Mallett and Swim (2005) found that proactive coping with weight-based discrimination was associated with less self-reported stress and with positive outcomes including being rated as likeable, competent, and intelligent by outside observers.

Understanding how African Americans proactively cope with the ever-present threat of racial discrimination can reveal ways that stigmatized group members can protect themselves from stress and manage the quality of intergroup interactions (Richeson & Trawalter, 2005; Richeson, Trawalter, & Shelton, 2005; Shelton, Richeson & Salvatore, 2005). For example, when seeking employment an equally qualified African American may be passed over in favor of a White applicant. After being denied a job, reactive coping can help one understand why employment was denied and make one feel better. Alternatively, the applicant could proactively cope with potential rejection by carefully preparing a resume, dressing well, and rehearsing answers for typical interview questions before asking for applications. If given the opportunity to speak to a manager or interview, the African American applicant could use additional social skills or seek common ground to create a positive impression. These proactive measures could increase the likelihood that the applicant is given equal consideration and, possibly, the job.

Although the nature of stigma differs by group, all stigmatized group members are devalued and must cope with stress due to discrimination. We expect the basic process of proactive coping with stress due to discrimination to remain the same across stigmatized groups. Most research investigates how heavy women cope with weight-based discrimination (e.g., Miller et al., 1995). Yet because African Americans possess a unique stereotype, they may use distinctive proactive coping strategies. African Americans and heavy women differ in important ways, and so could their approach to proactive coping. One difference is the type of threat each group poses during social interactions (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, & Lickel, 2000). Stereotypes indicate that African Americans threaten physical violence whereas heavy women threaten vulnerability to disease (Park, Schaller, & Crandall, 2007). As a result, African Americans will be more concerned with projecting an image of safety than heavy women, who will be more concerned with projecting an image of health. A second difference is the duration of stigmatized status; women may become heavy at any point in life, whereas African Americans are born into their racial group. Greater experience dealing with discrimination could provide

African Americans with a wider repertoire of proactive coping strategies than heavy women.

We expect that in addition to trying to *avoid* a potentially discriminatory situation, African Americans' take proactive action using *situation-focused* or *self-focused* coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Mallett & Swim, 2005; Miller & Major, 2000). We define situation-focused coping as attempts to regulate the person–environment relationship that is causing the stress (e.g., problem-focused coping, primary control of the situation). In comparison, we define self-focused coping as attempts to regulate the self to avoid a potentially negative outcome (e.g., emotion-focused coping, secondary control of the self). This distinction is supported by our own research on heavy women's proactive coping with weight-based discrimination (Mallett & Swim, 2005) and by research on reactive coping and self-regulation during daily interracial interactions (e.g., Shelton, Richeson, & Vorauer, 2006; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003). The present research is the first to simultaneously examine all three types of coping and to determine the extent to which they are used before or during potential instances of racial discrimination.

Physical Avoidance

African Americans and other stigmatized groups prefer to strategically avoid people or places that possess a high likelihood of racial discrimination (Krieger & Sidney, 1996; Pinel, 1999; Swim, Cohen, & Hyers, 1998; Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000). For example, Bird and Bogart (2001) found that African Americans who perceived discrimination from health care professionals avoided health care settings. In a more controlled environment, Cohen and Swim (1995) found that women who anticipated being the only woman in a group interaction were more likely to say they wanted to change to a different group, compared to when they did not anticipate being the only woman. Physical avoidance differs from self- and situation-focused coping because individuals do not change the situation or adapt the self to the situation; rather they remove the self from the situation.

Manifestations of Situation-Focused Coping

It is not always possible to avoid people or places that signal a high likelihood of racial discrimination, but African Americans can try to manage those situations by focusing externally on problematic aspects of the person–environment relationship. Situation-focused strategies involve gathering information that can be used to manage the interaction or changing the nature of the person–environment relationship by using social

skills, changing the style of interaction, or changing the content of self-presentation.

By paying close attention to changes in the partner's behavior across the course of an interaction, one can anticipate what path it might take and develop a flexible response to the shifting situation (Blascovich et al., 2000; Feagin, 1991; Frable, Blackstone, & Scherbaum, 1990; Langer, 1989; Rodin & Slochower, 1976). Very few studies examine how African Americans use information seeking to manage interracial interactions, but the work of Shelton and colleagues (2005) suggests one way that information seeking can inform proactive coping. For example, if an African American senses that race is beginning to affect an interaction with her roommate, then she can use strategic self-disclosure to highlight aspects of herself that are not stereotypically devalued. At first, attending to the interaction can be cognitively draining and detract from one's performance in the situation (e.g., thoughtful contributions to the conversation), but over time attending to the course of the interaction can become automatic and require less effort (Frable et al., 1990; Hyers & Swim, 1998).

African Americans can also strategically use social skills to address a problematic person-environment relationship (e.g., Frable et al., 1990). Miller and Myers (1998) found that heavy women tried to head off weight-based rejection by smiling or attempting to engage the interaction partner in conversation. Similarly, if an African American man sees a mother pull her child close and tuck her purse under her arm as he approaches on the street, he may smile and say hello or pull out his expensive iPhone to show that he has no need for her possessions. Strategically engaging the woman and displaying his resources could assuage her fears that he will confirm the aggressive stereotype associated with his group. If the same man sensed that his conversation partner was nervous or afraid because of his race, he could make the partner comfortable by smiling, nodding, joking, or responding positively to something the partner said. He might also choose to temporarily change the way he communicates to fit the perceived normative behavior of the situation. Cross and Strauss (1998) found that "code-switching," or using more formal language around high-status strangers compared to peers, can make non-African Americans comfortable and prevent prejudice from affecting the interaction.

Manifestations of Self-Focused Coping

African Americans can also use a variety of self-focused strategies that involve monitoring and attempting to regulate one's own thoughts, emotions, and behavior to achieve a personal or social goal. Plummer and Slane (1996) found that, overall, African Americans recalled

using more emotion-focused coping (e.g., self-control, positive reappraisal) than problem-focused coping (e.g., seek social support, accept responsibility, confront) for racial discrimination. If proactive coping follows the same pattern as reactive coping, then we should find that African Americans use more self-focused coping than situation-focused coping.

When they are the only member of their racial group in a situation, African Americans attract a disproportionate amount of attention from others (Lord & Saenz, 1985). When the additional attention is interpreted as racial discrimination, African Americans may respond by closely monitoring their own thoughts or behavior to determine whether they are confirming stereotypes of their group (Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Pratto & John, 1991). This preoccupation consumes resources that then cannot be used for the task at hand (Cohen & Swim, 1995; Inzlicht, McKay, & Aronson, 2006; Richeson & Trawalter, 2005; Richeson et al., 2005; Saenz, 1994). African Americans have considerable experience being the racial minority in social situations, which allows them to practice regulating their thoughts and behavior and actually perform better than Whites during interracial interactions (Hyers & Swim, 1998).

African Americans can also attempt to regulate feelings of anxiety or frustration that accompany the experience of racial discrimination (Swim et al., 1998; Swim et al., 2003). Emotion regulation is psychologically and physically draining (Gailliot et al., 2007). As a result, African Americans may compensate by psychologically withdrawing from an interaction. Although temporarily effective, continuously withdrawing from a certain type of situation to protect the self can reduce identification with important domains including academics (Major & Schmader, 1998; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001).

THE ROLE OF SITUATIONAL APPRAISALS AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN PROACTIVE COPING

The same event can be interpreted in many different ways depending on situational appraisals and individual differences. Primary appraisals indicate whether anything personal is at stake in the encounter, such as blockages of a goal or damage to self-esteem and secondary appraisals assess the resources one can use to reduce the likelihood of a negative outcome (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). If primary appraisals are high and secondary appraisals are low, then coping is mobilized to reduce the magnitude of stress (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997).

African Americans nearly always appraise some level of harm from racial discrimination (Outlaw, 1993). Mallett and Swim (2005) found that as heavy women's appraisals of harm increased, so did the use of proactive

coping. Therefore we expect a positive association between African-Americans' primary appraisals of harm and use of proactive coping. Mallett and Swim also found that as heavy women's secondary appraisals of resources increased, so did the use of proactive coping. We expect to find a similar positive association between African Americans' secondary appraisals and proactive coping with racial discrimination. It is also possible that secondary appraisals will moderate the influence of primary appraisals on proactive coping. Knowing that one has resources to mitigate a potential stressor could make proactive coping more likely to occur whereas knowing that one does not have adequate resources could make proactive coping less likely to occur. Therefore we also test for an interaction between primary and secondary appraisals for proactive coping with racial discrimination.

Individuals also vary in the extent to which they are chronically attuned to the role that race plays in their lives. Stigma threatens both personal and collective identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). To the extent that group membership is central to one's sense of self (e.g., Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995), identification should be related to proactive coping with racial discrimination. Similarly, African Americans who are sensitive to the possibility of being treated according to their race (i.e., stigma conscious; Pinel, 1999) may be particularly motivated to head off discrimination, thereby producing a positive association between stigma consciousness and proactive coping. As a consequence, we predict that as African Americans' identification with their racial group and stigma consciousness increases, so will the motivation to engage in proactive coping.

Factors unrelated to race may also play a role in proactive coping with racial discrimination. In particular, optimism promotes proactive coping with everyday stressors (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). Optimism is also negatively related to denial and positively related to the use of problem-focused coping in reaction to a stressor (Scheier, Weintraub, & Carver, 1986). With regards to discrimination, optimists feel they are better able to cope with sexism compared to pessimists (Kaiser, Major, & McCoy, 2004). Optimism can also guide the way that individuals choose to proactively cope. Sechrist (in press) found that optimists were more likely than pessimists to plan to confront sexism in ways that were both situation focused (i.e., educate their evaluator) and self-focused (i.e., gain knowledge). We therefore predict that optimism will also be positively related to proactive coping with racial discrimination.

SUMMARY

The present research investigates five aspects of African Americans' efforts to proactively cope with racial

discrimination. First, we examine the extent to which African Americans recognize the need for proactive coping and use it for racial discrimination. Second, we assess whether different types of proactive coping (self-focused, situation focused, avoidance) emerge from self-reports. This is the first study to simultaneously examine the extent to which all three types are used for proactive coping with discrimination. Third, we compare daily reports to recollections of proactive coping. Keeping a daily diary may draw attention to incidents that would have otherwise gone unnoticed, triggering proactive coping that might not have occurred outside of the study. On the other hand, people tend to remember extreme examples of times they performed particularly well or poorly (DeMaio, 1984; Swim, Pearson, & Johnston, 2007), which could provide a distorted picture of the way people proactively cope with stressful events. Given the limitations of both methods, comparing results from both methodologies would provide stronger evidence for our predictions. Fourth, we test whether primary and secondary appraisals of the stressor are independently or interactively associated with proactive coping. Fifth, we examine whether African American identification, stigma consciousness, and optimism are positively associated with proactive coping. In doing so, we provide information about the process of proactive coping with racial discrimination.

METHOD

Participants

Seventy-seven African Americans (63 female, 14 male) were recruited from a rural college town in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Seventy-two were students and 5 were community members. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 33 ($M = 21.45$, $SD = 4.43$). They received course credit or \$20 for participating.

Procedure

Participants completed individual difference measures and questions about the nature and frequency of proactive coping with racial discrimination (Retrospective Reports of Proactive Coping).¹ An experimenter demonstrated how to complete a diary form on the Internet. For the next week, participants completed daily reports of proactive coping when they encountered a potential instance of racial discrimination (Reports of Daily Proactive Coping).

¹Participants also reported how they coped with one specific instance of racial discrimination in the past year. Results from recall of a specific incident were nearly identical to retrospective reports of how they typically coped with racial discrimination.

Materials

Individual differences. Participants completed an 18-item measure of African American identification (Swim & Mallett, 2007) that included items modified from a gender identity scale (Branscombe, Owen, & Kobrynowicz, 1993), an ethnic identity scale (Phinney, 1992), and additional items that we created (see the appendix; $\alpha = .85$, $M = 5.37$, $SD = 0.61$). Participants also completed the 10-item measure of Stigma Consciousness (Pinel, 1999; $\alpha = .78$, $M = 4.97$, $SD = 0.97$) and the 10-item Life Orientation Test–Revised (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994; $\alpha = .71$, $M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.17$). African-American identification was distinct from Stigma Consciousness ($r = .02$, *ns*) and Optimism ($r = .04$, *ns*). All items were answered on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). We averaged the items in each measure to form scales.

Retrospective reports of proactive coping. Research has yet to document the prevalence of proactive coping with racism. We therefore began by asking whether African Americans ever used proactive coping to deal with racial discrimination. Participants answered *yes* or *no* to the question, “Do you do anything to cope with racism before it happens or while it is happening? These things might prevent a person from discriminating against you, keep a stressful thing from happening, or reduce the bad things that happen as a result.”

Participants then recalled the extent to which they used 14 proactive coping strategies for racial discrimination (see Table 1). Using a scale from 1 (*a little bit*) to 7 (*a lot*), they rated each strategy in response to the statement, “When you think someone might discriminate against you based on your race/ethnicity, do you do any of the following things to help manage the situation or to reduce the likelihood of harm to yourself?” Reliability was acceptable when all items were averaged to form a scale ($\alpha = .86$).

We derived the proactive coping items from past research. Aspinwall and Taylor (1997) and Feagin (1991) inspired the items about information seeking. Frable and colleagues’ (1990) work on mindfulness informed items about attention to the interaction partner and the situation. Saenz (1994) worked on solo status-shaped items regarding attention to the self. Cross and Strauss’s (1998) work on code-switching inspired the item about changing the way one typically communicates. We looked to research on the use of social skills for items on self-presentation (Miller & Myers, 1998; Miller et al., 1995). The items related to self-regulation were informed by the work of Shelton et al. (2005) and by research on psychological withdrawal (Crocker & Major, 1989; Major & Schmader, 1998; Miller & Major, 2000; Schmader et al., 2001; Swim et al., 1998). Research

by Bird and Bogart (2001) and Pinel (1999) inspired the items on physical avoidance.

Confirmatory factor analysis. We used structural equation modeling (AMOS 7.0) to test whether the items reflected an overall use of proactive coping or distinct types of proactive coping by comparing one-, two-, and three-factor models. In the one-factor model, all 14 items indicated a single latent variable of proactive coping. In the two-factor model, 4 items indicated self-focused coping and 10 items indicated situation-focused coping (see Table 1); because avoidance has been described in ways that are more similar to self-focused than to situation-focused coping, the two avoidance items also indicated self-focused coping in this model. In the three-factor model, the same items indicated self-focused and situation-focused coping as in the two-factor model, but we separated physical avoidance from self-focused coping. We allowed the latent factors to correlate in the two and three-factor models.

We assessed levels of fit using the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and the comparative fit index (CFI). An RMSEA less than or equal to .08 indicates a reasonable fit (Browne & Cudek, 1993), but an RMSEA “close to” $\leq .06$ is preferable (Hu & Bentler, 1999, p. 1). A CFI greater than or equal to .90 is typically thought to reflect good fit, although a CFI “close to” $\geq .95$ is preferable (Hu & Bentler, 1999, p. 1). Our theoretically preferred three-factor model did not provide an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(144) = 113.62$, $p < .05$ (CFI = .87, RMSEA = .08; lower limit = .04, upper limit = .11). Following the recommendations of Hu and Bentler (1995, 1999) we relaxed the assumption of uncorrelated unique errors among the measured variables. We identified the largest modification indices and adopted those that made theoretical sense. We incorporated three theoretically meaningful modification indices, which added covariances among pairs of coping items in the self and situation-focused coping factors (see Figure 1). Some researchers caution against the use of modification indices due to the possibility of capitalizing on sample-specific idiosyncrasies, and they recommend reporting the pattern of results both before and after modifications to determine the influence of modifications on one’s statistical conclusions (e.g., MacCallum, Roznowski, & Necowitz, 1992). Both before and after modification, all measured proactive coping items were reliable indicators of their latent variable in the three-factor model.

After modification, our theoretically preferred three-factor model provided an acceptable fit to the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999; MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996), $\chi^2(148) = 203.94$, $p = .02$ (CFI = .91, RMSEA = .04; lower limit = .03, upper limit = .06). The two-factor model

TABLE 1
The Factor Loadings for and Average Use of Each Proactive Coping Strategy for Retrospective and Daily Reports

Proactive Coping Items	Retrospective Reports					Daily Reports				
	M	SD	Factor Loading			M	SD	Factor Loading		
Self-focused proactive coping										
I [will] pay close attention to my own behavior or performance in a situation where I might be the target of racism	4.73 _a	1.38	0.81	–	–	4.87 _a	1.98	0.87	–	–
I [will] monitor my own thoughts in a situation where I might be the target of racism	4.27 _a	1.48	0.079	–	–	5.13 _b	1.75	.083	–	–
I [will] try to regulate my emotions when I think I might be the target of racism	4.24 _a	1.51	0.47	–	–	5.11 _b	1.80	0.64	–	–
I [will] try to maintain self-control when I think I might be the target of racism	4.76 _a	1.51	0.45	–	–	5.32 _b	1.73	0.78	–	–
Situation-focused proactive coping										
When speaking to someone who was not African American, I [will pay] paid close attention to what the other person [is] was doing (e.g., eye contact, body position) because it [will tell] told me more about how she or he felt than what [is] was said	4.33 _a	1.64	–	0.78	–	3.41 _b	2.58	–	0.69	–
I [will pay] paid close attention to elements of the environment (e.g., decorations, exits) when [interacting] I interacted with people who [are] were not African American	3.81 _a	1.83	–	0.55	–	3.00 _b	2.45	–	0.69	–
I [will try] tried to maintain eye contact when I [have] was having a conversation	4.93 _a	0.98	–	0.54	–	4.21 _b	2.48	–	0.89	–
I [will pay] paid attention to information that tells [told] me about the potential for [future] discrimination	4.01 _a	1.59	–	0.53	–	3.98 _a	2.34	–	0.64	–
I [will pay] paid close attention to how an interaction with another person [is] was developing and [will try] tried to imagine what other paths it might take, good or bad	4.58 _a	1.13	–	0.53	–	3.98 _b	2.39	–	0.73	–
When I [sense] sensed that another person [does] did not like African Americans, I [will try] tried to educate that person about my group	3.41 _a	1.88	–	0.52	–	2.06 _b	1.98	–	0.81	–
When I [am] was not around other African Americans, I [will try] tried to change the way I normally [communicate] communicated to fit what [seems] seemed to be appropriate in a particular situation (e.g., using more formal language around faculty)	3.14 _a	2.07	–	0.45	–	2.24 _b	1.88	–	0.41	–
When I [sense] sensed that another person [does] did not like African Americans, I [will try] tried to emphasize parts of myself that [are] were not being called into question, but [are] were positive (e.g., if intelligence is insulted, emphasize appearance)	2.91 _a	2.16	–	0.37	–	2.17 _b	2.06	–	0.72	–
Avoidance										
I try to avoid interactions where I might encounter racism to minimize the amount of stress I might experience.	3.30 _a	1.67	–	–	0.47	3.80 _b	2.27	–	–	0.83
I try to leave interactions where I might encounter racism as soon as possible to minimize the amount of stress I might experience.	3.50 _a	1.37	–	–	0.52	3.34 _a	2.25	–	–	0.61

Note. Matching subscripts indicate the average use of the strategy did not differ for retrospective and daily reports.

did not demonstrate an acceptable fit, $\chi^2(144) = 289.43, p < .001$ (CFI = .78, RMSEA = .08, lower limit = .06, upper limit = .09) and did not fit as well as the

three-factor model (*df* difference = 4, chi-square difference = 85.49, $p < .001$). The one-factor model did not fit the data as well as the two-factor model,

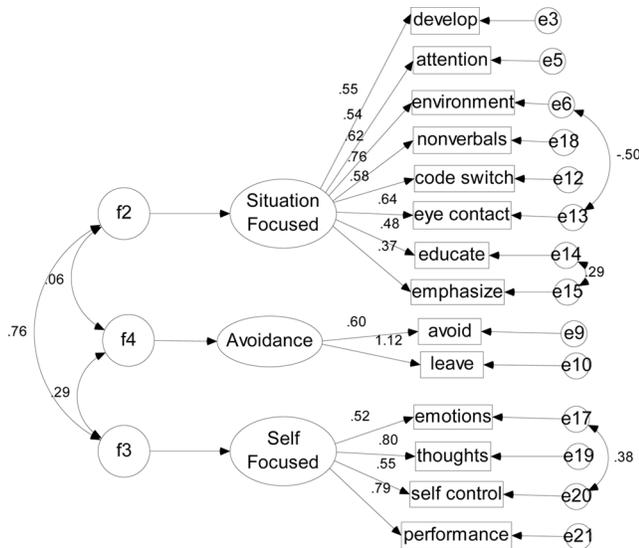


FIGURE 1 Confirmatory factor analysis for proactive coping with racial discrimination.

$\chi^2(142) = 337.92$, $p < .001$ (CFI = .69, RMSEA = .09; lower limit = .08, upper limit = .10; df difference = 6, chi-square difference = 133.98, $p < .001$). Thus, our theoretically preferred three-factor model obtained support in the confirmatory factor analysis, suggesting that self- and situation-focused proactive coping are distinct from each other and from physical avoidance. We formed scales by calculating the average of self-focused ($\alpha = .76$) and situation-focused ($\alpha = .76$) proactive coping and of physical avoidance ($\alpha = .80$). Self- and situation-focused coping were positively correlated ($r = .52$), self-focused coping was positively correlated with avoidance ($r = .43$), and situation-focused coping was positively correlated with avoidance ($r = .16$).

Appraisals of potentially discriminatory events. We assessed primary appraisals with 10 items ($\alpha = .86$; Lazarus, DeLongis, Folkman & Gruen, 1985) including, “Did you think you would . . .” “lose something because of this event?” “become angry because of this event?” “become anxious because of this event?” “become depressed because of this event?” “Did you think this event would . . .” “keep you from reaching an important goal?” “hurt your self-esteem?” “lower other people’s regard for you?” “How intimidated were you by this event?” “How dangerous did you think this event might turn out to be?” and “Did you feel as if your ability to deal with this incident was challenged?”

We assessed secondary appraisals with three items ($\alpha = .81$; Lazarus et al., 1985) including, “How confident were you that you . . .” “had enough skills to overcome the potentially negative outcome?” “had enough and resources to overcome the potentially negative outcome?” and “could overcome a potentially negative outcome?”

All appraisal items used a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).

Reports of daily proactive coping. African Americans should be able to anticipate discrimination if they know they will interact with a prototypical perpetrator or face a situation where they have previously encountered racial discrimination (Inman & Baron, 1996). In that case, they should be able to decide whether proactive coping can head it off. To investigate this possibility, each day participants indicated whether they anticipated experiencing racial discrimination. They were told that “we want you to report events that you thought might be stressful and tell us what you did *before and during* the potentially stressful event.” If they identified a potentially discriminatory event, they used a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) to report primary ($\alpha = .86$) and secondary appraisals ($\alpha = .91$) and the extent to which they used each of the 14 proactive coping strategies ($\alpha = .71$) just described to deal with the incident.

Confirmatory factor analysis. We tested whether the same three-factor model described above provided an adequate fit to the daily report data. The three-factor model provided a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(148) = 309.21$, $p < .01$ (CFI = .93, RMSEA = .04; lower limit = .03, upper limit = .05), and this fit was better than both the two-factor model, $\chi^2(152) = 439.27$, $p < .01$ (CFI = .88, RMSEA = .05, lower limit = .05, upper limit = .06, df difference = 4, chi-square difference = 130.06, $p < .001$), and the one-factor model, $\chi^2(154) = 660.31$, $p < .01$ (CFI = .79, RMSEA = .07, lower limit = .06, upper limit = .07, df difference = 6, chi-square difference = 351.10, $p < .001$).

For daily reports of racial discrimination, the scales measuring self-focused ($\alpha = .88$) and situation-focused coping ($\alpha = .84$) and physical avoidance ($\alpha = .76$) demonstrated acceptable internal reliabilities. Self- and situation-focused coping were positively correlated ($r = .53$), self-focused coping was positively correlated with avoidance ($r = .35$), and situation-focused coping was positively correlated with avoidance ($r = .36$).

RESULTS

Descriptive Information

Establishing the base-rate of proactive coping in this sample, 83% of participants answered *yes* to the item, “Do you do anything to cope with racism before it happens or while it is happening?” When asked to reflect on their average use of 14 proactive coping strategies,

participants recalled using a moderate amount of each strategy (range = 2.91–4.93; see Table 1).

We then considered daily reports of proactive coping with racial discrimination. Not every participant encountered racial discrimination each day; therefore, the number of diary entries per participant ranged from 1 to 9. Dividing the number of days with racial discrimination by the 7 days of the diary study, participants reported an average of 3.43 ($SD = 2.35$) instances of racial discrimination—a number that is consistent with past research (e.g., Swim et al., 2003). Averaging across daily reports, participants used a moderate amount of each proactive coping strategy (range = 2.06–5.32; see Table 1).

Comparing Retrospective and Daily Reports of Proactive Coping

When considering the three proactive coping scales, we found that self-focused proactive coping was used to a greater extent than situation-focused coping or avoidance. Paired samples *t* tests showed that average reports of self-focused coping ($M = 4.50$, $SD = .95$; $M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.44$; retrospective and daily reports, respectively) were higher than average reports of both situation-focused coping ($M = 3.89$, $SD = .92$; $M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.44$; retrospective, $t[82] = 7.26$, $p < .001$, and daily reports, $t[188] = 16.72$, $p < .001$, respectively) and physical avoidance ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.38$; $M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.95$; retrospective, $t[82] = 10.05$, $p < .001$, and daily reports, $t[188] = 9.86$, $p < .001$, respectively). Within retrospective reports, situation-focused coping and physical avoidance did not differ, $t(82) = 0.61$, *ns*. In comparison, daily reports showed marginally lower situation-focused coping than physical avoidance, $t(188) = -1.86$, $p = .06$.

When we examined each proactive coping item, paired samples *t* tests showed that participants avoided interactions more during the diary week than they recalled doing in the past (see the superscripts in Table 1). Similarly, participants reported using three out of the four self-focused proactive coping items more during the diary week than they recalled in their retrospective analysis. Yet we see the opposite for situation-focused proactive coping; participants recalled using seven of eight of the situation-focused proactive coping items more when recalling how they typically dealt with racial discrimination compared to what they reported using during the diary week.

The Relation Between Appraisals and Proactive Coping

We next tested whether primary and secondary appraisals were uniquely or interactively associated with proactive coping. For the retrospective data, we standardized

the variables and simultaneously regressed participant gender, primary appraisals, secondary appraisals, and their interaction product on to each type of proactive coping (self-focused coping, situation-focused coping, physical avoidance). Because daily reports were nested within participant, we used Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) to correct for the shared variance of repeated responses within individual. HLM also accounts for the fact that participants generated different numbers of diary reports by capitalizing on the available data (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). We entered primary and secondary appraisals and their interaction product at Level 1, predicting the outcome variable. None of the interactions were significant, so we removed the interaction product from the equation and only estimated the main effects of primary and secondary appraisals in the reported analyses. The coefficients represent slopes which are interpreted similar to unstandardized coefficients in linear regression equations. Thus, G_{10} and G_{20} represent the slopes for the effect of primary and secondary appraisals, respectively, predicting each type of proactive coping response.

For both retrospective and daily reports, primary appraisals, more so than secondary appraisals, were associated with proactive coping. Similar to research on weight-based discrimination, primary appraisals were positively associated with self-focused coping ($\beta = .26$, $p < .05$, $G_{10} = .28$, $SE = .14$, $p < .05$, retrospective and daily reports, respectively), situation-focused coping ($\beta = .31$, $p < .05$, $G_{10} = .20$, $SE = .11$, $p = .08$, retrospective and daily reports, respectively), and with avoidance for daily reports ($\beta = -.01$, *ns*, $G_{10} = .40$, $SE = .19$, $p < .05$, retrospective and daily reports, respectively). Unlike research on weight-based discrimination, secondary appraisals were not associated with self-focused coping ($\beta = .13$, *ns*, $G_{20} = .22$, $SE = .14$, $p = .11$, retrospective and daily reports, respectively) situation-focused coping ($\beta = .12$, *ns*, $G_{20} = .16$, $SE = .14$, $p = .19$, retrospective and daily reports, respectively) or avoidance ($\beta = .09$, *ns*, $G_{20} = .28$, $SE = .16$, $p = .08$, retrospective and daily reports, respectively).

The Relation Between Individual Differences and Proactive Coping

We then tested whether African American identification, stigma consciousness, or optimism were related to self and situation-focused coping and physical avoidance. For the retrospective data, we standardized the variables and simultaneously regressed participant gender, African American identification, stigma consciousness, and optimism on to each type of proactive coping (self-focused coping, situation-focused coping, physical avoidance). For the daily reports of racial discrimination, we used HLM. We entered African American

TABLE 2

The Association Between Individual Differences and Retrospective Reports of Proactive Coping With Racial Discrimination

	<i>B</i>	β (Standard Error)	<i>R</i> ² Change for the Model
Self-focused coping			0.15*
Participant gender	-0.01	-0.01 (0.28)	
African American identification	0.27*	0.25 (0.17)	
Stigma consciousness	0.19	0.17 (0.11)	
Optimism	0.04	0.03 (0.10)	
Situation-focused coping			0.24**
Participant gender	-0.19	0.59 (0.32)	
African American identification	0.25*	0.28 (0.13)	
Stigma consciousness	0.22 [†]	0.24 (0.13)	
Optimism	0.13	0.14 (0.12)	
Avoidance			0.13*
Participant gender	0.29	1.33 (0.50)	
African-American identification	0.24 [†]	0.39 (0.20)	
Stigma consciousness	-0.09	-0.15 (0.19)	
Optimism	0.05	0.09 (0.18)	

Note. Gender was coded 0 = female, 1 = male.

[†]*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .001.

identification, stigma consciousness, and optimism as Level 1 predictors of each outcome variable (self-focused coping, situation-focused coping, physical avoidance).

African American identification was the only unique predictor of proactive coping with racial discrimination

TABLE 3

The Association Between Individual Differences and Daily Reports of Proactive Coping With Racial Discrimination

	<i>t</i> Ratio	<i>Gamma</i> (Standard Error)
Self-focused coping		
Intercept	37.33	4.43 (0.62)**
Participant gender	0.75	0.46 (0.62)
African American identification	3.97	0.31 (0.08)**
Stigma consciousness	-0.96	-0.14 (0.15)
Optimism	1.01	0.14 (0.13)
Situation-focused coping		
Intercept	24.42	4.06 (0.16)**
Participant gender	-1.41	-0.86 (0.61)
African American identification	3.61	0.46 (0.13)**
Stigma consciousness	-1.13	-0.16 (0.14)
Optimism	0.59	0.09 (0.16)
Avoidance		
Intercept	18.22	3.39 (0.19)*
Participant gender	-2.26	-0.89 (0.68)
African American identification	1.62	0.24 (0.14) [†]
Stigma consciousness	-0.32	-0.06 (0.18)
Optimism	0.24	0.05 (0.19)

Note. Gender was coded 0 = female, 1 = male.

[†]*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .001.

for both retrospective and daily reports (see Tables 2 and 3). The more strongly African Americans identified with their racial group, the more they reported self-focused coping, situation-focused coping, and avoidance. Stigma consciousness and optimism were not significantly related to proactive coping for either type of report.

DISCUSSION

In an effort to increase their “store of goodwill in America’s accounts” and “get the benefit of the doubt” during daily interactions (Obama, 2006, p. 236), 83% of our sample reported using proactive coping for racial discrimination. Even if they did not identify the behavior as proactive coping, the entire sample reported using self-focused and situation-focused proactive coping in addition to physical avoidance. African Americans used self-focused proactive coping more than situation-focused coping or physical avoidance, which is similar to heavy women’s use of proactive coping (Mallett & Swim, 2005) and to reactive coping with racial discrimination (Plummer & Slane, 1996). Unlike research on weight-based discrimination, primary appraisals of harm, more so than secondary appraisals of resources, were associated with proactive coping for racial discrimination. Moreover, the extent to which African Americans identified with their racial group was the only individual difference that was uniquely related to proactive coping.

Recalling What One Would Do Versus Reporting What One Does Do

When considering how each proactive coping strategy was used, we found interesting differences between the way participants remembered proactive coping and the way they reported proactive coping during the diary week. In comparison to daily diary reports, African Americans recalled using more situation-focused strategies and less self-focused strategies. Specifically, when recalling how they typically dealt with racial discrimination, African Americans said they used seven of eight situation-focused strategies more than they actually reported using them during the diary week. We found the opposite pattern for self-focused proactive coping; African Americans recalled using three of the four self-focused strategies to a lesser extent than they reported using them during the diary week.

There may be several reasons for these differences. First, memory draws from a different sample of events than daily experience. People are more likely to recall events that had a big impact on their lives (Swim et al., 2007), yet those events are rare and are therefore not

likely to occur during the diary week. Moreover in this study, retrospective reports could have been based on events that were firmly categorized as discrimination and were perhaps examples of blatant discrimination. In contrast, daily encounters with racial discrimination could have been more ambiguous or subtle in nature (Crocker & Major, 1989). As a result, differences between recall and diary data could arise from the type of events that participants used as a basis of their report. Second, the recall methodology is influenced by beliefs about how one typically responds, whereas the daily diary methodology encourages people to ground their reports in actual experiences (Ross, 1989). We know from past research that although people expect they will confront discrimination, a form of situation-focused coping, they rarely do so when given the opportunity (Swim & Hyers, 1999; Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2001). Although there are many reasons why people do not confront discrimination, one reason could be that they do not fully take into account situational constraints on their behavior. Thus, the diary data could reflect the way that people actually respond while the recall data could reflect the way people believe they typically respond.

The Role of Situational Appraisals and Individual Differences in Proactive Coping

We found that perceptions of harm were more important than perceptions of resources when explaining proactive coping with racial discrimination. As expectations of harm increased so did reports of self- and situation-focused coping and attempts at avoidance. We did not find an association between secondary appraisal of resources and proactive coping. If the types of racial discrimination faced on a college campus are not as difficult to deal with as racial discrimination that occurs in other environments, then our participants may not have needed many resources, rendering secondary appraisals uninformative. It may be more important to assess perceptions of response efficacy or the extent to which proactive coping has the intended effect. Doing so can provide information about how well proactive coping is meeting the goal one has in a situation (e.g., prevent discrimination vs. get a job; Swim & Thomas, 2006).

We know that individual differences in the way one views a social group (identification, stigma consciousness) and the world in general (optimism) relate to perceptions of discrimination (e.g., Cross & Strauss, 1998; Kaiser et al., 2004), but the present research is the first to show how they shape the use of proactive coping with racial discrimination. African American identification, but not stigma consciousness or optimism, was uniquely associated with proactive coping. As ingroup identification increased, so did the use of self- and situation-focused

proactive coping and physical avoidance. We found a marginal positive association between stigma consciousness and situation-focused proactive coping for retrospective reports of dealing with typical racial discrimination. It is possible that if African American identification was not in the equation, stigma consciousness and optimism could relate to proactive coping. The fact that identification was the only unique predictor reinforces the idea that it is an important protective factor for dealing with discrimination.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Increasing our understanding of proactive coping with discrimination has the potential to improve intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes for stigmatized group members (Mallett & Swim, 2005). Many African Americans recognize that they use proactive coping but do not always anticipate the way they will proactively cope with specific instances of racial discrimination. Simply informing African Americans about the variety of strategies they can use to reduce the impact of racial discrimination could be useful—particularly for those who have recently relocated to an area where they are a racial minority. For example, African American college students who transition from an urban to rural setting may not be accustomed to experiencing certain types of racial discrimination and therefore may not know how to effectively cope in their new environment. We could obtain a more complete picture of the proactive coping process if we asked participants to analyze their responses over the course of a stressful episode (Ickes, Patterson, Rajecki & Tanford, 1982). Doing so would highlight the variety of proactive coping strategies used throughout the interaction and perhaps reveal how self and situation-focused coping complement each other.

Our sample describes proactive coping with racial discrimination among African Americans in their early 20s, living as the minority in a rural town in the United States. We expect our results would generalize to other racial groups to the extent that they face similar types of discrimination. Participants in our study represented approximately 4% of the population in a rural area; therefore, our results primarily apply to locations where intergroup contact is frequent and often unavoidable. It would be useful to determine whether proactive coping differs across urban and rural locations. Tracking the development of proactive coping over the life span could also reveal age-related preferences for the three types of proactive coping. It is unclear whether our results would generalize across cultures. The importance of being a good group member could cause members of collectivist cultures to spend more time monitoring the situation than the self, whereas the importance placed on being true to the self could cause members of individualist

cultures to spend less time monitoring the situation than the self.

Conclusion

Modern prejudice takes many forms, creating a moving target for proactive coping during social interactions. Yet African Americans appear to be well versed in the use of proactive coping with racial discrimination. They use three types of proactive coping to deal with a variety of situations, with self-focused coping being used to a greater extent than situation-focused coping or physical avoidance. The way one imagines proactive coping may differ from what one actually does during an interaction, but as African Americans gain experience with various types of racial discrimination they may be able to tailor proactive coping to each situation. The ability to accurately anticipate the nature of racial discrimination should allow African Americans to use proactive coping to achieve their goals (e.g., prevent discrimination, gain employment, gain acceptance in a social group). If successful, proactive coping should allow African Americans to make the best of a bad situation and minimize negative psychological and physical consequences of racial discrimination.

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TABLE A1
African American Identification Items

Blacks have much to be proud of these days.
I think that I am very different from most Blacks.
I have spent time trying to find out about Black culture, such as the history of Blacks in America.
I don't have a lot in common with Blacks.
I have difficulty identifying with the culture of Black Americans.
I have not spent much time trying to learn about the culture of Blacks, such as their history and traditions.
I am very concerned about the problems Blacks have in today's society.
When electing public officials, I would vote for candidates who I know consider issues that affect Black Americans.
I feel an attachment to Blacks as a group.
I seek out information about the culture of Blacks.
When I meet a Black person, I feel like I will have a lot in common with him or her.
I think a lot about how Black people's lives will be affected by their ethnic group membership.
I feel little sense of commitment to Black people even those who are close friends.
I think I have much in common with Blacks.
I have learned a lot about the history and tradition of Blacks.
I don't feel much of a connection to Blacks.
Blacks have a culture worth protecting and documenting.
I don't think I would be interested in taking a course on the history of Blacks in America.
