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Subtle yet significant: The existence and impact of everyday racial discrimination in the workplace

Elizabeth A. Deitch, Adam Barsky, Rebecca M. Butz, Suzanne Chan, Arthur P. Brief and Jill C. Bradley

ABSTRACT   In this article, we argue that research concerning workplace discrimination could be advanced by considering 'everyday discrimination,' that is, the subtle, pervasive discriminatory acts experienced by members of stigmatized groups on a daily basis. Three studies are reported which use secondary data analysis techniques to provide evidence for the existence of everyday workplace discrimination against Blacks. In addition to demonstrating the occurrence of such discrimination, evidence is presented which indicates that the experience of everyday discrimination is negatively associated with various indicators of well-being. The implications of these findings for organizations and for discrimination researchers are discussed.

KEYWORDS   discrimination ▪ job satisfaction ▪ racism ▪ well-being

As the diversity of the American workforce increases, organizational researchers have been increasingly interested in issues of discrimination and prejudice on the job. Much of this research has focused on the perpetrators of discriminatory acts in the workplace and their prejudices (e.g. Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Frazer & Wiersma, 2001; Trentham & Larwood, 1998). Only recently have the experiences of the targets of discrimination become a focus of study. Some studies have shown that members of culturally stigmatized groups (i.e. those whose social identity is devalued in the context

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of dominant American culture; Crocker & Major, 1989) often face discrimination in the workplace, with detrimental personal effects (e.g. Sanchez & Brock, 1996; Schneider et al., 2000). However, we argue that previous studies of workplace discrimination have failed to adequately sample the range of discriminatory events experienced by stigmatized individuals on the job. Such failure to sample the range of discrimination may lead to underestimation of both the prevalence and personal consequences of workplace discrimination. Focusing on Black Americans, we examine 'everyday' discrimination, those subtle and pervasive manifestations of racism faced by Blacks on a daily basis (Essed, 1991) in the workplace. We use secondary data analysis to assess the presence of everyday racism in the workplace in an unobtrusive manner and determine its impact on well-being.

The remainder of the article unfolds as follows. First, we update the organizational literature on workplace discrimination to include the concept of everyday discrimination. Specifically, we highlight the need to incorporate a more modern perspective, one that treats racism as subtle and discrimination as both ambiguous and pervasive, into the more traditional focus on rare but egregious discriminatory acts in the workplace perpetrated by individuals with blatantly racist attitudes. Next, we argue that everyday discrimination is manifested at work in the form of subtle acts of mistreatment experienced disproportionately by minority group members. Following the explication of the nature of everyday discrimination, we propose that discrimination of this type has negative consequences for the well-being of victims. Finally, using archival data from three samples, we empirically demonstrate both the existence of everyday discrimination, and also the corresponding negative impact on the job-related and nonjob-related well-being of recipients.

The existence of everyday discrimination

Before delving into the concept of everyday discrimination, we briefly describe what may be considered a more 'traditional' focus on discrimination. Most studies of discrimination focus on relatively rare, major events, such as the denial of housing or employment (e.g. Valentine et al., 1999). These incidents are certainly negative events in the lives of those who experience them; however, the discrimination faced by stigmatized group members, such as racial minorities, is far more pervasive than the study of major discriminatory events would lead one to believe (Swim et al., 1998). We believe that the singular attention to major discriminatory acts in the workplace is insufficient to explain the experience of discrimination many minority members

experience on the job, and may be an increasingly inadequate research focus in the future as the social and political landscape shifts toward newer forms of racism and discrimination. For example, to the extent that racial attitudes account for discriminatory acts, changes in racial attitudes would precipitate a change in the nature of discrimination. Thus, subtle, everyday discrimination may become even more common, as blatant racism becomes less prevalent among dominant group members. There is substantial evidence that expressions of blatant racism (e.g. 'Blacks are inherently inferior') have become less socially acceptable in recent years, and Americans are less willing to publicly endorse such beliefs (Bobo, 1998).

Research, however, has shown that racism is not disappearing, but rather is being replaced by less overt forms, termed, for example, 'modern racism' (McConahay, 1986), 'aversive racism' (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986) or 'ambivalent racism' (Katz & Hass, 1988). These forms of racism allow for individuals to hold racist views while buttressing such views with non-racially based rationales (e.g. beliefs in opportunity and individual mobility), thus maintaining a view of themselves as nonprejudiced.[1] But despite modern racists' assertions that they are not 'prejudiced,' modern racist views can predict discriminatory behaviors (e.g. Brief & Barsky, 2000; Brief et al., 2000; Monteith, 1996). Because these people do not view themselves as 'racists,' they are unlikely to engage in overt expressions of prejudice, such as racial slurs, but they do engage in more subtle discriminatory behaviors, such as avoidance of Blacks, 'closed' and unfriendly verbal and nonverbal communication, or failure to provide assistance – what Pettigrew and Martin (1987) refer to as 'microaggressions' by Whites against Blacks. Thus, as modern racism tends to displace blatant racism, the forms of discrimination encountered by Blacks may shift from 'big,' explicit discriminatory events to the more subtle, everyday forms of discrimination being investigated here. This point is elucidated by Essed's (1991) work with Blacks focusing on 'everyday racism,' which she maintains constitutes the 'lived experience' of being Black. Everyday encounters with prejudice are not rare instances but are familiar and recurrent patterns of being devalued in many varied ways and across different contexts. Thus, the modern nature of racial attitudes suggests that to focus solely on major discriminatory acts is insufficient to capture the experience of discrimination.

In addition to changes in racial attitudes, changes in the political and legal landscape likely discourage overt forms of discrimination in the workplace and prompt subtler manifestations of prejudice (Dovidio et al., 2001). Stone et al. (1992) point out that obtrusive research on workplace discrimination, for example, asking participants to make hiring or personnel evaluation decisions, has yielded contradictory results, with many studies showing

no effect or counter-intuitive effects (i.e. Blacks rated higher than Whites). However, more unobtrusive studies, examining criteria such as helping or various nonverbal behaviors, show a consistent picture of racial discrimination in workplace interactions. Thus, perhaps due to federal laws and EEOC guidelines, Whites may be sensitized to blatant discriminatory acts in the workplace and attempt to avoid them, yet more subtle, 'everyday' forms of discrimination may persist largely unchecked.

Not only may everyday racism be more prevalent than discrimination that can be characterized as blatant and major, but its consequences for victimized individuals may be equally, if not more, profound. Indeed, D. Williams et al. (1997), in studying a blend of economic (i.e. work-related) and noneconomic forms of discrimination, observed that a 'measure of everyday discrimination was a more consistent and robust predictor of health status than [a] measure of major experiences with discrimination' (p. 348).

Everyday discrimination and mistreatment

Clearly, the above suggests the necessity of examining everyday, more 'minor', forms of discrimination; however, we could not locate a single study of everyday discrimination focused in the workplace. Measuring everyday discrimination in the workplace presents an interesting challenge in and of itself. Typically, studies of workplace discrimination only directly ask individuals whether they feel they have been discriminated against on the job (e.g. Sanchez & Brock, 1996) (for an exception encompassing both economic and noneconomic forms of everyday discrimination, see D. Williams et al., 1997). This type of approach may lead to over- or under-reporting of discriminatory events for two reasons. First, incidents of discrimination often are attributionally ambiguous; that is, people cannot be certain whether the negative treatment they receive is due to their race or gender, or some other reason (e.g. Barrett & Swim, 1998; Crocker et al., 1998). This attributional ambiguity may be even greater with minor, pervasive discrimination than with major, blatant events. Given such ambiguity, questions referencing discrimination actually may be measuring people's propensities to make attributions to prejudice, rather than differential treatment per se. For example, Gomez and Trierweiler (2001) found evidence suggesting that people's informal theories about discrimination may influence their reports of events when specifically primed to think about 'discrimination.' Thus, if the propensity to make attributions to prejudice is high, over-reporting of incidents may occur.

Second, the fundamental 'everyday-ness' of everyday discrimination

may lead to a failure to note consciously regularly experienced incidents and attribute them to racism, or to difficulty in differentiating and itemizing incidents. However, as we have implied, even if people do not expressly report that they have been 'discriminated against,' such incidents may still have an impact. Schneider et al. (1997) found that women who reported various sexually harassing incidents in the workplace (such as sexist jokes or touching) exhibited negative psychological effects, regardless of whether they answered in the affirmative to the explicit question of whether they had been sexually harassed at work. That is, even if they thought the incidents too minor or ambiguous to label as 'sexual harassment,' they still were affected negatively – in fact, just as negatively affected as those women who labeled such incidents as harassment. A similar situation may occur when researchers ask Blacks whether they have been 'discriminated against;' Blacks may not report minor or ambiguous incidents, and may not even internally categorize those incidents as discrimination, but they still may experience negative outcomes as a result.

As indicated earlier, discriminatory acts commonly are *attributionally* ambiguous, meaning that individuals have trouble assigning a motivation to a behavior. Thus, an individual may know that he or she was mistreated, such as being excluded from a group activity, and consequently report the instance. However, he or she may not want or be able to label that exclusion as 'discrimination.' Therefore, as observed by Schneider et al. (1997), the questions 'were you left out?' and 'were you left out because you are Black?' may elicit two very different responses. This presents a conundrum for researchers that must be solved with some methodological ingenuity, as using self-reported discrimination to assess the construct of everyday discrimination is clearly problematic. Therefore, one must assess the existence of everyday discrimination in the workplace in an indirect, unobtrusive manner, without requiring respondents to decide whether specific incidents constitute discrimination. If everyday discrimination were present, then one would expect that the experience of mistreatment, uncontaminated by the attribution of discrimination, would be more common among Blacks than Whites. Consistent with this perspective, in three studies using secondary data, we assessed the extent to which everyday racism could be detected merely by examining whether Blacks and Whites differentially report that they are treated unfairly at work (for example, a failure of supervisors to provide the information necessary to adequately do one's job) without explicitly asking whether such treatment is due to discrimination. Everyday discrimination would be indicated if these reports of unfair treatment, or mistreatment, varied as a function of race. Thus, our first hypothesis was as follows:

> *Hypothesis 1: Blacks will report more mistreatment in the workplace than will Whites.*

Everyday discrimination and well-being

The neglect of everyday discrimination by organizational researchers might imply that such 'minor' incidents are assumed to be not particularly important, in terms of impact on the lives of minorities. We do not believe that such an assumption is warranted. On the contrary, the earlier cited results of D. Williams et al. (1997), as well as recent popular press publications such as, *It's the little things: The everyday interactions that get under the skin of Blacks and Whites* (L. Williams, 2001), suggest that little everyday incidents can have large consequences. Although 'everyday' incidents may be less severe forms of discrimination, they are likely to be far, far more frequent. If one perceives that discrimination and bias against one's racial group are pervasive in one's environment, feelings of hopelessness and resignation can result (Branscombe et al., 1999). Furthermore, incidents of everyday discrimination may have a cumulative impact on the lives of individuals, in ways that studies of major discriminatory events do not assess (Swim et al., 1998). Swim et al. (2001) found that 'everyday' sexist incidents had psychological ramifications for women, with exposure to sexist incidents associated with more anger and depression, and lower self-esteem. We expect that incidents of everyday racism similarly impact the lives of Black Americans, leading to dysfunctional psychological outcomes.

There is a growing recognition that encounters with discrimination are stressors in the lives of stigmatized individuals. A 'stressor' is some event that taxes an individual's adaptive resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As Miller and Kaiser (2001) point out, discrimination is taxing because it impedes access to opportunities and adversely affects interpersonal interactions, resulting in psychological and physiological stress responses, such as negative emotions and heightened blood pressure. Furthermore, they noted that the ambiguous nature of many discriminatory events may exacerbate the stressful encounter. Crocker et al. (1991) found that attributional ambiguity regarding feedback about one's performance in cross-race evaluation situations is damaging to the self-esteem of Blacks. In addition, Schneider et al. (2000) found that individuals who reported ethnic harassment incidents consisting only of 'exclusion' (e.g. being excluded from work-related or social interactions due to ethnicity) exhibited more negative personal and organizational outcomes than those who experienced both exclusion and verbal ethnic harassment (e.g. ethnic slurs or derogatory comments). This result suggests that it may be less stressful to be subjected to negative

treatment that is clearly the result of prejudice (because clear verbal racism has also been expressed) than mistreatment that has no such unambiguous cause (e.g. being excluded but not entirely certain whether racism is the reason). Thus, as incidents of everyday racism are likely to be more attributionally ambiguous than blatant discrimination, they may be especially significant stressors in spite of their seemingly minor nature.

The stress associated with discrimination has been shown to be negatively related to the well-being of the targets of discrimination (e.g. R.J. Burke, 1991; Jackson et al., 1996; Kessler et al., 1999; Sanchez & Brock, 1996; Schneider et al., 2000; Valentine et al., 1999). Although previous research has focused on major types of discriminatory events, we believe, as argued earlier, that everyday discrimination also is stressful and followed by negative personal outcomes. Of course, we will not be asking respondents to directly report everyday discrimination (for the reasons outlined), but instead, we will be assessing racial *differences* in reports of everyday mistreatment as indicative of everyday discrimination. We expect that everyday mistreatment will be damaging, and as we propose that Blacks will experience more of this mistreatment; thus, we would expect that they would exhibit lower well-being than Whites due to these expected mistreatment differences. Thus, our second and third hypotheses:

> *Hypothesis 2: The experience of everyday mistreatment is associated negatively with well-being, such that individuals experiencing more everyday mistreatment will report lower well-being.*

> *Hypothesis 3: The relationship between race and well-being is mediated by the amount of everyday mistreatment experienced in the workplace.*

We examined these hypotheses using secondary data from three different samples and several indicators of well-being. Well-being may be thought of as encompassing both 'context-free' forms of well-being, such as overall mental or physical health, as well as 'context-specific' forms, such as job-specific well-being, commonly referred to as job satisfaction (Warr, 1999; but see Brief & Atieh, 1987). The first study investigates the existence of everyday mistreatment of Blacks in a civilian sample, as well as its impact on job-specific well-being. Studies 2 and 3, using military samples, then attempt to 'constructively replicate' (Lykken, 1968) the findings of Study 1, by employing a different measure of everyday racism and a much broader set of outcome variables, including measures of context-free well-being, as indexed by reported physical and emotional health.

Study 1

An aim of Study 1, as described earlier, was to assess the existence of everyday discrimination through unobtrusive means in order to sidestep the problems of attributional ambiguity that are inherent in current measures of discrimination. The study examines reports of mistreatment in a national sample of Black and White employees. Even though the items do not reference 'discrimination,' we expect that Blacks will report more mistreatment on the job than Whites, providing evidence in support of our first hypothesis.

Furthermore, we expect to find that the experience of everyday racism in the workplace is associated with lower job-specific well-being, manifested by lower reported job satisfaction. There is some empirical evidence that racial discrimination in the workplace is related to lowered organizational commitment and job satisfaction (R.J. Burke, 1991; Sanchez & Brock, 1996; Valentine et al., 1999). But again, none of this research has focused on everyday racial discrimination, which we expect also will have a detrimental effect on job-specific well-being.

Method

Data

Data for the current study were drawn from a study entitled 'Prejudice and violence in the American workplace, 1988–1991: Survey of an eastern corporation,' conducted by Ehrlich and Larcom (1993), and available through the Inter-University Consortium of Political and Social Research. The study examined mistreatment and victimization of employees in two large work sites of a single corporation.

Sample

In the Ehrlich and Larcom (1993) study, personal interviews were conducted with 327 first-line workers at an American corporation in the mid-Atlantic states. Only data from Black and White respondents were included in our study. The final sample included 314 respondents, of which 79.6 percent were White. The average age of respondents was 37 years (range 20–64); 58 percent were male, over 40 percent had completed a college degree or greater; and average tenure on the job was 11.92 years (SD = 7.88).

Measures

Race   Race was measured by a single item that asked respondents how they identified themselves by race (1 = White, 2 = Black).

Everyday mistreatment   This dataset contained items that assessed different forms of mistreatment experienced at work and items that assessed the frequency with which these forms of mistreatment occurred. For the purposes of this study, questions assessing the incidence of mistreatment ('Yes' or 'No') were combined with those assessing frequency, such that items were scored on a 3-point scale from (0) 'no' to (2) 'more than once'. Our scale consisted of 10 items that asked respondents whether or not anyone had mistreated them in a variety of ways, such as 'Set you up for failure,' 'Gave others privileges you didn't get,' 'Treated you as if you didn't exist,' 'Damaged your personal property,' or 'Made insulting jokes or comments.' The scale was found to have an internal consistency reliability estimate [Cronbach's (1951) alpha] of .60. Importantly, these items did not ask respondents to make any attributions to 'discrimination' or 'prejudice.'

Job-specific well-being   Job-specific well-being was measured by a single item assessing overall job satisfaction (see Wanous et al., 1997, for a discussion on the acceptability and validity of single-item measures of global job satisfaction), scored on a 5-point scale ranging from (1) 'very satisfied' to (5) 'very dissatisfied'.

Results

Existence of everyday discrimination

Means, standard deviations, reliability estimates, and intercorrelations are presented in Table 1.

Supporting Hypothesis 1, race was significantly related to mistreatment ($r = .21$, $p < .01$), with Blacks perceiving significantly more mistreatment on the job. This is consistent with our expectation that Blacks experience everyday discrimination, as indicated by substantially more unfair and unkind treatment in the workplace. In addition, Black individuals had lower perceptions of job satisfaction ($r = -.15$, $p < .01$).

Consequences of everyday discrimination

We hypothesized that Blacks would report lower levels of well-being (job-specific well-being in this study) than Whites, and that this relationship

Table 1　Study 1 descriptive information and intercorrelations for included variables

	Variable	Mean	SD	Alpha	1	2	3
1	Race	1.20	0.40	–	–		
2	Mistreatment	0.14	0.17	0.60	0.21**	–	
3	Job Satisfaction	2.09	1.01	–	–0.15**	–0.18**	–

Note: N = 314.
**p < .01.

would be mediated by everyday mistreatment. Consistent with Baron and Kenny (1986), full mediation is established if the relationship between the independent variable (IV) and dependent variable (DV) drops to zero when the mediator is included in the regression equation. Given that the direct effect did not drop to zero, we tested whether mistreatment partially mediated the relationship between race and job satisfaction. The significance of the indirect effect of race on job satisfaction through mistreatment was investigated, using the procedure described by MacKinnon et al. (1995) to conduct a Z-test of the indirect effect size. Providing some support for our third hypothesis, the indirect effect of race on job satisfaction through mistreatment was significant ($Z = 844$, $p < .01$), indicating that partial mediation was achieved (see Table 4).

Discussion

We found, as hypothesized, that Blacks reported higher levels of mistreatment on the job than did Whites. Notably, Blacks perceived more mistreatment though the items used did not reference race or discrimination. We take this as evidence that everyday discrimination is experienced by Blacks on the job. The results of this study suggest that workplace discrimination researchers should widen the scope of what they consider to be 'discrimination' in order to more fully capture the experience of being a target of discrimination in the workplace.

　　Furthermore, even though this everyday discrimination consisted of relatively minor discriminatory incidents, it did partially account for lower job satisfaction on the part of Black employees. This finding is particularly noteworthy because Blacks were not primed to attribute mistreatment to their race. Thus, this study provides some evidence that the experience of everyday discrimination on the job is associated with negative job-specific

well-being outcomes. Blacks appear to be experiencing an additional source of stress on the job, one with which Whites do not have to cope. Moreover, this additional source of stress for Black workers is related to impaired well-being.

Studies 2 and 3

Studies 2 and 3 are attempts to constructively replicate the findings of Study 1 with different samples and a different survey instrument. Thus, we again tested whether Blacks report more mistreatment on the job than Whites and examine the relationship between differential mistreatment and job-specific well-being. We then extended these findings by examining the relationship of everyday discrimination with more context-free forms of well-being, in terms of reported emotional and physical well-being.

Although not focusing on everyday discrimination, ample empirical evidence does suggest that discrimination adversely affects psychological well-being as indicated, for example, by lowered levels of self-esteem and increased levels of anxiety and depression (e.g. Jackson et al., 1996; Kessler et al., 1999; Kessler & Neighbors, 1986; Noh et al., 1999; Radhakrishnan, 1998; Schneider et al., 2000; D. Williams et al., 1997). The stress of discrimination also has been found to negatively impact the physical health reported by members of stigmatized groups (e.g. Jackson et al., 1996, 1999; D. Williams et al., 1997). However, few studies have focused on discrimination *in the workplace* as a source of distress, as we intend to do here. This is especially true regarding *race* discrimination. Moreover, to our knowledge, no previous research has attempted to assess the existence and outcomes of *everyday* discrimination in the workplace, nor have unobtrusive measures of discrimination been employed. We expected that everyday discrimination would negatively impact well-being, as do more serious discriminatory incidents. Although each everyday discrimination event may be minor, the cumulative impact of such pervasive discrimination and the stress of attendant attributional ambiguity is likely to be detrimental to the well-being of Black workers.

Method

Data

Data for Studies 2 and 3 were from the Department of Defense 1995 Sexual Harassment Survey, Form B (Bastian et al., 1996). The survey and data are publicly available from the Department of Defense (see http://www.dod.gov).

Sample

As Study 3 was a replication of Study 2, using the same survey instrument but with a different sample, the methodology for both studies will be discussed in this section. The sample for Study 2 comprised 5483 individuals from the United States Navy. Twenty-three percent of respondents were Black, and 80 percent were female with an average age of 31.6 years (range 20–50). The over-sampling of women reflects the survey's original purpose in evaluating sexual harassment in the military. Data from 8311 United States Army personnel were used as the sample for Study 3. This sample had a higher percentage of Black respondents (40 percent), and a similar percentage of women (82 percent). The average age for the Army sample was 32.7 years (range 20–50). The personnel for both studies were selected through a nonproportional stratified random sampling technique; rationale and definition of the strata may be found in the survey technical report (see Bastian et al., 1996).

Measures

Race   A single item asked respondents to indicate their race. As in Study 1, the predictor of central interest was race; thus only respondents identifying themselves as White (coded '1') or Black (coded '2') were utilized.

Everyday mistreatment   Consistent with our conceptual definition of everyday discrimination, we selected items that reflected unfair treatment, or mistreatment, but did not reference race or discrimination as the cause of the treatment. Five items were selected to tap the construct domain of overall mistreatment, each answered on a 5-point Likert type scale (from 1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree'). For example, items asked to what extent 'does the chain of command provide you with the information you need to do your job?', 'is your work performance evaluated fairly?,' and 'do you get the assignments you need to be competitive for promotions?' Positively worded items were reverse coded so that higher scores indicated more mistreatment. The internal consistency estimate was .75 in the Navy sample and .74 in the Army sample.

Job-specific well-being   The survey contained nine items that comprise a measure of job satisfaction, assessing respondents' satisfaction with various facets of their job, such as 'your pay and benefits,' 'the relationship you have with your co-workers,' and 'the kind of work you do.' Items were answered on a 5-point scale, with response options ranging from (1) 'very satisfied' to

(5) 'very dissatisfied.' The internal consistency estimate was .81 in the Navy sample and .82 in the Army sample.

Emotional well-being Emotional well-being was assessed with five items inquiring about the respondent's emotional state in the past four weeks, such as 'How much of the time have you felt down-hearted and blue?' and 'How much of the time have you been a happy person?,' answered on a 6-point frequency scale ranging from (1) 'all of the time' to (6) 'none of the time.' Negatively worded items were reverse coded so that higher scores reflected higher emotional well-being. Internal consistency estimates were .84 in both samples.

Perceived physical well-being Four questions assessed the respondents' perceptions of their general state of health over the previous four weeks, and asked respondents how true each question (e.g. 'My health is excellent') was on a 5-point scale ranging from (1) 'definitely true' to (5) 'definitely false.' Consistent with emotional well-being and job satisfaction scales, higher numbers reflected better physical well-being. The internal consistency estimate in the Navy sample was .80, and in the Army sample was .82.

Results

Because of similarity in the samples and findings, results for Studies 2 and 3 are discussed together. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for Study 2 and Study 3 can be found in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively.

Table 2 Study 2 descriptive information and intercorrelations for included variables

	Variable	Mean	SD	Alpha	1	2	3	4
1	Race	1.23	0.42	–	–			
2	Mistreatment	2.80	0.85	0.75	0.12**	–		
3	Job Satisfaction	3.50	0.71	0.81	–0.13**	–0.74**	–	
4	Emotional Well-Being	3.51	0.92	0.85	–0.03*	–0.34**	0.39**	–
5	Physical Well-Being	4.24	0.78	0.80	–0.05**	0.25**	0.28**	0.42**

Note: $N = 5483$.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

Table 3 Study 3 descriptive information and intercorrelations for included variables

	Variable	Mean	SD	Alpha	1	2	3	4
1	Race	1.40	0.49	–	–			
2	Mistreatment	2.72	0.84	0.74	0.08**	–		
3	Job Satisfaction	3.47	0.71	0.82	–0.11**	–0.75**	–	
4	Emotional Well-Being	3.52	0.92	0.84	–0.01	–0.36**	0.41**	–
5	Physical Well-Being	4.14	0.86	0.82	–0.09**	–0.26**	0.28**	0.43**

Note: N = 8311.
**$p < .01$.

Existence of everyday discrimination

Again, consistent with our hypotheses, race was significantly associated with mistreatment (Navy, $r = .12$, $p < .01$; Army, $r = .08$, $p < .01$). The similarity of these results to those found in Study 1, despite differences in the populations sampled and variation in the everyday mistreatment item content, provides persuasive (though disheartening) evidence of the existence of everyday workplace discrimination.

Consequences of everyday discrimination

Beyond substantiating and generalizing the existence of everyday discrimination in the workplace, we examined its consequences. A mediation analysis, identical to that used in Study 1 for job satisfaction, was conducted for each indicator of well-being.

Job-specific well-being   As a precondition to mediation analysis, we first showed that race was, in fact, significantly negatively related to job satisfaction (Navy, $r = -.13$, $p < .01$; Army, $r = -.11$, $p < .01$). As presented in Table 4, the tests of indirect effects show a clear and consistent pattern across studies; the results from Studies 2 and 3, which used a multiple-item facet measure of job satisfaction, parallel the results from Study 1, which utilized a single-item global measure of satisfaction. Specifically, additional support for Hypotheses 2 and 3 is provided by the partial mediation effect clearly shown in both the Navy and Army samples. Thus, we conclude that not only does everyday discrimination exist, but that the consequences for the job satisfaction of those victimized is statistically significant.

Table 4 Linear regression results of effects of race on well-being measures and effect sizes for Black/White differences

Effect	Job satisfaction (Study 1) N = 314	Job satisfaction (Study 2) N = 5483	Job satisfaction (Study 3) N = 8311	Emotional well-being (Study 2) N = 5483	Emotional well-being (Study 3) N = 8311	Physical well-being (Study 2) N = 5483	Physical well-being (Study 3) N = 8311
Direct	−0.11*	−0.04**	−0.04**	−0.01	0.02*	−0.02	−0.07**
Indirect through mistreatment	−0.04**	−0.09**	−0.07**	−0.02*	−0.03**	−0.03**	−0.02*
Total	−0.15**	−0.13**	−0.11**	−0.03**	−0.01	−0.05**	−0.09**
Effect size (d)	0.3714	0.3091	0.2203	0.0647	0.0144	0.1247	0.1800

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Emotional well-being The results of the tests of indirect effects on emotional well-being for Studies 2 and 3 are displayed in Table 4. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, mistreatment was strongly negatively related to emotional well-being (Navy, $r = -.34$, $p < .01$; Army, $r = -.36$, $p < .01$). Although not as robust as the relationship with job satisfaction, the results of Study 2 support the mediational role of everyday discrimination in the relationship between race and emotional well-being. Contrary to our hypothesis, however, the relationship between race and emotional well-being in the Army sample was nonsignificant; therefore, we did not attempt to interpret the test of mediation.

Perceived physical well-being Significant relationships between mistreatment and reported physical well-being were observed in both samples (Navy, $r = -.25$, $p < .01$; Army, $r = -.26$, $p < .01$). Support for Hypotheses 2 and 3 was found in both Study 2 and Study 3, as Blacks reported significantly worse physical well-being (Navy, $r = -.05$, $p < .01$; Army, $r = -.09$, $p < .01$), and the relationship was fully mediated by the mistreatment these individuals experienced on the job.

Discussion

With these studies, we replicated the findings from Study 1, again finding evidence that Blacks are experiencing everyday discrimination in the form of minor, pervasive mistreatment and unfairness on the job. The survey from which these data were taken did not in any way mention racial discrimination or prejudice; thus, demand characteristics and cues to prejudice cannot account for these results. Furthermore, as in Study 1, this discrimination accounted for lower reported job satisfaction on the part of Blacks. Thus, even in the military, one of the most integrated organizations in the country (Hacker, 1995), Blacks appear to experience everyday mistreatment and are less satisfied as a result. One might expect even greater amounts of everyday discrimination and negative personal outcomes for Blacks who are in less integrated environments, for example, where they occupy 'token' or 'solo' positions in their jobs (Kanter, 1977).

Everyday discrimination also appears to adversely affect other indicators of well-being, consistent with the findings of D. Williams et al. (1997). Blacks commonly are found to have poorer health than Whites in America, which is often attributed to factors such as poverty, diet, and unequal access to health care (e.g. Kessler & Neighbors, 1986; D. Williams et al., 1997). This study suggests an additional factor contributing to this health inequality: the stress of encountering everyday discrimination in the workplace. As

the Blacks and Whites in these samples live in common military environments, there should not be marked differences between the health care and diet provided to Black and White personnel, and none of those personnel should be particularly impoverished. This increases our confidence in the conclusion that everyday discrimination creates this racial disparity in reported physical well-being. But, it is important to note that we sampled perceived physical well-being, not actual health status. Future researchers should attend to the possible relationship between everyday discrimination in the workplace and the health status of Blacks.

The direct positive relationship between race and emotional well-being in the Army sample, apparently offsetting the negative impact of mistreatment, is somewhat surprising. One possible explanation is that some Blacks may, in certain circumstances, psychologically withdraw from domains in which they are mistreated in order to protect their mental health. Crocker and Lawrence (1999) reported on a series of studies indicating that Blacks do manage to maintain surprisingly high self-esteem because their self-esteem tends not to be contingent on domains that are valued by the majority group and that are often inhospitable toward Blacks, such as work and school. Instead, they suggest that Blacks' self-esteem rests upon sources such as religious faith and family and social ties. Branscombe et al. (1999) found that perceiving pervasive discrimination also tended to increase Blacks' social identification with other Blacks, which was beneficial to emotional health and counterbalanced direct negative effects of discrimination. Such cognitive dissociation of emotional well-being from work may be operating here; the lower job satisfaction found for Blacks could be an indicator of work withdrawal. Future studies might include measures of psychological withdrawal from work to investigate this possibility. In addition, they might consider the potential for increased social identification and reliance on alternate life domains as a means of maintaining well-being.

In light of this discussion, the relationship between mistreatment and perceptions of physical well-being is even more striking. The stress of everyday discrimination apparently still takes a toll on its targets even if it may be countered by using alternate bases for self-esteem and emotional well-being. Blascovich et al. (2001) found that the experience of stereotype threat (a fear of confirming stereotypes about one's group through one's performance; see Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995) increased the blood pressure of African Americans. Perceptions of everyday discrimination may trigger chronic stereotype threat on the job for Blacks, elevating blood pressure and adversely affecting health. Further research is necessary to determine the precise mechanisms by which the experience of everyday discrimination may affect physical well-being.

Before moving on, it is important to note explicitly that the statistically significant relationships detected in Studies 2 and 3 were small in magnitude. However, small effect sizes may be expected in preliminary studies in a new area (Cohen, 1977). We calculated Cohen's *d*-statistic for racial differences in our outcome measures, which express the difference between means as a function of units of variability. These values are shown in Table 4. Although the values for emotional well-being are < .1 (consistent with the weak or nonsignificant effects found in our other analyses), *d* values for the remaining measures range from .12 to .37. We also calculated *d*-statistics for the difference in mistreatment by race, and found effects of similar magnitude (*d* = .52 for the corporate sample; .16 for Army, and .29 for Navy). Cohen (1977) does refer to a *d* = .2 as being a 'small effect size,' but points out that 'in new areas of research inquiry, effect sizes are likely to be small . . . because the phenomena under study are typically not under good experimental or measurement control or both' (p. 25). Certainly that is the case here, and in future work involving more targeted primary data collection effect sizes may be found to be larger.

Furthermore, in several areas of psychology, it has been argued successfully that the import of a relationship cannot be judged adequately, out of context, by its magnitude alone (e.g. Abelson, 1985; Martell et al., 1996). We, for instance, concur with Eagly's (1995) position that the practical importance of a relationship depends on the consequences it implies in natural settings. That is, we feel that to explain even a small proportion of the variance in the well-being of individuals victimized in the workplace because of their skin color is a very worthwhile aim.

General discussion

The studies reported here clearly indicate that research which focuses solely on major discriminatory events in the workplace does not fully capture Blacks' 'lived experience' with racism on the job. To our knowledge, this is the first workplace-focused study to acknowledge that Blacks may experience racism in more subtle, everyday ways than typically assumed by organizational researchers. We found compelling evidence, in three different samples, that everyday discrimination against Blacks is occurring on the job, with negative outcomes for its targets. Furthermore, by using subtle measures that assess more general mistreatment, we were able to assess the existence of everyday discrimination apart from respondents' propensity to make attributions to discrimination.

We do acknowledge that the relationships between mistreatment and

well-being, irrespective of race, are relatively strong, indicating that mistreatment lowers well-being for all individuals. However, this does not undermine our argument that such mistreatment, when associated with race, indicates discrimination. Take the case of a major event like being fired from one's job. Such an event likely damages any person's well-being (at least temporarily), yet is still considered evidence of discrimination if Blacks are found to be fired more often than equivalently performing Whites. Such was the case here, as Blacks were found to experience *more* mistreatment than Whites, and it is that differential that we take as evidence of discrimination.

Importantly, the fact that everyday discriminatory incidents in the workplace are 'minor' does not imply that the outcome of facing such discrimination is negligible. We found that being the target of everyday mistreatment appears to negatively impact several facets of well-being, both job specific and context free. The finding of lower job-specific well-being is disturbing not only in terms of personal costs, but also because it may represent organizational costs, as job satisfaction is related to role withdrawal and other organizationally dysfunctional behaviors (Brief, 1998). Impaired emotional and physical well-being also likely have organizational costs (as well as being personally damaging to the targets), in that they may lead to absenteeism and other withdrawal behaviors. Therefore, organizations that wish to be welcoming to qualified Black personnel should be concerned about the negative effects of everyday discrimination on job satisfaction and well-being, which may influence retention of those employees. However, research which specifically measures job involvement, commitment, absenteeism, and other withdrawal behaviors is needed to determine whether Blacks cope with everyday discrimination through job withdrawal.

Unfortunately, everyday discrimination at work is likely to be extremely difficult to combat. The ambiguity and subtle nature of many everyday racist events make them hard to definitively identify or proscribe. Furthermore, perpetrators may not even be fully cognizant that they are engaging in racist actions. For example, 'subtle' or 'modern' racists tend to believe they are not racist, and endorse plausible nonprejudiced explanations to justify otherwise prejudiced acts (Brief & Barsky, 2000). Even people who are strongly motivated not to be racist are subject to automatic cognitive activation of stereotypes that can unconsciously influence behavior (e.g. Chen & Bargh, 1997; Devine, 1989; Dovidio et al., 1997). Thus, typical one-time diversity training courses and nondiscrimination policies may do little to alleviate the existence of everyday discrimination in the workplace. Nonetheless, organizations can make efforts toward reducing this sort of discrimination, even if complete elimination is unlikely. Indeed, we hope that our findings will highlight the need for organizational decision-makers to

adapt to the changing face of racism and discrimination against Blacks in this country. Brief and Barsky (2000) suggest that training which induces modern racists to expand their concept of what 'nonprejudiced' entails may lead to some modifications of their behavior. They also suggest self-regulation training to help nonprejudiced individuals overcome automatically activated stereotypes and achieve truly nonracist interactions. Moreover, perhaps human resource professionals can simply be more vigilant for minor slights and mistreatment that may be differentially affecting Black employees, or conduct surveys or workshops that assess the existence of such mistreatment in their organizations. Attending to 'minor' discrimination in organizations may be key to establishing a true 'positive diversity climate,' which several researchers have pointed out requires more than simply removing official barriers to entry and mobility for minority employees (e.g. Hicks-Clarke & Iles, 2000). Future research must focus more attention on possible courses of action that organizations can take to reduce everyday discrimination in the workplace.

Limitations

Admittedly, there may be alternate explanations for our findings. For example, Blacks may be experiencing more mistreatment because they occupy lower organizational positions than do Whites. However, we investigated this possibility using rank as a control variable in the military datasets (enlisted, noncommissioned officer, or officer) and obtained a similar pattern of effects. For the corporate dataset, all employees were described as 'first-line workers,' but we did also re-run analyses in that dataset using education as a control variable, finding no change in the pattern of effects.

As another alternate explanation, one could argue that Blacks are being mistreated on the job not because of their race, but because they are poor performers or because they are interpersonally more difficult or unpleasant. Owing to our use of secondary data sources, our information was limited, and we cannot conclusively refute these alternate explanations, however offensive they may seem. However, even if a relationship did exist between, for example, performance and mistreatment, it might be that an environment rife with everyday discrimination is not conducive to peak performance, so that mistreatment is undermining performance, rather than poor performance engendering mistreatment. Additional research is required to assess these alternate explanations and explore potential issues of causality.

Given the secondary nature of our data, we were presented with few options in constructing the measures used. So, for example, the measures of mistreatment used in Study 1, and in Studies 2 and 3, likely would have

looked different if they had been developed exclusively for our purposes. Although the use of secondary data was certainly not ideal, we undertook this effort as a 'first step' in a planned program of research focusing on the concept of everyday discrimination. We feel that the results we have obtained here (*despite* the fact that the data at our disposal were not ideal) offer encouragement for our continuation of this research program. For our subsequent primary-research studies in this area, which are already underway as of this writing, we have crafted a measure of everyday workplace mistreatment that we hope more precisely captures the construct of interest.

Finally, numerous researchers investigating the consequences of work-related stress (e.g. Brief et al., 1988; M.J. Burke et al., 1993) have advocated accounting for the critical role of underlying response tendencies, such as those associated with trait negative affectivity (e.g. Watson & Clark, 1984), in self-report data collection. Owing to the use of archival data, we were not able to include these items in the survey. However, we know of no evidence that shows consistent evidence of racial differences in negative affectivity or other personality dimensions. Furthermore, testing the interaction of race with mistreatment as a predictor of the well-being measures did not yield any significant results, suggesting that Blacks and Whites do not respond differently to mistreatment. Thus, we believe that the majority of our findings cannot be explained by a common response bias related to underlying personality traits.

Conclusions

In conclusion, these studies provide evidence that everyday discrimination does occur in the workplace and that it negatively affects Blacks' well-being. As organizational researchers are beginning to turn their attention toward understanding the experience of being a target of discrimination on the job, these sorts of everyday encounters with racism should not be ignored. Everyday discrimination is part of the reality of being Black in America, and it has real effects in the lives of Black Americans. Thus, attempts to 'embrace diversity' and make workplaces welcoming to minorities will need to address the reality of everyday discrimination.

Acknowledgement

Note

1   As a more detailed example, McConahay (1986) explains that the principal beliefs of the 'modern racist' are as follows: (i) discrimination is a thing of the past because Blacks now have the freedom to compete in the marketplace and to enjoy those things they can afford; (ii) Blacks are pushing too hard, too fast, and into places they are not wanted; (iii) these tactics and demands are unfair; (iv) therefore, recent gains are undeserved and the prestige granting institutions of society are giving Blacks more attention and the concomitant status than they deserve; (v) the first four beliefs do not constitute racism because they are empirical facts; and (vi) *racism is bad*.

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