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# Black Canadians' Coping Responses to Racial Discrimination

Justine Joseph  
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*On the basis of a cultural coping framework, the present study examined coping responses to racial discrimination among 190 Black Canadians. The study assessed the respondents' coping with both general (i.e., problem- and emotion-focused coping) and Africultural coping strategies (i.e., spiritual-centered, collective, and ritual-centered coping) across three different racial discrimination vignettes (i.e., interpersonal, institutional, and cultural discrimination). Furthermore, three individual and cultural difference variables, African self-consciousness, social desirability, and past race-related stress, were controlled in the analyses. As predicted, the results of the profile analysis and multivariate analyses showed that both general and Africultural coping were used by the participants in responding to all three types of discrimination. Additionally, differential coping patterns were found depending on the context of racial discrimination. Overall, the study suggests that Black Canadians are exposed to multiple race-related stressors that require them to adopt a flexible repertoire of general and culture-specific coping strategies.*

**Keywords:** Blacks; coping behavior; racial discrimination

The transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) has substantially influenced recent research on the impact of racial discrimination on African Americans (Mellor, 2004; Outlaw, 1993; Plummer & Slane, 1996; Slavin, Rainer, McCreary, & Gouda, 1991). Based on this framework, race-related discrimination becomes stressful when “transactions between

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individuals or groups and their environment that emerge from the dynamics of racism . . . are perceived to tax or exceed existing individual and collective resources or threaten well-being” (Harrell, 2000, p. 44). According to Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) original conceptualization, an individual’s coping response is bounded by his or her cultural norms and shaped by the individual’s values and beliefs. However, empirical attempts to systematically assess the association between culture and coping has been quite limited (Wong, Wong, & Scott, 2006), as reflected by the acontextual nature of the prevailing coping research (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

Recently, however, there have been some movements within coping research towards identifying the culture-specific coping preferences among various ethnic groups (e.g., Wester, Kuo, & Vogel, 2006; Wong & Wong, 2006; Yeh & Inose, 2002) and the link between coping and deep structural and cultural dimensions (e.g., collectivism vs. individualism, acculturation; Bhagat, Steverson, & Kuo, in press; Kuo, Roysircar, & Newby-Clark, 2006; Lam & Zane, 2004). With respect to individuals of African descent specifically, only a handful of studies have taken a cultural perspective in investigating coping among this population (see Lewis-Coles & Constantine, 2006; Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000; Utsey, Brown, & Bolden, 2004, for examples). In an attempt to address the above-mentioned gaps, the present study examined the pattern of coping responses to varying types of racial discrimination in a community sample of Black Canadians. To this end, the study adopted an integrated coping framework by incorporating general (i.e., problem- and emotion-focused coping; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and African-centered (i.e., Africultural; Utsey, Adams, & Bolden, 2000, Utsey et al., 2004) dimensions of coping and examined the differential patterns of coping among Black Canadians across cultural, institutional, and interpersonal discrimination situations.

#### GENERAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF COPING

Minority group members are significantly more susceptible to race-related stressors than members of the majority culture (Deitch et al., 2003, Utsey, Giesbrecht, Hook, & Stanard, 2008). The nature of social structure, social status, and social roles indicates the potential role of minority group status as a risk factor for adverse mental health consequences. Nevertheless, the psychology and the psychological processes of being a target of discrimination are much less understood than that of the perpetrators of discrimination (Cassidy, O’Connor, Howe, & Warden, 2004).

Coping is one critical psychological process that concerns individuals’ responses to stressors and life hassles (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As such,

coping has garnered considerable empirical attention because of its mediating role in the relationship between stress and psychological well-being. Coping refers to a person's cognitive and behavioral efforts to reduce a perceived threat or to manage emotions associated with stress (e.g., anger; Plummer & Slane, 1996). Coping has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct with at least two broad categories: problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The problem-focused coping strategies involve efforts by an individual to obtain information and mobilize actions with the intention of changing the reality of the person-environment interaction (Lyon, 2000). These problem-focused actions may be directed at either the environment (e.g., planning, taking control of the situation) or the self (e.g., changing the meaning of an event, recognizing personal resources or strengths; Lazarus, 2000). By contrast, the emotion-focused strategies are aimed at regulating one's emotional responses to stressful situations without changing the realities of the stressful situation. These strategies include distancing, avoiding, selective attention, blaming, minimizing, wishful thinking, venting emotions, seeking social support, exercising, and meditating. Unlike the problem-focused techniques, emotion-focused tactics do not alter the meaning of an event directly (Lyon, 2000). An examination of the early research exploring minority group members' strategies for coping with racial discrimination (e.g., Allport, 1954; Harrell, 1979; Pettigrew, 1964; Simpson & Yinger, 1985) suggests that the majority of responses are problem focused (Mellor, 2004).

#### AFRICENTRIC CONCEPTUALIZATION OF COPING

Research concerning the coping strategies of African Americans responding to racial discrimination shows divergent results from that of the general coping literature. The literature suggests that responses to racial discrimination by African Americans are influenced by the context in which the event occurs (Feagin, 1991; Plummer & Slane, 1996; Utsey, Ponterotto, et al., 2000). Certain coping strategies may be more opportune and advantageous when used in response to stressors resulting from interpersonal discrimination (e.g., being followed by security while shopping), as opposed to institutional discrimination (e.g., being passed over for a promotion despite being well-qualified), or cultural discrimination (e.g., witnessing negative portrayal of Black people in the media). Where racism is part of the cultural fabric of a society, it tends to be more insidious and less identifiable (Jones, 1997). Consequently, individuals of African descent may have little opportunity to use problem-focused coping strategies (i.e., a type of general coping) in managing certain types of race-related stress (Utsey,

Ponterotto, et al., 2000). Alternatively, African Americans may turn to culture-based coping strategies (Williams, 1994).

Previous research has suggested that culture influences the coping behavior of African Americans by ways of defining the stressors, delimiting the selection of appropriate coping methods, and defining the context in which coping occurs (Daly, Jennings, Beckett, & Leashore, 1995; Greer, 2007; Parks, 1998; Plummer & Slane, 1996). Adopting an African-centered theoretical frameworks and epistemology, Utsey, Ponterotto, et al., (2000) documented various culture-specific coping behaviors utilized by people of African descent during stressful encounters, coined "Africultural coping." Africultural coping is defined as the extent to which individuals of African descent adopt coping behaviors specifically derived from African culture (Utsey, Adams, et al., 2000). Utsey, Adams, et al. (2000), conceptualized Africultural coping behaviors in terms of four primary dimensions: (a) cognitive/emotional debriefing represents adaptive reactions by individuals of African descent as a result of efforts to manage stressors (e.g., hoping for things to get better); (b) spiritual-centered coping refers to behaviors that reflect a spiritual sensibility (e.g., praying that things will work themselves out); (c) collective coping represents a reliance on in-group to manage stressful situations (e.g., resolution and comfort sought from others or a group); and (d) ritual-centered coping involves African cultural practices (e.g., burning incense for strength or guidance in dealing with a problem) as stress responses.

#### INTERFACE OF GENERAL AND AFRICULTURAL COPING

While people of African descent may live, have families, socialize with friends, and attend churches within their racial and ethnic communities, they are often required to navigate within European American dominated institutions (e.g., schools, workplaces, media; Bell & Tracey, 2006). This reality demands individuals of African descent to adapt and apply values and behaviors flexibly across situations. As such, it is often necessary for minority group members to develop respective sets of coping methods that correspond to the dominant and the minority cultures. This is because a given culture might sanction certain coping behaviors while rejecting other coping options due to cultural values or orientations (Lam & Zane, 2004). For example, African cultural values may promote the practice of rituals such as prayers, meditation, candle lighting, as a means of coping with adversity, but discourage seeking assistance from individuals outside of one's kinship circle. By contrast, dominant European American values may emphasize individualistic coping strategies, such as taking direct action and

deem the above culture-specific responses irrelevant and even inappropriate (Slavin et al., 1991). However, taking direct action (a problem-focused coping style) in a racially hostile work environment might actually be counterproductive to people of African descent because it risks being labeled as a troublemaker (Harrell, 2000).

Following this perspective, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the coping repertoire of individuals of African descent living in North America would likely consist of both general and culture-specific coping strategies. This notion finds support in coping studies of other ethnic groups. For example, Kuo and his colleagues found Asians in the United States and Canada adopt coping strategies that reflect Western, individualistic values (e.g., engagement coping) as well as Asian collectivistic values (i.e., collective and avoidance coping; Kuo et al., 2006; Wester et al., 2006).

However, to date, no empirical research has simultaneously examined the utilization of general and Africultural coping among Black Canadians or African Americans. Furthermore, the existing studies of African Americans' experiences with racial discrimination have not explored the preferential use of this bicultural repertoire of coping behaviors in response to various types of race-related stressors. Therefore, a fine-grained analysis of differential coping patterns among varying types of racial discrimination, including cultural, institutional, and interpersonal discrimination has considerable conceptual and empirical value.

#### RESEARCH QUESTION

The current study explores the following research question: *How do Black Canadians cope with racial discrimination?* In doing so, two main hypotheses were tested.

*Hypothesis 1:* Black Canadians employ both general and Africultural coping strategies in responding to interpersonal, institutional, and cultural discrimination.

Due to continuous exposure to European Canadian and Africentric cultural environments, the use of general and Africultural coping strategies are unlikely to be mutually exclusive (Harrell, 2000; Ramseur, 1991; Slavin et al., 1991). Thus, it was predicted that Black Canadians adopt both general and Africultural coping strategies in dealing with all incidents of racial discrimination.

*Hypothesis 2:* There are differences in the types of coping strategies employed by Black Canadians to deal with cultural, institutional, and interpersonal discrimination.

Racial discrimination typically implicates some degree of power disparity between the perpetrator and the target. Through personal and vicarious experiences with racial discrimination, Black Canadians are likely aware of coping strategies that have the least risks and most benefits (Harrell, 2000). Thus, it was predicted that Black Canadians may monitor and adjust their selection of coping strategies according to nature of the event.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited through the Department of Psychology and Black student associations at a southwestern university in Ontario, Canada, community-based Black associations in Canada, and the snowball method. Participants completed questionnaires using paper-and-pencil or online format. A total of 190 participants (69.7% female) ranging in age from 18 to 68 years (mean = 26.94,  $SD = 11.99$ ) were included in the study and the final analyses. Of these participants, 80.5% indicated both parents' racial background as Black and the remaining self-identified as biracial or multiracial Black Canadians. Of the sample, 50% were born in Canada while the remaining participants had been living in Canada from 10 months to 41 years (mean = 16.34 years,  $SD = 9.88$ ). The current level of education varied widely within this sample: 1.6% had completed grade school, 0.5% had partially completed high school, 15.3% had completed high school or received the diploma equivalent, 5.3% had partially completed a 2-year college program, 8.9% had completed a 2-year college program, 42.1% had partially completed university, 8.9% had received a university degree, 3.7% had partially completed graduate or professional school, and 11.6% had completed graduate or professional school. Household income was determined by using Canadian census data tabulations (Statistics Canada, 2001) organized by postal code. The median household incomes for census areas encompassing the participants' permanent addresses were normally distributed, ranging from \$16,174 to \$101,394 (median = \$49,997.50,  $SD = \$20,418.19$ ). When reporting employment status, participants were directed to indicate multiple responses if applicable. Of the sample, 23% were employed full-time, 23.5% were employed part-time, 47.3% held student status, 2.67% were currently unemployed, and 2.2% declared that they held alternative employment arrangements. In terms of marital status, 78.4% were single, 13.2% were married, 0.5% were widowed, 4.2% were either separated or divorced, and 3.2% were cohabiting. Generation status refers

to whether the participant or the participant's parents were born in or outside of Canada. Approximately 27% of the sample claimed first-generation status (born outside of Canada and immigrated to Canada after the age of 12), 20% identified themselves as 1.5 generation (born outside of Canada and immigrated to Canada before the age of 12), 41.1% declared second-generation status (born in Canada and have at least one parent who was born outside of Canada), 3.7% declared third-generation status (born in Canada and have at least one parent who was born in Canada), 3.7% claimed that they were beyond third generation (born in Canada and have at least one grandparent who was born in Canada), and 3.7% stated that they were international students. With regards to citizenship, 86.8% of the sample held Canadian citizenship, 6.3% held landed immigrant status, and 3.7% held student visas.

#### PROCEDURE

Participants were invited in person, by phone, or electronic mail to participate in a research study exploring how Black Canadians cope with racial discrimination. Interested respondents were advised to contact the investigator to either make an appointment to complete a paper version of the questionnaire package in person, receive the questionnaire package via ground mail with a prestamped envelope for returning the completed questionnaire package, or receive an access code to complete the questionnaires in electronic format via an Internet survey service. The completion rates for the in-person, mail, and electronic administrations were 85%, 47%, and 87%, respectively. Participants who were currently enrolled in a psychology course at the University of Windsor were eligible to receive credits towards bonus marks in one psychology course of their choice. All other participants were entered into a raffle to win one of the five \$20 gift certificates to a retail bookstore.

#### ASSIGNMENT OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION SITUATIONS

When completing the questionnaire, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the three groups. Each group was presented with a set of four hypothetical vignettes describing incidents of interpersonal, institutional, or cultural discrimination. These vignettes were adopted from Utsey and Ponterotto's (1996) validation study of the index of race-related stress (IRRS) and consisted of the items that generated the highest factor component loadings on their respective factors (i.e., individual [interpersonal] discrimination, institutional discrimination, cultural discrimination). For interpersonal

discrimination, the vignettes described being treated as if unintelligent, being ignored when shopping, being followed by security when shopping, and having salespeople assume that one was unable to afford certain items. The institutional discrimination vignettes described being passed over for an important project at work, discovering a similarly qualified coworker is being paid with a higher wage, not protesting against racist jokes out of fear of retribution, and holding back angry feelings for fear of being accused of having a *chip* on one's shoulder. The cultural discrimination vignettes described observing negative images of Black people in the media, noticing crimes committed by Black people being portrayed as savagery, witnessing minimal consequences for crimes committed against Black people, and hearing racist remarks by non-Blacks in positions of authority.

In order to help elicit the best approximation of their coping strategy use, the participants were then instructed to select one vignette that best described a situation they had experienced in their lifetime. When participants did not identify with any of the vignettes presented by the researchers, they were instructed to provide a description of a racial discrimination incident that they had either experienced or witnessed. These responses were then categorized according to the type of racial discrimination described. At the end of data collection, 63 of the respondents were assigned to the interpersonal discrimination group, 62 were assigned to the institutional discrimination group, and 65 were assigned to the cultural discrimination group.

## MEASURES

Each participant was administered a questionnaire package consisting of the following measures (see Table 1).

### INTEGRATED COPING MEASURE (ICM)

The coping strategy indicator (CSI; Amirkhan, 1990) and the Africultural coping systems inventory (ACSI; Utsey, Adams, et al., 2000) were combined to create a comprehensive coping measure that encompasses both general and Africultural coping strategies, referred to as the integrated coping measure (ICM). The original CSI (33 items) was composed of three subscales (i.e., problem solving, avoidance, and social support) scaled on a 4-point Likert-type scale. The original ACSI (30 items) was composed of four subscales (i.e., cognitive/emotional debriefing, spiritual-centered coping, collective coping, and ritual-centered coping) scaled on a 3-point Likert-type scale. In order to avoid items with overlapping content, only the problem solving subscale of the CSI was added to the entire ACSI to create the

**TABLE 1**  
**Internal Consistency Reliability and Mean Scores of Measures**

	$\alpha$	<i>Mean (SD)</i>			
		<i>Total Sample (N = 190)</i>	<i>Interpersonal Discrimination Group (n = 63)</i>	<i>Institutional Discrimination Group (n = 62)</i>	<i>Cultural Discrimination Group (n = 65)</i>
<b>ICM</b>					
Problem solving	.87	24.1 (5.5)	22.8 (5.6)	24.2 (5.3)	25.2 (5.4)
Cognitive/emotional debriefing	.90	14.9 (8.1)	14.4 (9.1)	14.4 (7.5)	15.8 (7.6)
Spiritual-centered coping	.90	9.85 (6.8)	9.4 (6.8)	9.7 (6.8)	10.5 (7.0)
Collective coping	.87	12.81 (6.3)	12.3 (6.7)	12.8 (6.3)	13.6 (6.1)
Ritual-centered coping	.85	1.73 (2.2)	2.7 (1.9)	1.6 (2.1)	1.9 (2.6)
<b>MCSD</b>	.24	5.98 (2.9)	6.2 (2.9)	5.4 (2.8)	6.4 (2.9)
<b>ASC</b>	.79	205.6 (27.2)	203.0 (24.1)	212.3 (32.1)	201.6 (24.1)
<b>IRRS-B: global racism</b>	.88	0.0 (2.71)	-0.2 (2.4)	0.2 (3.14)	0.0 (2.6)

NOTE: ICM = Integrated Coping Measure; MCSD = Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale; ASC = African Self-Consciousness Scale; IRRS-B = Index of Race-related Stress Brief Version.

final version of the ICM. Thus, the final version of the ICM assessed (a) general problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies represented by the problem solving (11 items; CSI) and cognitive/emotional debriefing (11 items; ACSI) subscales, respectively and (b) Africultural coping strategies represented by the spiritual-centered coping (8 items; ACSI), collective coping (8 items; ACSI), and ritual-centered coping (3 items; ACSI) subscales. Higher scores on each subscale suggest a tendency to utilize the associated coping strategy.

#### MARLOWE-CROWNE SOCIAL DESIRABILITY SCALE

The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale-Form C (MCSD-C; Reynolds, 1982) was used in the present study to control for the participants' tendency to minimize socially undesirable responses. The 13-item, forced-choice measure describes behaviors that are undesirable but true of almost everyone. The total score ranges from 0 to 13, where ascending scores suggest an increasing tendency to conceal undesirable personal reactions despite reports of adequate internal consistency for this measure (Cronbach's alphas ranging from .62 to .89; Fischer & Fick, 1993; Loo & Thorpe, 2000; Reynolds, 1982), in the present study the Cronbach's alpha of the MCSD-C was low. The authors suspect that this discrepancy in the reliability of the measure may be a function of sample characteristics.

Previous validation studies of the MCSD-C were conducted mainly with Caucasian university student sample in the United States. By contrast, the present study primarily focused on community-dwelling Black Canadians. Therefore, the results of the MCSD-C needed to be interpreted with caution.

#### AFRICAN SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS SCALE

The African Self-Consciousness Scale (ASC; Baldwin & Bell, 1985) was administered to measure the participants' Africentric cultural orientation. Accounting for African self-consciousness was deemed important to accurately control for the heterogeneity of Africentric values and beliefs among the participants, which the researchers suspected would significantly influence the respondents' degree of preference for Africultural coping. The 42-item ASC is a questionnaire designed according to Baldwin's (1976) Africentric theory of Black personality, which stipulates that African self-consciousness plays a critical role in all aspects of the psychological functioning and behavior of people of African descent (Baldwin & Bell, 1985). Responses are indicated on an 8-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 8 (*strongly agree*). Total scores range from 42 to 336, where higher scores indicate a greater awareness of African cultural heritage, the need for Black survival, and a proactive approach toward Black issues (Boatswain & Lalonde, 2000). Various studies have reported internal consistency of the ASC to range from  $\alpha = .70$  to  $\alpha = .86$  (Baldwin & Bell, 1985; Kelly & Floyd, 2001; Stokes, Murray, Peacock, & Kaiser, 1994).

#### INDEX OF RACE-RELATED STRESS-BRIEF VERSION

In order to control for the participant's baseline race-related stress, the brief version of the Index of Race-Related Stress (IRRS-B; Utsey, 1999) was administered. This scale assesses stress due to racism and racial discrimination experienced either personally by respondents themselves or vicariously through the respondents' family members or close friends (Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996). The IRRS-B consists of 22 items with three subscales scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale: cultural racism, institutional racism, and individual (i.e., interpersonal) racism. The cultural racism subscale (10 items) assesses racist experiences resulting when a person's culture or race is maligned or attacked. The institutional racism subscale (6 items) measures the experiences of racism as a result of institutional policies. The individual racism subscale (6 items) measures interpersonal discrimination in face-to-face encounters. In the present study, each participant was instructed to rate the intensity of their emotional reaction to

racist experiences they encountered within the past year. A global racism score was calculated by totaling the weighted value (converted to *z*-scores) of each subscale, where higher scores reflect increasing levels of race-related stress.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

A demographic sheet was administered to collect the participants' background information. The questions included gender, age, country of birth, immigration status, racial background of biological parents, generation status, marital status, employment status, highest level of education completed, and family socioeconomic status of the participants.

#### DATA ANALYTIC PLAN

In preliminary analyses, the data were first evaluated for adherence to parametric assumptions (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Subsequently, ANOVA was conducted to determine whether the groups of participants who responded to the three types of racial discrimination (i.e., institutional, interpersonal, cultural) differed on the following categorical demographic variables: gender, age, place of birth, level of education, household income, employment status, marital status, generation status, and immigration status. Furthermore, MANCOVA and ANOVA were conducted to determine whether the categorical demographic variables influenced coping strategy ratings (i.e., problem solving, cognitive/emotional debriefing, spiritual-centred coping, ritual-centred coping, collective coping). Scores on the ASC, MCSD-C, and Past Year Global Racism Scales were used as covariates to control for the varying degrees of Africentric orientations, impression management, and past experiences of racism among the participants.

The main analytic technique consisted of profile analysis, a special application of MANOVA used to simultaneously compare the pattern of responses of two or more groups measured on several different scales. Profile analysis complements the study design by providing tests of the main effects of the type of racial discrimination and of the coping subscales, as well as their interaction. This technique has the advantage over one-way between-subjects conceptualization of the study design, which would only test of the main effect of type of racial discrimination on the combined coping subscales (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

In the present study, profile analysis was performed using the three racial discrimination groups (i.e., interpersonal discrimination, institutional discrimination, and cultural discrimination) as the independent variable.

Profile analysis requires each dependent variable to have the same range of possible values and meaning. Consequently, the scores on the five coping subscales of the ICM were converted to  $z$ -scores to achieve consistency in scaling between the subscale that was adopted from the CSI (i.e., problem solving) and the remaining subscales that were adopted from the ACSI. African self-consciousness, social desirability and past year race-related stress scores were used as covariates to control the within-group, individual, and cultural differences among the participants.

Profile analysis generates multivariate statistics to test for the significance of main effects (flatness), between-subject effects (levels), and interaction effects (parallelism; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). In the present study, the test of flatness addresses Hypothesis 1: *Black Canadians employ both general and Africultural coping strategies in response to interpersonal, institutional, and cultural discrimination*. This test determines whether the coping strategy ratings elicit the same average response, regardless of the type of racial discrimination. The tests of levels and parallelism address Hypothesis 2: *There are differences in the types of coping strategies employed by Black Canadians to deal with cultural, institutional, and interpersonal discrimination*. The test of levels determines whether one racial discrimination group, on average, scores higher on the collected set of coping strategy scores than the other groups and the test of parallelism determines whether different types of racial discrimination elicit similar patterns of coping strategy scores. Profile analysis also generates profile plots that illustrate the mean scores and interactions between the different types of coping strategies and racial discrimination, where parallel lines indicate no interaction and intersecting lines indicate interaction among the variables.

## RESULTS

### PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

An analysis (ANOVA) was conducted and found no significant differences on the key demographic variables among the respondents across the three types of racial discrimination vignettes. Analyses (i.e., MANCOVAs) were also conducted to assess whether the categorical demographic variables influenced rating on the five coping subscales of the ICM. Only educational status was found to have an effect on the problem solving coping subscale. A subsequent ANOVA was performed to explore which coping strategies were being affected by this relationship. This procedure showed a significant effect for educational status on problem solving coping strategy ratings,  $F(8, 172) = 2.27, p < .05$ . Thus, educational status appeared to

have a specific effect on problem solving coping strategy ratings. This finding held true when the covariables were controlled among the entire sample,  $F(7, 159) = 2.202, p < .05$ . However, when the sample was divided into the interpersonal discrimination,  $F(6, 48) = .501, p = .81$ , institutional discrimination,  $F(7, 41) = 1.868, p = .10$ , and cultural discrimination groups,  $F(6, 50) = 1.135, p = .356$ , the specific effect of educational status on problem solving coping strategies disappeared.

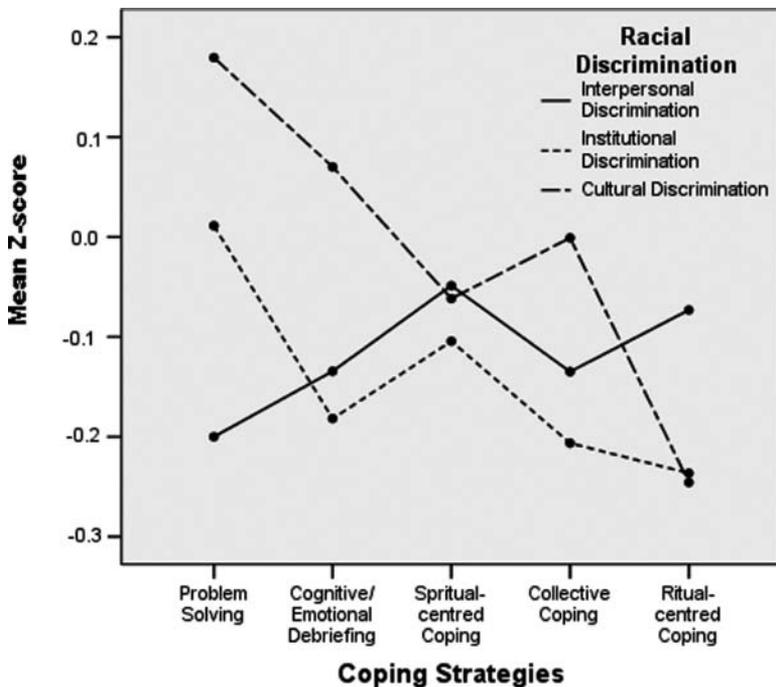
#### MAIN ANALYSIS

For Hypothesis 1, the goal of the analysis was to determine whether Black Canadians adopt general coping strategies and Africultural coping strategies concurrently in dealing with racial discrimination. The test of flatness revealed a significant main effect for coping: Pillai's trace = .156,  $F(4, 153) = 7.085, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .156$ ; Wilks's  $\Lambda = .844, F(4, 153) = 7.085, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .156$ ; Hotelling's trace  $\eta_p^2 = .185, F(4, 153) = 7.085, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .156$ ; and Roy's largest root = .185,  $F(4, 153) = 7.085, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .156$ . In other words, the results indicated that Black Canadian participants utilized the similar coping mechanism differently across the three racial discrimination scenarios. As indicated in Figure 1, problem solving coping, cognitive/emotional debriefing, spiritual-centered coping, collective coping, and ritual-centered coping were all endorsed as strategies used to cope with racial discrimination. *z*-Scores means displayed in Table 2 indicate that problem solving coping was the most frequently endorsed coping strategy used in confronting cultural and institutional discrimination and the least frequently endorsed coping strategy in dealing with interpersonal discrimination. By contrast, ritual-centered coping produced the opposite effect across the discrimination scenarios. Therefore, the overall findings from the multivariate test of flatness and profile plot supported Hypothesis 1. As hypothesized, Black Canadians utilize a combination of general and Africultural coping strategies to manage the stress associated with racial discrimination of varying natures.

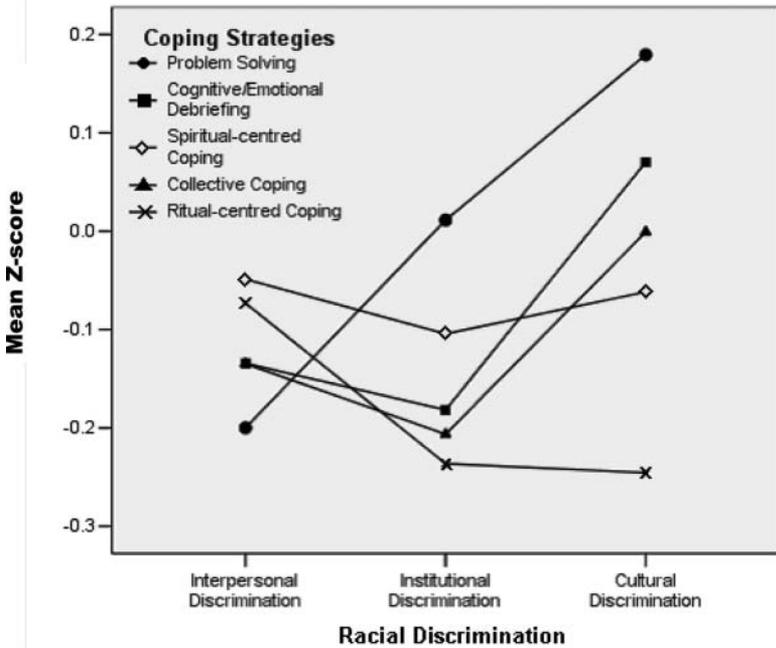
For Hypothesis 2, the goal of the analysis was to identify differential patterns of coping by Black Canadians associated with the three types of racial discrimination. The test of levels demonstrated that, on average, there were significant group differences,  $F(2, 156) = .716, p = .490, \eta_p^2 = .009$ . This finding suggested that coping preferences of Black Canadians were dependent on the type of racial discrimination encountered. The test of parallelism demonstrated a significant interaction effect based on Roy's largest root = .077,  $F(4, 154) = 2.950, p = .022, \eta_p^2 = .071$ , a statistic that separates the interpersonal discrimination group from the institutional discrimination and

**TABLE 2**  
**Coping Strategy z-Score Means by Racial Discrimination Group**

Coping Strategies	Mean z-Scores		
	Interpersonal Discrimination Group	Institutional Discrimination Group	Cultural Discrimination Group
Problem solving	-0.20	0.11	0.18
Cognitive/emotional debriefing	-0.13	-0.18	0.07
Spiritual-centered coping	-0.05	-0.10	-0.06
Collective coping	-0.13	-0.21	0.00
Ritual-centered coping	-0.07	-0.24	-0.25



**Figure 1: Profile Plot of Coping Strategies for Three Types of Racial Discrimination**



**Figure 2: Profile Plot of Coping Strategies for Three Types of Racial Discrimination: Inverted Axes**

cultural discrimination groups. Together, findings from the test of levels and parallelism suggested that the coping strategies utilized in interpersonal discrimination differed significantly from the coping strategies used in institutional and cultural discrimination. A visual inspection of Figure 2 further supports this interpretation.

Based on the test of parallelism, unplanned comparisons were then performed to pinpoint the source of variability. Using ANOVA, the simple effect for the types of racial discrimination was examined separately for each coping strategy. Three contrasts were conducted to test whether (a) the interpersonal discrimination group was significantly different from the institutional discrimination and cultural discrimination groups, (b) the interpersonal discrimination group was significantly different from the institutional discrimination group, and (c) the interpersonal discrimination group was significantly different from the cultural discrimination group. The modified Bonferroni technique (Keppel, 1991) was applied to control for family-wise Type I error,

and a more stringent  $\alpha$  level (.0167) was applied to test for each comparison. Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant and the null hypothesis that the groups have equal variances was accepted.

The test of contrasts demonstrated that the interpersonal discrimination group scored significantly less on the Problem Solving Coping Scale than the institutional discrimination and cultural discrimination groups,  $t(1, 183) = 2.479, p < .0167$ . Furthermore, the score on problem solving coping associated with interpersonal discrimination differed significantly from the score on the same subscale for the cultural discrimination,  $t(1, 183) = -1.669, p < .0167$ . Therefore, for Black Canadians, the problem-focused strategies were the least preferred coping option when dealing with interpersonal discrimination but were the most preferred coping option when managing cultural discrimination. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was supported by the overall findings from the multivariate tests of levels, parallelism, and follow-up analysis. These findings demonstrated that the strategies selected to cope with racial discrimination depend on the nature and the context of the incident.

## DISCUSSION

The objective of the present study was to explore the strategies used by Black Canadians to cope with different types of racial discrimination.

*Hypothesis 1:* Black Canadians employ both general and Africultural coping strategies in responding to interpersonal, institutional, and cultural discrimination.

The results of the present study showed that Black Canadians utilize a wide spectrum of coping strategies including problem solving, cognitive/emotional debriefing, spiritual-based, collective, and ritual-based methods to respond to racial discrimination. In this regard, the present study helps clarify the findings in previous, non-culture-based research on coping with racial discrimination among people of African descent. For example, the results of Plummer and Slane's (1996) study indicated that African Americans were less likely to use problem-focused and emotion-focused coping when dealing with race-related stressors than when dealing with generic life stresses and hassles. Such a finding might be easily misconstrued as indifference or passivity on the part of African Americans in the face of racial discrimination. On the contrary, the results of the present study showed that Black Canadians in fact adopted a broad array of coping methods in managing racial discrimination, including general and Africultural strategies. It appears that Black Canadians do possess a variety of psychological resources, many of

which are deeply rooted in African cultural traditions, customs, and practices. This finding speaks to the complexity and diversity of coping for people of African descent. It further underscores the importance of employing a cultural framework in studying the stress-coping process among members of ethnic minorities, including specific race-related stressors and other general life hassles (Kuo et al., 2006; Utsey et al., 2008; Wong & Wong, 2006).

*Hypothesis 2:* There are differences in the types of coping strategies employed by Black Canadians to deal with cultural, institutional, and interpersonal discrimination.

The results of the current study demonstrated that Black Canadians' selection of coping strategies vary according to the nature of racial discrimination. The characteristics of the coping profiles pointed to a hierarchy of context-dependent preferences for coping strategies among Black Canadians within the domain of racial discrimination. In terms of interpersonal discrimination, spiritual-centered coping strategies were used more often by Black Canadians, followed by ritual-centered coping, and then by collective coping and cognitive/emotional debriefing. problem solving coping was the least preferred response to interpersonal discrimination. This finding was inconsistent with Lewis-Coles and Constantine's (2006) report of no association between race-related stress of an interpersonal nature and Africultural coping strategies among African Americans. However, Utsey, Ponterotto, et al. (2000) indicated a similar preference for avoidance (i.e., passive) coping strategies among African Americans dealing with interpersonal discrimination.

With respect to coping with institutional discrimination, the results of the current study indicated that Black Canadians tend to use problem solving coping most often, followed by spiritual-centered coping, cognitive/emotional debriefing, collective coping, and ritual-centered coping. Although the results of this study did not indicate a marked preference for any particular coping strategy among Black Canadians dealing with institutional discrimination, there was an apparent trend toward using spiritual-centered coping strategies before cognitive/emotional debriefing and collective coping strategies. This trend parallels Lewis-Coles and Constantine's (2006) report of the relative importance of these coping strategies for African Americans facing institutional discrimination.

When responding to cultural discrimination, the current study demonstrated that problem solving coping was most preferred by the Black Canadians, followed by cognitive/emotional debriefing coping, collective coping, spiritual-centered coping, and ritual-centered coping. This finding

presents a departure from existing literature that suggests race-related stress of a cultural nature predicts greater use of collective coping strategies (e.g., social support) among African Americans (Constantine, Donnelly, & Myers, 2002; Daly et al., 1995; Lalonde, Majumder, & Parris, 1995; Lewis-Coles & Constantine, 2006; Utsey, Ponterotto, et al., 2000; Utsey, Bolden, Lanier, & Williams, 2007).

Although all five coping strategies assessed in the current study were utilized across the racial discrimination situations, the results of the profile analysis indicate clear preferences for some strategies over the others depending on the nature of discrimination. In particular, the results showed that Black Canadians were least likely to adopt problem solving coping when confronted with interpersonal discrimination and most likely to adopt problem solving coping strategies when responding to cultural discrimination.

The context-specific nature of coping used by Black Canadians can be conceptually explained by the personal/group discrimination discrepancy phenomenon (PGDD; Ruggiero, 1999; Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990). This phenomenon refers to the tendency for individuals to perceive racial discrimination directed at one's group, as in the case of cultural discrimination, as being more severe than discrimination directed at oneself, as in the case of interpersonal discrimination (Lalonde et al., 1995). According to the PGDD, people of African descent may be more attuned to incidents of cultural discrimination because these events pose collective threat to the group being targeted. Thus, this awareness and sensitivity might prompt them to counteract the incidents with direct action, namely problem-focused coping strategies.

On the other hand, the PGDD points to individuals' tendency to deny or downplay experiences with racial discrimination that have occurred at an interpersonal level. This tendency to minimize the salience of interpersonal discrimination is conceptually aligned with emotion-focused coping (e.g., avoidance, cognitive/emotional debriefing). The use of emotion-focused strategies may be necessary for the psychological survival of individuals of African descent. These attempts can help reduce the emotional burdens associated with being unable to act directly against injustice (Taylor & Dubé, 1986) or being under the control of the dominant group (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995, 1997). For Black Canadian respondents in the current study, the risks and costs associated with direct coping actions aimed at altering the interpersonal discriminatory situations might simply be too overwhelming as compared to the alternative options of emotion-focused and/or Africultural coping.

## LIMITATIONS

The findings of the present study should be viewed with the following limitations in mind. First, the current study operated under the assumption that the discrimination vignettes presented to the participants were realistic enough to elicit accurate reporting of coping strategy use. However, the correspondence between participants' self-report and actual coping behavior were nonetheless assumed and not actually measured. Despite the support for scenario-based approach to assess coping as noted by some (Kuo et al. 2006), the extent to which their coping responses truly reflect actual coping behaviors can not be ascertained at this point.

Second, while the present study controlled for the within-group variability among the participants in terms of their African self-consciousness, their orientations toward the dominant Canadian culture and values (i.e., acculturation) were not accounted for. Acculturation has been shown to mediate coping preferences among members of ethnic groups (Kuo et al., 2006; Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987). Given that Black Canadians and African Americans must operate in the dominant society in addition to one's own ethnic family and community contexts, their extent of acculturation to European Canadian and American values would likely influence their coping patterns. Future coping research would benefit from a more complete evaluation of both Africentric and Eurocentric cultural orientations of Black Canadians and African Americans.

Third, the use of a convenience sample in the present study requires cautious interpretation about the generalizability of its findings to Black Canadians as well as African Americans. The participants, though demographically representative of Black Canadians, were not selected randomly. Thus, the possibility that individuals who participated in this study systematically differ from those who declined raises the issue of potential self-selection bias. Furthermore, while Black Canadians' contemporary experiences of racial discrimination have been found to parallel those of African Americans in many ways, the individuals' reactions to racial incidents may be uniquely shaped by the intraracial and interracial dynamics in each community within their respective countries (Smith & Lalonde, 2003). For example, Canada's longstanding vision of multiculturalism has encouraged Canadian racial ethnic minorities to retain their cultural heritage, whereas the increasingly apparent diversity within the United States has more recently contributed to the rise of American pluralistic ideals (Boatswain & Lalonde, 2000). Furthermore, the proportion of Black Canadians in Canada (2.2%) is considerably smaller than that of African Americans in the United States (12.3%; Statistics Canada, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Thus, it would be valuable for future research to replicate the present study

with samples of African descent from Canada, the United States, and/or other communities in the African diaspora to allow further comment on the generalizability of the current study's findings.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This study joins the increasing number of cultural coping studies (e.g., Lam & Zane, 2004; Utsey, Ponterotto, et al., 2000; Utsey et al., 2004; Wester et al., 2006) in offering empirical evidence for cultural variations and dimensions of stress and coping process among ethnic minority individuals (Bhagat et al., in press; Kuo et al., 2006). Along with this emerging body of research, the present study suggests that the general, individualistically-based coping paradigm alone is inadequate in fully capturing the coping mechanism and process of racially and culturally-diverse individuals, including people of African descent.

It appears that Africultural coping and stress appraisal might be interacting with other types of coping methods. For example, the collective coping strategy of confiding in other Black Canadians about the discriminatory event could either evoke a decision to act against the discriminatory event or person with direct action (i.e., problem-focused coping) based on the advice of the in-group members or to do the opposite by withdrawing oneself from confronting the incident (emotion-focused coping) because sufficient support has been received from the in-group members to offset the stress (Lalonde et al., 1995). Although speculative, this interpretation might reconcile some of the divergent findings between the current study and the existing literature concerning the people of African descent's preferred strategies for coping with cultural discrimination. Accordingly, it might be argued that Africultural stress responses may serve as the foundational, primary appraisal basis on which the secondary, general coping strategies might be evaluated and adopted in response to racial discrimination.

To date, the empirical models for how people of African descent and other minorities groups cope with the threats and challenges of racial discrimination remain very scarce (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Outlaw, 1993). Understanding the influences of cultural and situational factors on the coping patterns of people of African descent would significantly enhance our knowledge about the psychological responses and consequences of discrimination. Future research should continue to focus on identifying the specific mechanisms that guide people of African descent in selecting and adopting behavioral and cognitive coping responses to racial discrimination. This line of research will eventually lead to a culturally informed model of stress and coping (Kuo et al., 2006) that can account for the

unique experiences and characteristics of people of African descent in the coping process (Anderson, 1991).

Future coping research of people of African descent should also examine the influence of cultural mistrust and its impact on the appraisal of discrimination-based stressors. Cultural mistrust refers to suspicions or beliefs on the part of individuals of African descent about the trustworthiness and fairness of members of the dominant group (Terrell & Terrell, 1981). While moderate levels of cultural mistrust have been linked to psychological well-being among people of African descent, low and high levels of cultural mistrust has been found to be detrimental to psychological health (Bell & Tracey, 2006). Therefore, it stands to reason that one's degree of cultural mistrust would either mediate or moderate the process of coping with race-related stress. This line of research would enable researchers to assess the extent to which cultural mistrust shapes an individual's primary appraisal of an apparent race-related event with regards to its threat and relevance, the controllability of the incident, and subsequently the secondary appraisal of one's available coping resources.

It would also be beneficial for future coping research to explore anticipatory coping behaviors in response to racial discrimination (Utsey, Ponterotto, et al., 2000). This line of study would help determine how and what strategies are being adopted by people of African descent to protect themselves from becoming a potential target of discrimination before it actually occurs (i.e., job interview, searching for housing). Coping, in this regard, is considered proactive rather than reactive and is expected to affect the appraisal process of the anticipated race-related event.

In terms of practice implications, the findings of the present study remind mental health providers who are working with individuals of African descent to engage in a culturally responsive therapy approach. In working with populations of African descent, clinicians should carefully consider clients' full repertoire coping strategies from a broad, cultural perspective that include general (etic) as well as Africultural (emic) coping resources. Clinicians need to be cognizant that certain coping strategies might be more culturally viable and acceptable to individuals of African descent with respect to certain type of discrimination but not to others. As such, a thorough exploration of clients' culturally-appropriate coping options is indicated.

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