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Differences In Brand-Logo Size Preferences Between Racial/ Ethnic Groups

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DIFFERENCES IN BRAND-LOGO SIZE PREFERENCES BETWEEN RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

DIFFERENCES IN BRAND-LOGO SIZE PREFERENCES BETWEEN RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS

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The current study compared and explained differences in consumption behaviors among people of different racial/ethnic groups: White, Black, Hispanic, and Southeast Asian. Specifically, we analyzed racial/ethnic group preferences for brand-logo sizes on visually conspicuous products (t-shirts and hats). The fear of being negatively evaluated as a minority group member was examined to see if it predicted unique conspicuous consumption patterns across individual consumer groups. This research extended prior consumer tendency literature by trying to demonstrate a link between race/ethnicity and conspicuous consumption through the fear of being negatively evaluated because of one's racial/ethnic background. A final sample of 222 participants completed a survey that measured their preference for brand-logo sizes on products and how fearful they were of being negatively evaluated due to their race/ethnicity. Results showed that Non-White participants preferred bigger-brand logo sizes and were more fearful of being negatively evaluated than White participants. However, the fear of being negatively evaluated did not mediate the relationship between brand-logo size preferences and race as hypothesized. This research has broad implications for both understanding the role of culture in the marketing community as well as the economic consequences of minority group status.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Introduction

As technology advances and consumers from across the world become more connected, the ability to purchase products increases ("Amazon Revenue 2006-2019," 2019; "Mobile Behavior Report," 2014). This increased consumption leads to questions regarding where these new, connected consumers will spend their financial resources. On the surface, consumption can be considered as a form of purchasing a specific product, but from the experiential point of view, consumption is a state of consciousness with "symbolic meanings, hedonic responses, and esthetic criteria" (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982, pg. 132). The things people own have symbolic meanings because there are social gains from acquiring an item (e.g., owning a Ferrari vs. owning a Camry) that go beyond its objective or instrumental features (e.g., acquiring a car to get from one point to another; Foxall, 2001). In other words, the view of consumption as a psychological experience focuses on subjective features of consumption that consumers aim to fulfill through the products and goods they purchase.

Given worldwide increases in consumption, it is important to understand how different racial/ethnic consumers spend their income on luxury products (i.e., clothes, cars, jewelry) and why (Falk, 2018; Handley, 2018). Consumer behaviors surrounding conspicuous products (e.g., something that can be physically observed, such as a pair of shoes) are constantly in flux (Falk, 2018) and can vary across racial/ethnic groups (Souiden et al. 2011; Podoshen et al. 2011; Lamont & Molnár, 2001), intrapersonal psychological motivations, and socioeconomic class (Charles et al. 2009; Bristow & Asquith, 1999; Ryabov, 2016). Conspicuous consumption can help us understand why

certain products (e.g., shirts and hats) are acquired to fuel status-seeking motivations through the specific purchasing of a visibly conspicuous product (Veblen, 1918). However, the vast majority of these studies have relied on self-reported values, which may be prone to self-presentational concerns, or archival purchasing data, whose naturalistic composition makes it difficult to rule out confounds. Few studies have relied on behavioral measures of conspicuous consumption and to our knowledge none have attempted to examine how psychological mechanisms like the fear of being negatively evaluated as a minority group member can account for racial/ethnic differences in conspicuous consumption. Thus, by testing brand-logo size preferences across racial/ethnic groups, this research aims to better understand the impact of modern-day racism through the fear of being negatively evaluated as a minority group member on the consumption of conspicuous goods. These unexposed ramifications of racial discrimination can be an integral discovery for why conspicuous consumption differences exist today between minority groups (e.g., Hispanic, Black, and Asian people) and their majority counterparts (e.g., White people). It is important to note that in this study, race/ethnicity will be used interchangeably given that cross-cultural literature uses "ethnicity" and terms like "European-Americans and "Asian-Americans" (Iwata & Buka, 2002) while the intergroup literature uses "race" and terms like "Black" and "White" (Messick & Mackie, 1989); this research is at a crossroads with both.

Defining and Operationalizing Materialism

Broadly defined, *materialism* is how much importance consumers place on their highly regarded possessions (Belk, 1985) and the relationship between owning possessions and one's overall life satisfaction. Richins and Dawson (1992) define materialism as how individuals use the ownership and acquisition of possessions to attain preferred emotional states such as happiness. Individuals who place a higher value on the possession and acquisition of products are high in materialism while those who do not place a high value on the acquisition of possessions are low in materialism. Those who rank higher in materialism prefer financial security over interpersonal relationships, choose to be more unwilling to share their possessions, and are less satisfied with their life (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Both Belk (1985) and Richins and Dawson (1992) show that individuals with higher materialism levels tend to be less satisfied with their life.

How Materialism Relates to Status/Conspicuous Consumption

In prior research, *conspicuous consumption* has also been referred to as *status consumption* (O'Cass & McEwan 2004). Even when looking at scales for status and conspicuous consumption, these two consumption constructs appear similar and can leave readers somewhat confused when trying to find a clear-cut difference. In this research proposal, we use conspicuous consumption in reference to both forms of consumption as they confer the same meaning, consistent with previous work (Fershtman & Weiss, 1992).

Prior studies suggest that the behavior of conspicuous consumption is a manifestation of the broader value of materialism as they share similarities through social status seeking

behaviors. To illustrate, Babin et al. (1994) claimed that the need to seek social status is related to materialism, which then relates to conspicuous consumption. Various studies have shown a positive relationship between materialism and status consumption (Bevan-Dye et al. 2012; Eastman et al. 1997). Individuals who are considered "materialists" are sensitive to social acceptability and care deeply about the products and brands they display to their social world (Fitzmaurice & Comegys, 2006). Thus, the underlying theme of conspicuous consumption lies in consuming products and brands that signify prestige in order to portray success (Veblen, 1918). Those who conspicuously consume aim to inform their social world that they deserve to be thought of in a high regard and ultimately want social acceptance through their purchases.

Defining and Operationalizing Conspicuous Consumption

Conspicuous consumption is associated with how an individual signals status (Veblen, 1918), ranks in their social world, portrays their self-image, and responds to interpersonal situations such as being ignored (Lee & Shrum, 2012). Veblen (1918) originally coined the term conspicuous consumption to signify how goods were consumed to show a sense of high-profiled significance. Accumulating wealth leads to the consumption of goods and services that signifies social prestige and importance in one's social world. To signify strength and maintain a "good name" in a "highly organized industrial community," individuals consume goods that visibly show their status (Veblen, 1918, pg. 40). Through Veblen's lens, upper class members of society would conspicuously consume in order to stand out and separate themselves from lower classes. Accumulating such items allows upper class members of society to be seen as

unique by reducing imitation (i.e., lower class individuals cannot buy these products). In turn, individuals in lower classes are motivated to conspicuously consume to project similarities with members in higher social classes (Veblen, 1918). While both classes engage in conspicuous consumption, lower class individuals and those to be perceived in lower classes conspicuously consume to emulate those in higher classes and gain social status. In comparison, individuals in higher social classes engage in conspicuous consumption and other forms of consumption to separate themselves from lower classes.

In line with Veblen's theories, empirical research has found consistent findings surrounding conspicuous consumption habits (Memushi, 2013). For example, developing countries that tend to have more people in lower socioeconomic (SES) classes conspicuously consume at higher rates compared to more developed countries (Memushi, 2013). SES is defined by the class or social standing of an individual or group in relation to others ("Socioeconomic status", 2021). Education, income, and occupation are common ways to measure an individual's SES (Piff, 2014). The increased consumption from individuals in developing countries could stem from the motivation to be part of a higher-ranking social group. This motivation and desire for lower class individuals to imitate upper class individuals in their consumption of products that portray social status can be a partial explanation as to why conspicuous consumption habits differ across majority versus minority ethnic groups (given that the latter tend to have more people in lower SES classes; Charles et al. 2009). Minority or disadvantaged groups might be motivated to conspicuously consume because they ultimately want to portray success and a high social status, which is an associated outcome in dominant or advantaged social

groups. As stated earlier, those in majority ethnic groups use conspicuous consumption to separate from those in lower social classes, but recently have shifted more towards inconspicuous consumption (Currid-Hackett, 2017). As many flashy products are becoming accessible to every class (e.g., renting a nice car), the wealthiest are spending their fortunes on prominent and private education, healthcare, and other forms of "cultural capital" which relay their social prominence to others around them. These inconspicuous consumption behaviors are a modernized way for majority groups to further separate themselves from their minority group counterparts, without using visibly conspicuous products.

On an individual level, conspicuous consumption can be seen as a competition between consumers' expenditures on products that they visually show to others in their social world (Duesenberry, 1949). This furthers Veblen's belief of social status seeking behavior as the root motivation for individuals in an industrial society to conspicuously consume. Eastman et al. (1999) similarly state that the consumption of conspicuous products can be seen as a means to an end to improve an individual's social status standing for themselves and for others around. Taken together, these studies suggest that conspicuous consumption is a prominent way to signal social status and inform others of your success.

Ethnicity, Class, and Conspicuous Consumption

Previous literature has indicated that ethnic differences (Hoyer & Deshpande, 1982; Lamont & Molnár, 2001; Souiden et al. 2011) and class differences (Charles et al. 2009; Ryabov, 2016) exist with regard to conspicuous consumption but have not always been

consistent in their findings. Moreover, Hispanic, Black, and Asian people's motivation to conspicuously consume likely stems from a multitude of reasons that may differ from those of White individuals, as previous literature suggests (Charles et al. 2009; Pellerin & Stearns, 2001; Rybov, 2016). Below, we review the findings on how and why ethnic groups differ in their conspicuous consumption as well as highlight gaps or inconsistencies in this literature.

The idea that cultural differences between ethnic groups may influence conspicuous consumption is not new, with researchers suggesting that conspicuous consumption is higher in individualistic cultures (e.g., the United States) compared to collectivist cultures (e.g., Mexico; Souiden et al. 2011). Motivations to conspicuously consume also vary between these different groups (Wong, 1997; Souiden et al. 2011). People in individualistic cultures generally put their personal goals ahead of the goals of their in-group, in contrast to individuals in collectivist cultures (Triandis, 2001). However, those in collectivist societies are more closely affiliated within their in-group, share beliefs in common with their in-group, and behave in a communal way compared to individuals in individualistic (Triandis, 1993).

The factors underlying these cultural differences in consumption may include different values surrounding materialism, as individualistic cultures put more emphasis on materialistic values in relation to conspicuous consumption (i.e., a positive relationship between materialism and individualism; Wong 1997), while a negative relationship exists between collectivist culture values and materialism (Wong, 1997; Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). Attaining perceived social status is thought to be behind

this difference in materialism and conspicuous consumption values between collectivist and individualistic cultures. As Wong (1997) claimed, consumers in individualistic cultures are more concerned with their impression on others (i.e., self-image) than those in collectivistic cultures. The need for products and items to confer success and prestige along with self-worth in individualistic cultures is thought to be the driving force as to why conspicuous consumption values are higher in individualistic, urban communities. Other research indicates some Hispanic people have lower materialistic values in general, and this can be attributed to their collectivist culture roots (Roberts et al. 2004).

However, additional research shows that Hispanic Americans (who originally come from a collectivist culture; Triandis, 2001) conspicuously consume at higher rates than White Americans (who mostly reside in individualistic cultures; Charles et al. 2009). The makeup of Hispanic individuals consist of unique ethnicities which include Cubans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, various ethnic groups from Central and South America, and others who self-identify with Spanish culture (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Bellenger and Valencia (1982) found that Hispanic Americans are more materialistic compared to White American individuals but less materialistic than Black Americans, who have highly been considered the most materialistic ethnic group (Podoshen et al. 2014). Consistent with this, Bristow and Asquith (1999) observed that Hispanic Americans placed a higher level of importance towards certain products and their associated brand names than do White Americans. Hispanic Americans cared more about the brand name importance of a car, book bag, blue jeans, and a pair of sunglasses when compared to White Americans (Bristow & Asquith, 1999).

Bristow and Asquith (1999) claimed that these differences could be attributed to the prestige and social status factors that exclusive brands manifest compared to more common ones. This belief falls right in line with the idea that conspicuous consumption aims to confer social status and prestige through the consumption of specific products. Additional work suggests Hispanic Americans consume excessive quantities of high-status items (e.g., a feature of conspicuous consumption), which has been associated with personal and familial pride (Alaniz & Gilly, 1986). Therefore, it is reasonable to infer from the findings of Bristow and Asquith (1999) that, relative to White Americans, Hispanic Americans care more about brand name importance and certain products for social status concerns because White Americans hold more economic and social power.

In addition to differences in the importance of brand names, Charles et al. (2009) noted that both Hispanic and Black American households spent 30% more of their financial resources on visibly conspicuous products (e.g., jewelry, clothes, cars) than did White American households, even when controlling for differences in income. Ryabov (2016) specifically discussed and tested a variety of issues surrounding conspicuous consumption related to Hispanic Americans. Hispanic American households in wealthy neighborhoods spent more on visibly conspicuous products compared to their co-ethnics in poorer neighborhoods (although Cuban people were the exceptions to this finding; Ryabov, 2016). This discovery is particularly interesting as Charles et al. (2009) noted that individuals in lower classes spend a higher percentage of their disposable income (i.e., available income after basic necessities are paid for like food, water, housing etc.) on visibly conspicuous in comparison to those in higher classes. Furthermore, Hispanic

Americans deal with status inconsistencies (i.e., lower occupations and income despite attaining high levels of education; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). Hispanic Americans often reside in households with lower SES compared to White Americans. According to Caplovitz (1963), members of low SES households more frequently buy new products instead of used ones and are more likely to buy expensive products than cheaper, durable alternatives. In addition, Ryabov's (2016) discoveries indicated Hispanic Americans in affluent neighborhoods might be inclined to distance themselves from their less successful ethnic group members. To create distance, Hispanic Americans (with the exception of Cuban Americans) will conspicuously consume products that indicate overt status to show they do not fit into lower class thresholds associated with this group. Taken together, this suggests that regardless of whether Hispanic Americans live in low SES or high SES neighborhoods, they will still spend more on visibly conspicuous items (although for slightly different reasons), ultimately in part to their ethnic minority status. If Hispanic Americans cannot successfully improve their financial ranking, they may feel marginalized, which can lead to excessive conspicuous consumption habits to improve self-esteem (Ryabov, 2016).

Similar to Hispanic Americans, Black Americans continue to be a marginalized minority group in America. They have not risen on the SES ladder and found financial success compared to White Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). White Americans fall into higher SES classes than Black Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), yet Black Americans conspicuously consume and value materialism at a higher rate compared to White Americans (Podoshen et al. 2014). In other words, Black Americans spend more of

their household income on status consumption products even though they make less than White Americans (Lamont & Molnár, 2001). Comparatively, White Americans in similar SES classes devoted more of their expenditures to healthcare and education compared to Hispanic and Black Americans; these differences were observed across time and through multiple forms of resource allocation (Charles et al. 2009).

Lamont and Molnár (2001) posited that Black Americans spend more money on products to reassure their equal place in mainstream society as wearing nicer clothes, looking good, and maintaining a clean appearance are of the utmost importance. When compared to White Americans, Black Americans are more likely to consume at specialty and department stores and twice as likely to select an exotic or foreign car. Black Americans will spend four times the amount of money on sport coats, suits, accessories, and skirts compared to White Americans (Campanelli, 1991). Shoes and the importance of wearing stylish footwear are critical to many in the Black community, as Black American households will spend 86% more on footwear compared to White American households (Lamont & Molnár, 2001). Mazzocco et al. (2012) findings suggest that Black Americans conspicuously consume at a higher rate compared to White Americans while caring more about looking good to shape their collective identity. This collective identity helps strengthen social group membership through conspicuous consumption. Additionally, Black Americans may use conspicuous consumption to go against ethnic prejudices and to distance themselves from "ghetto Black American" stereotypes. This trend is not specific to America; a study on conspicuous consumption and ethnicity in South Africa demonstrated that Black Africans, like Black Americans, spend more on

visually conspicuous products than their White African household counterparts (Kaus, 2013). Black African and other ethnic minorities who make less on average than European (White) South African households spend more money on visibly conspicuous products (23-26% more) compared to European (White) South African households in similar income and demographic groups, who devote more spending on healthcare, food, and education services (Kaus, 2013).

Historically, Asian Americans have been referred to as the *model minority* due to their economic racial/ethnic group success (Peterson, 1966). While the average Asian American family resides in a higher social class when compared to Black, Hispanic, or White American families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), they still engage in conspicuous consumption behaviors and hold higher materialistic values compared to White Americans (Zhang, 2018; Podoshen et al. 2011) despite their socioeconomic and "model" minority status. Specifically, Asian Americans display tendencies and behaviors in relation to their consumption behaviors that indicate the need to exert social status (Nielsen, 2013; Chen et al. 2008). In a recent consumer study, Asian Americans were 200% more likely to purchase a watch that was $300 or more, and 36% more probable to buy a piece of jewelry that was above $400 compared to White Americans (Nielsen, 2013). Similar to Hispanic and Black Americans, Asian Americans have been observed to inform their surrounding social group with visibly conspicuous products that display social importance. It should be noted that Zhang (2018), Podoshen et al. (2011), and Chen et al. (2008) did not examine consumption habits in Southeast Asian people (e.g., Vietnamese, Indonesian, and Filipino), South Asian people (e.g., Indian), West Asian

people (e.g., Iranian), Central Asian people (e.g., Mongolian), or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander people (e.g., Tongans) but instead focused on East Asian individuals (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans), the focal point and most successful subethnic group of the Asian American culture due to their high SES ranking (Mourdoukoutas, 2018). Other consumption-oriented literature that discusses Asian American groups fails to differentiate between various subethnic groups (Piron, 2000; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). Furthermore, Zhang (2018) and Podoshen et al. (2011) did not take SES under consideration in their examination of conspicuous consumption and materialism among Asian individuals. Outside of East Asian consumers, the remaining Asian American subethnic groups vary in regards to their SES status (i.e., mostly lower with some exceptions; Cook et al. 2017). On a general level, Asian American communities outside of East Asian consumers have been understudied in relation to their consumer habits.

To date, previous research suggests that Hispanic, Black, and Asian Americans conspicuously consume more than White Americans. However, relatively few studies have examined specific factors that contribute to these differences in consumption. Some have suggested that these conspicuous consumption differences can be attributed to cultural concerns (e.g., individualism vs. collectivism) and the importance of social status (e.g., owning a Ferrari compared to a Camry; Podoshen et al. 2014). The present study focuses on a new intrapersonal psychological motivation for why Hispanic, Black, and Asian Americans engage in conspicuous consumption more (here operationalized as preferences for bigger brand-logo sizes on products) compared to White Americans. This intrapersonal motivation stems from ethnically charged stereotypes that can negatively

impact minority groups and make them more aware of how others perceive their status. Being fearful of negative evaluations from others due to your racial/ethnic background has not been empirically tested as a mediator in the previous literature, and, in general, few studies have introduced psychological mechanisms that aim to identify the cause of conspicuous consumption differences between ethnic groups.

Intrapersonal Psychological Motivations Behind Conspicuous Consumption: Fear of Negative Evaluations

Intrapersonal psychological issues can help explain why Black, Hispanic, and Asian Americans engage more in regard to conspicuous consumption when compared to White Americans. The present study examined the hypothesis that the fear of negative evaluations from others can help explain why these individual ethnic groups differ in their values and beliefs surrounding conspicuous consumption, which can be measured through brand-logo size preferences.

Across the world, ethnic minorities are commonly marginalized, discriminated against, and disenfranchised for a variety of reasons (Drydakis, 2011). This second-class treatment of individuals can lead to a host of psychological issues (e.g., increase in perceived stress; Heim et al. 2011), including the fear of negative evaluations. Black and Hispanic Americans are minorities and face similar types of discrimination (Farley, 1987) and negative stereotyping (Dixon & Rosenbaum, 2004), which can lead to being fearful and worried of how others evaluate them. The fear of being negatively evaluated may be mitigated by consumption habits in order to counteract negative stereotypes that often fuel these negative evaluations of minority groups.

In the case of Black Americans, they are more likely to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019) and are more likely to be perceived negatively through stereotypes and culturally charged assumptions compared to White Americans (Lamont & Molnár, 2001; Palmer & Maramba, 2011). These stereotypes and assumptions may be the guiding force as to why Black Americans rank higher in conspicuous consumption and materialistic values and spend more of their income on such items when compared to White Americans. Black Americans consuming luxury products that signify social status may help mitigate the damaging psychological impact fueled by the fear of being negatively evaluated. Consistent with this prediction, Charles et al. (2009) noted that Black American households may spend more on visually conspicuous products to prove they did not belong to a low social status group. Black Americans and minorities in general may choose to allocate resources to counteract these hurtful stereotypes in regard to the fear of being negatively evaluated by others in their social world. Wearing a nice watch or pair of shoes, for example, may help portray prestige and financial success, which combats negative stereotypes leading to negative evaluations that are commonly experienced by Black Americans.

The fear of being negatively evaluated can be applied to the Hispanic American community for similar reasons as the Black American community. Hispanic Americans often reside in lower SES areas compared to White Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), but even when Hispanic Americans live in affluent areas, they spend more of their financial resources on visibly conspicuous items, often to escape the negative stereotypes associated with their ethnicity (Ryabov, 2016). In the case of Hispanic Americans, class

has not proven to be a determining factor for the tendency to conspicuously consume (with the exceptions of Cuban Americans), as Hispanic Americans in higher classes conspicuously consume at higher rates compared to White and Hispanic Americans in lower classes (Ryabov, 2016). The present research suggests that the distance Hispanic Americans aim to create from stereotypes surrounding their ethnic group through conspicuous consumption even in higher classes is related to the fear of being negatively evaluated. Nevertheless, Hispanic Americans with lower SES still conspicuously consume more than White Americans. Prior research suggests that these lower SES Hispanic Americans want to distance themselves from their current low social class status by engaging in conspicuous consumption (Charles et al. 2009; Ryabov, 2016), similar to Black Americans. Additionally, given that Hispanic Americans frequently deal with negative stereotypes (Farley, 1987), research has shown that no matter the class, they will spend more money on visibly conspicuous products to counteract these hurtful stereotypes compared to White Americans (Ryabov, 2016). As such, they may be more likely to have a higher fear of being negatively evaluated compared to White Americans fueling their high conspicuous consumption habits.

Despite their "model minority" status, Asian Americans deal with racism, discrimination, and negative stereotypes (Alvarez et al. 2006; Toupin & Son, 1991). These racist behaviors against the Asian American community has risen within the last year due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic (Jeung et al. 2021). Even though East Asian consumers have accumulated vast financial success, they are still subject to negative stereotypes surrounding their ethnic background (Toupin & Son, 1991). Thus,

previous research on their consumption behavior (i.e., placing a higher value on conspicuous consumption and materialism in comparison to White people) may be explained by the fear of being negatively stereotyped due to their ethnicity as well. Moreover, considering many Southeast Asian consumer groups fall into lower SES classes than their Eastern Asian consumer counterparts (Cook et al. 2017), the negative stereotypes they face could draw similarities to what Hispanic and Black Americans endure. Minimal research has been conducted analyzing isolated consumer habits of Asian Americans outside of those with East Asian heritage. Similar to Black and Hispanic Americans, Southeast Asian Americans may use conspicuous consumption to boost their social status, combat negative stereotypes about their ethnicity, and better assert themselves in their social world.

Current Study

Although many studies have demonstrated ethnic differences in conspicuous consumption, few have evaluated the underlying factors that contribute to such differences. Moreover, most of the aforementioned studies have used self-reported values or economic trends, approaches that are problematic because they do not allow us to understand the *why* behind these consumption differences. To reduce these methodological concerns, this study assessed brand-logo size preferences as a measurement of conspicuous consumption in different ethnic groups. In addition to relying on this more behavioral measure of conspicuous consumption when examining group differences, we assessed participants' fear of negative evaluations due to their racial/ethnic group as a means of explaining differences in conspicuous consumption

between specific ethnic groups. The fear of being negatively evaluated based on your ethnic/racial group has not been used to understand conspicuous consumption differences among individuals more broadly or between specific racial/ethnic groups.

The current study offers to help better understand the economic consequences of the fear of being negatively evaluated by others. By performing this research on three marginalized ethnic groups, Blacks-, Hispanics-, and Southeast Asian-Americans, this study evaluated the impact that racism has on individual consumption habits by testing how individuals' fear of being negatively evaluated by others based on their ethnic/racial group can drive purchasing behavior. We hypothesized that: (a) Hispanic, Black, and Southeast Asian participants would prefer bigger brand-logo sizes on visibly conspicuous products compared to White participants, (b) Hispanic, Black, and Southeast Asian participants would score higher on scales measuring the fear of being evaluated by others due to their minority status, and (c) the fear of negative evaluations would explain or mediate brand-logo size differences across ethnic groups.

Method

Sample and Participant Demographics

A statistical power analysis was performed for sample size estimation using the latest version of G*Power (v. 3.1.9.4). The effect sizes in previous studies on conspicuous consumption and race/ethnicity ranged from small to medium according to Cohen's (1988) criteria (Podoshen et al. 2011; Lee & Shrum, 2012). Given this, an effect size (f^2) of .08 was used, as it reflects the midpoint between small and medium effect sizes. A power analysis was run with alpha (α) = .05, power (1 - β) = 0.95, and effect size (f^2) = .08. The projected sample size needed with this effect is approximately N = 165 to run multiple linear regressions to test the mediation model (fixed model with two predictors).

A total of 274 initial participant responses were collected through three distinct recruitment pipelines. Participants in introductory psychology classes were recruited through SONA while participants from North America signed up using Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk). Mturk was used to recruit Black and White participants because SJSU's student demographic population made it a challenge to recruit Non-Hispanic and Asian students. The remaining participants were recruited from student groups at SJSU. Participants who were not included in the initial 274 responses were excluded for a variety of reasons. These included: (a) failing two out of the three attention checks, (b) identifying with a racial group(s) that could not be solely classified as White or Caucasian, Asian, Black or African American, or Hispanic or Latino/a/x, (c) leaving two or more questions on a scale blank or missing two or more questions throughout the

entire survey (i.e., missing responses to age and race), (d) displaying identical IP addresses and responses to another participant which inferred a duplicate participant response. Example attention checks included asking participants what day of the week it was and having them type in a basic letter or number. Additionally, 52 participant responses were not included in the final analysis as these participants identified as an Asian group that did not classify as Southeast Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean). This brought our final sample size to $n = 222$; degrees of freedom varied due to omitted responses by participants. Refer to Table 1 for specific demographic information.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

	n	%
Recruitment		
SONA	175	78.8
Mturk	14	6.3
Student Groups	33	14.9
Race		
White	46	20.7
Black	42	18.9
Hispanic	70	31.5
South. Asian[a]	64	28.8
Gender		
Female	143	64.4
Male	76	34.2
Unknown	3	1.4
Gen. Status		
1st	117	52.7
2nd	28	12.6
3rd	66	29.7
Unknown	11	5.0
SES[b]		
No H.S.	27	12.2
H.S./GED	62	27.9
Assoc.	61	27.5
Bach.	47	21.2
Grad.	24	10.8
Unknown	1	0.5

Note. $N = 222$. Participants were on average 21 years old ($SD = 6.95$).

[a]South. Asian = Southeast Asian

[b]No H.S. = Parent(s) did not graduate from high school
H.S./GED = Parent(s) graduated from high school or passed a GED equivalent
Assoc. = Parent(s) received an associate's degree or attended some college
Bach. = Parent(s) graduated from college with a bachelor's degree
Grad. = Parent(s) graduated with a master's or higher

Brief Fear of Negative Evaluations (BFNE-S)

To measure the fear of being negatively evaluated by others, a shortened and modified version of The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (BFNE) developed by Leary (1983) called The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale-Straight-forward score (BFNE-S--Rodebaugh et al. 2004; Weeks et al. 2005) was used. Rodebaugh et al. (2004) and Weeks et al. (2005) claimed a more dependable evaluation of fear of being negatively evaluated came from using only the eight straightforward questions on the (BFNE) and not the four reverse-scored questions which were in the original (BFNE). The (BFNE-S) is an eight item, five point (range 1-5) self-report measure of distress and fear associated with negative evaluations from those around you. Additionally, for the purposes of this study, "because of negative stereotypes about my ethnic/racial group" was added to the end of every item on the scale to adequately measure one's fear of being negatively evaluated from others due to racial/ethnic group stereotypes. Scores from this scale were summed and averaged in the final analysis. Higher scores indicated that one fears being negatively evaluated from others due to racial/ethnic group stereotypes (0-5). BFNE-S scores are highly correlated with measurements of social anxiety (Rodebaugh et al. 2004; Weeks et al. 2005) and has demonstrated consistent reliability across experiments (Weeks et al. 2005).

Conspicuous Consumption (Brand-Logo Size)

To measure conspicuous consumption, brand-logo sizes were altered on two conspicuous products. Brand-logo sizes have been used as an effective measurement of conspicuous consumption in previous literature (Lee & Shrum, 2012; Niesiobędzka, 2017; Wang & Griskevicus, 2014). Participants were shown images of five t-shirts and hats with Gucci and Nike logos on four of them and were asked to select which logo size they prefer on each had and t-shirt. The first hat and t-shirt did not have any logos on them as a control measure. Every logo on a subsequent hat or a t-shirt increased by 100 points (range 0-400, as measured by Keynote, a software used by Apple to create presentations) and were represented with a sliding scale. Nike and Gucci were chosen because they are both popular brands (Ciment & Biron, 2019) with which most participants will be familiar. As a quality check for these conspicuous consumption measures, a 5-point scale where participants rated their preference for conspicuous consumption was used from Rucker and Galinsky's (2009) modified conspicuous consumption self-report scale. Rucker and Galinsky (2009) showed this scale's reliability ($\alpha = .71$). The specific brand-logo size preferences across every t-shirt and hat combination were averaged (*post hoc* analysis differed), as were the items from Rucker and Galinsky's (2009) scale. High scores on both conspicuous consumption measures indicate a higher tendency to conspicuously consume. See Appendix to view specific scales.

Procedure

Participants completed the aforementioned measures in the order presented after completing an informed consent form. All analysis was performed in IBM SPSS Statistics 26.

Results

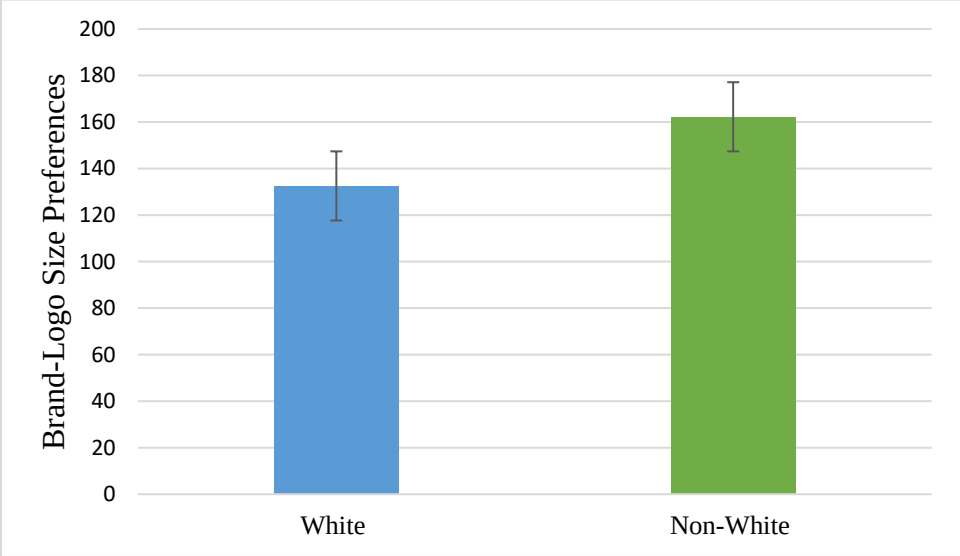
Reliability Measurements

Reliability measurements were conducted for the BFNE-S, Rucker and Galinsky's (2009) conspicuous consumption scale, and the brand-logo size preferences scale using Cronbach's alpha. All three scales displayed high levels of reliability: BFNE-S ($\alpha = .93$), Rucker and Galinsky (2009; $\alpha = .78$), and brand-logo size preferences ($\alpha = .86$). As a quality check, a Pearson correlation was calculated between the conspicuous consumption scale and the brand-logo size preferences scale. These scales were significantly correlated, $r(220) = .66$, $p = < .001$. These findings verified the validity of the brand-logo size preferences measure.

Group Differences in Conspicuous Consumption and Fear of Negative Evaluation

The following series of analysis of variances (ANOVAs) were conducted to test the relationship between race/ethnicity, brand-logo size preferences, and the fear of being negatively evaluated because of one's racial/ethnic background. In the first one-way ANOVA, the dichotomized race variable (White vs. Non-White) was used to examine differences in brand-logo size preferences. Levene's test of homogeneity of variances indicates that this assumption was violated. Due to this violation, Welch's *F* test was used and mean score differences between White ($M = 132.51$, $SD = 84.05$) and non-White ($M = 162.23$, $SD = 67.57$) showed statistical significance, $F(1, 61.14) = 4.92$, $p = .03$, eta squared ($\eta 2$) = .029, $d = 0.39$. Refer to Figure 1.

Figure 1

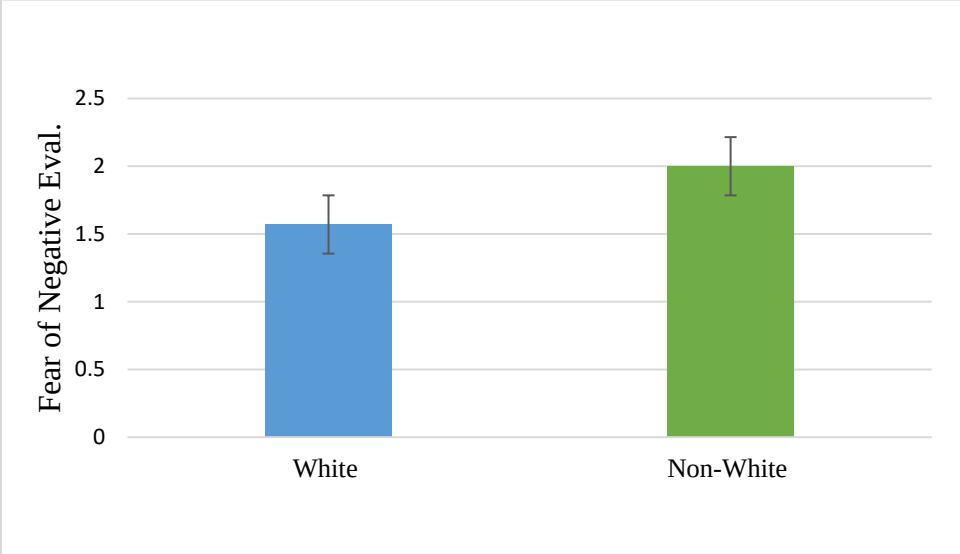


Brand-Logo Size Preferences by Race/Ethnicity (White vs. Non-White)

Note. This graph represents the mean score differences between White (*M* = 132.51) and Non-White (*M* = 162.23) participants in relation to their brand-logo size preferences. Error bars represent ± 1 standard error (SE) of the mean (SEM).

In the second one-way ANOVA, the impact of race (White vs Not-White) was tested against the fear of being negatively evaluated due to racial/ethnic status. There was a statistically significant difference between groups $F(1, 220) = 8.60$, $p = .004$, $\eta 2 = .039$, $d = 0.5$; White participants scored lower ($M = 1.57$, $SD = 0.77$) than did Non-White participants ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 0.93$). Refer to Figure 2.

Figure 2



The Fear of Being Negatively Evaluated by Race/Ethnicity (White vs. Non-White)

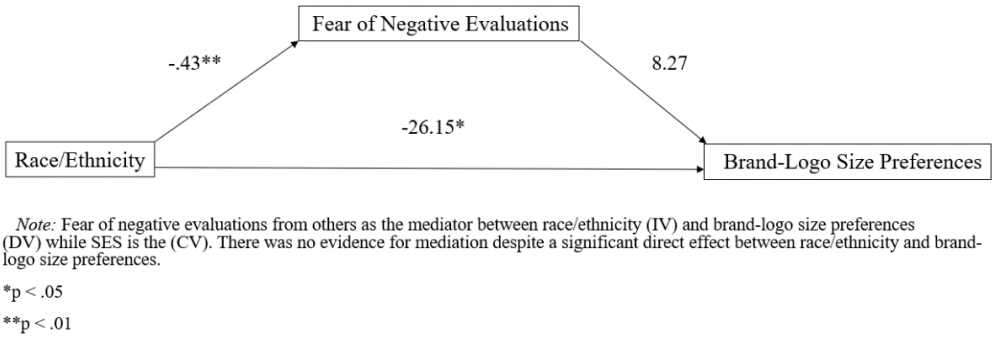
Note. This graph represents the mean score differences between White (*M* = 1.57) and Non-White (*M* = 2.00) participants in relation to the fear of being negatively evaluated due to their racial/ethnic status.
Error bars represent ± 1 standard error (SE) of the mean (SEM).

Mediation Analysis

To test if the fear of being negatively evaluated due to racial/ethnic background mediated the relationship between race/ethnicity (White vs. Non-White, with White coded as 1 and Non-White coded as 0), mediation analysis was performed using PROCESS with bootstrapping in SPSS version 26 (1000 samples and 95% confidence intervals; Hayes, 2018). Consistent with the ANOVA results reported above, the effect of race/ethnicity on the fear of being negatively evaluated was negative and statistically significant (*b* = -.43, *SE* = 0.15, *p* = .0041). However, when the fear of being negatively evaluated by others and brand-logo size preferences were used simultaneously to predict

brand logo size preferences, the former was positive but no longer statistically significant (*b* = 8.27, *SE* = 5.35, *p* = .12), but the latter (i.e., race/ethnicity) remained negative and statistically significant (*b* = -26.15, *SE* = 12.00, 95% CI [-49.8, -2.5], *p* = .030). This direct effect was statistically significant, but the indirect effect was not (IE = -3.57, SE = 2.64, 95% CI [-10.12, 0.67]). Refer to Figure 3.

Figure 3



Note: Fear of negative evaluations from others as the mediator between race/ethnicity (IV) and brand-logo size preferences (DV) while SES is the (CV). There was no evidence for mediation despite a significant direct effect between race/ethnicity and brand-logo size preferences.

*p < .05

**p < .01

Regression Coefficients for the Relationship Between Race/Ethnicity and Brand-Logo Size Preferences as Mediated by The Fear of Being Negatively Evaluated

Post Hoc **Analysis**

To further unpack the relationship between race/ethnicity and SES in relation to brand-logo size preferences, a two-way mixed model ANOVA was performed. Instead of using the dichotomous race variable that was used (i.e., White vs non-White) in the previous one-way ANOVAs, racial/ethnic groups (e.g., White, Southeast Asian, Hispanic, and Black Americans) were individually compared against one another in the two-way mixed model ANOVA. Gucci and Nike brand-logo size preferences were

treated as separate dependent variables. SES was dichotomized to accurately place participants in higher- or lower-class groups based on their parents' educational attainment. Because bachelor degree holders make over $500,000 more in their lifetime than those who hold an associate's degree or less (Carnevale et al. 2013) and those with a bachelor's degree are significantly less likely to be unemployed during recessions in comparison to associate degree holders or HS graduates ("How does a college degree improve graduates' employment and earnings potential", 2021), participants who indicated that their parents attained a bachelor's degree or a graduate degree were placed in the higher SES group coded as 0, while participants whose parents only attended some college, graduated HS, or did not graduate from HS were placed in the lower SES group coded as 1.

Results from the two-way mixed model ANOVA showed statistically significant main effects of brand (Gucci (M = 169.87, SE = 8.17) versus Nike (M =156.56, SE = 6.43) logo sizes), $F(1, 212) = 4.79$, $p = .03$, partial eta squared ($\eta p2$) = .02 and SES $F(1, 212) = 7.09$, $p = .008$, $\eta p2 = .03$; lower-SES participants preferred bigger-brand logo sizes (M = 181.04, SE = 11.51) when compared to higher-SES participants (M = 145.39, SE = 6.83). All other main effects and interactions were non-significant at $p > .087$.

Discussion

The aim of the current research was to explore the relationship between brand-logo size preferences and race/ethnicity. This research aimed to extend findings from Charles et al. (2009), Ryabov (2016), Lamont and Molnár (2001), Podoshen et al. (2014), Kaus (2013), and others who studied conspicuous consumption and race/ethnicity. From previous literature, a clear gap existed in differences among specific racial/ethnic groups' preferences of brand-logo size as a measurement of conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, there was a lack of previous research attempting to explain the underlying mechanisms behind these racial/ethnic group differences when measuring conspicuous consumption habits. Specifically, we hypothesized that Southeast Asian, Hispanic, and Black participants would prefer bigger brand-logo sizes on conspicuous products compared to White participants. The current research also predicted that Non-White participants were to be more fearful of being negatively evaluated by others due to their racial/ethnic background. Lastly, we hypothesized that the relationship between brand-logo size preferences and race/ethnicity would be explained by the fear of being negatively evaluated by others due to one's racial/ethnic status.

Results from this study are consistent with previous findings in relation to race and brand-logo size preferences between dominant racial/ethnic groups and minority racial/ethnic groups. As a whole, Non-White participants (i.e., Southeast Asian, Hispanic, and Black people) preferred bigger brand-logo sizes on t-shirts and hats across both Nike and Gucci logos. However, when individually comparing Southeast Asian, Hispanic, Black, and White Americans brand-logo size preference on Gucci and Nike products,

there was not a significant difference between each group. The lack of differences between racial/ethnic groups is most likely due to the low sample size which leads to a lack of statistical power. Future research should increase the number of participants used in their analysis to have a better chance of finding significance between racial/ethnic groups.

When SES was analyzed dichotomously, there was a significant difference between higher- and lower-class groups in their preference for brand-logo size preferences. Participants in the lower-SES group preferred bigger brand-logo sizes on Gucci and Nike t-shirts and hats while participants in the higher-SES group preferred smaller brand-logo sizes on the same products. This aligns with Charles et al. (2009) as those in lower classes conspicuously consume at a higher rate in comparison to upper classes (based on the proportion spent on conspicuous products from disposable income).

The aforementioned results from this research draw similarities with findings from the previous literature which indicated racial/ethnic group differences when analyzing conspicuous consumption (Charles et al. 2009; Ryabov, 2016; Kaus, 2013; Lamont and Molnár, 2001). This literature suggests that racial/ethnic minorities spend more on conspicuous products than their White counterparts (Charles et al. 2009; Kaus, 2013; Ryabov, 2016). The results from this research confirm past literature: once again, there was a difference between White and Non-White participants as well as between higher-class and lower-class groups in relation to conspicuous consumption. Specifically, White and higher-class participants preferred smaller brand-logo sizes on conspicuous products and were therefore less likely to engage in conspicuous consumption compared to their

non-White and lower-class counterparts. Moreover, this research highlighted how many racial/ethnic minorities are perceived and treated in the Western world solely due to their racial and ethnic background. Non-White participants were also more fearful of being negatively evaluated by others due to their racial/ethnic background in comparison to Whites. These findings are consistent with past research focused on the various negative stereotypes many racial/ethnic minority members frequently face (Farley, 1987; Lamont & Molnár, 2001; Ryabov, 2016). Lamont and Molnár (2001) and Ryabov (2016) both emphasize that Black and Hispanic people's higher expenditure on conspicuous products is fueled by these negative perceptions and racial/ethnic stereotypes. To create distance from these negative racial/ethnic stereotypes, Hispanic and Black people spend more of their disposable income on products that signify status.

However, it is important to note that my findings did not indicate that the fear of being negatively evaluated due to informed racial/ethnic status predicted brand-logo size preferences. The second hypothesis stated that the fear of being negatively evaluated by others due to one's racial/ethnic status would mediate the relationship between race/ethnicity and brand-logo size preferences. There was not a mediating effect between the fear of being negatively evaluated and brand-logo size preferences.

The lack of significance may also have to do with the ramifications of the recent events surrounding social injustice. Incidents like the murder of George Floyd and Breanna Taylor along with the increase of violence against Asian Americans; many racial/ethnic minorities took to the streets to protest their racial/ethnic based injustices. Southeast Asian participant responses could also have been influenced by the fear of

negative evaluation scale as racial/ethnic violence against the Asian American community has risen drastically because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This social and political unrest may have impacted these results: on the one hand, they likely heightened responses surrounding how fearful participants were of negative evaluations based on their racial/ethnic status, but on the other hand, they may have dampened the desire to use consumer goods to alleviate these issues given the severity of the recent series of racist attacks. It would be worthwhile to replicate this study during a non-pandemic year or a year not marked with the same racial tensions as 2020.

In addition, Southeast Asian Americans were included in this study as a marginalized racial/ethnic minority due to their lower social status in comparison to East Asian Americans (Mourdoukoutas, 2018) and because they are more likely to align in similar SES thresholds as Hispanic and Black Americans. Furthermore, their consumption behaviors have been vastly understudied unlike their East Asian counterparts who are wealthier and may not face the same racial/ethnic discrimination based on class (Cook et al. 2017). Southeast Asian Americans generally come from lower socioeconomic standing which can fuel their consumption behaviors like Hispanic and Black Americans. Future directions of research should isolate Southeast Asian individuals and compare them to other racial/ethnic groups to further specify their consumption tendencies.

Limitations

The results and potential implications from this research do not come without limitations. With any online survey it is tough to tell whether or not participants were fully engaged for the entire duration of the survey even with attention checks. The reward

for completing this survey was considerably low and participants could have easily rushed through their responses to finish as quickly as possible. A large number of participants identified as two or more races and could not be classified as solely Black, Hispanic, Southeast Asian, or White. While this allowed us to narrow down participants from individual racial/ethnic backgrounds, it also forced us to exclude a large number of participants. Another key limitation of this study can be found in the geographical range as 93.7% of participants came from SJSU. While these participants may not have met the full criteria to be classified as Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democrat (WEIRD) according to Henrich et al. (2010), almost all of the participants in this study were college students (educated), in an extremely liberal area (Democrat), and live in American society (Western).

One methodological limitation was the fact that the order of surveys may have led to priming. Participants were asked questions about being negatively evaluated due to their racial/ethnic background *before* responding to the brand-logo size scales. Thus, participants could have been consciously or subconsciously thinking about how other members of their racial/ethnic group would respond or how members of different racial/ethnic groups would respond, and this may have influenced their subsequent ratings of logos. As Molden (2014) describes, priming is defined by incidental exposure to information that may shape the way someone responds to a question. Future directions of research should counter balance race/ethnicity questions and conspicuous consumption to avoid a potential priming effect.

In addition, given that the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals were not going out and spending money on everyday conscious products like they once were. A large part of conspicuous consumption is the status associated with buying the product. Considering that a large number of people have been working from home; their preference towards conspicuous products may have declined as they work in more casual clothing. Therefore, these conditions may have dampened pre-exisiting differences in conspicous consumption.

Future Directions

Future research should use a more diverse geographic sample size and potentially recruit participants from universities, community centers, and other establishments to decrease the bias and reliability of their potential findings. Additionally, participants should be recruited in non-virtual ways to get a more representative sample and include potential respondents who do not have reliable internet access. When individual racial/ethnic groups were compared uniquely against one another, there was not a significant result most likely due to a low amount of power (e.g., low sample sizes). With a larger sample size, differences between individual racial/ethnic groups can be tested to see who is more likely to conspicuously consume and be more fearful of being negatively evaluated by others due to their racial/ethnic status.

Literature in the future surrounding race/ethnicity and conspicuous consumption should also further investigate differences within Asian groups. There is a limited amount of research in this field (especially outside of East Asian individuals) and there is more work needed to discover various consumption behaviors surrounding this ever-growing

community. Although this research included Southeast Asian Americans, it did not directly compare how this Asian American subgroup diverged (or not) from their East Asian American counterparts. Along a related vein, this research did not explore the impact of generational status. The relationship between race/ethnicity, generational status, and conspicuous consumption is another avenue of literature that can analyze various group differences.

Age is another variable that has yet to be explored to our knowledge in conspicuous consumption literature. The average age of participants in this study was 20 as most participants attended SJSU. These participants could be insecure about the financial status associated with their age and thus more likely to engage in conspicuous consumption. Nevertheless, older individuals tend to have higher levels of disposable income and may be more likely to engage in conspicuous consumption. Future literature should separate age groups and analyze age-related differences in conspicuous consumption tendencies.

Finally, to extend the field of conspicuous consumption even further and beyond preferences, research should look at actual purchasing behaviors. Seeing how much someone would pay for a certain item or whether or not they would be inclined to buy a product in general would lay the groundwork for understanding the financial implications of group differences in the real world. Identifying how much someone would pay for something in a certain scenario and conspicuous consumption together could advance consumer research. The present study only focused on brand-logo size preferences and not directly on purchasing-based consumer behaviors. Having a measurable price on

products in relation to conspicuous consumption would be a more definitive measurement of consumer purchasing behaviors. While these findings did not identify a casual explanation for why non-White participants prefer bigger brand-logo size preferences, it may be related to racial/ethnic stereotypes. Continuing literature in this field should explore this idea. One possibility could use a qualitative lens to discover the *why* behind conspicuous consumption differences between racial/ethnic minorities. Through interviews or focus groups, the impacts of racial/ethnic stereotyping can be discovered as an explanation for conspicuous consumption variances between and across racial/ethnic lines. This would shed more light on the economic consequences of racism and how culture impacts consumer decision making. It is important to remember that there is a vast amount of work to accomplish before discovering the true purchasing intentions of individuals based on their racial/ethnic group standings. These results provide key insights into unlocking new avenues of culturally based consumer preference research and the field of conspicuous consumption as a whole.

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Appendix

Demographic Questions

What race/ethnicity best describes you (Please fill in the blank)?

How old are you (Please fill in the blank)?

What gender (i.e., male, female, non-binary) do you identify as (Please fill in the blank)?

Where were you born?

Where were your parents born?

Where were your grandparents born?

Parental Educational Attainment Sample Question

What is the highest level of education your parent(s) have completed?

1. Less Than High School
2. High School or GED Equivalent
3. Some College or Associate's Degree
4. Bachelor's Degree
5. Graduate Degree or More

Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation, Straightforward Items (Modified)

Please circle the number that best corresponds to how much you agree with each item

1) I worry about what other people will think of me when I know it doesn't make a difference because of my racial/ethnic background.

   1 = Not at all characteristic of me | **5** = Entirely characteristic of me

2) I am frequently afraid of other people noticing my shortcomings because of my racial/ethnic background.

   1 = Not at all characteristic of me | **5** = Entirely characteristic of me

3) I am afraid that others will not approve of me due to my racial/ethnic background.

   1 = Not at all characteristic of me | **5** = Entirely characteristic of me

4) I am afraid others will find fault with me because of my racial/ethnic background.

   1 = Not at all characteristic of me | **5** = Entirely characteristic of me

5) When I am talking to someone, I worry about what they may be thinking of me because of my racial/ethnic background.

   1 = Not at all characteristic of me | **5** = Entirely characteristic of me

6) I am usually worried about what kind of impression I make because of my racial/ethnic background.

   1 = Not at all characteristic of me | **5** = Entirely characteristic of me

7) Sometimes I think I am too concerned with what other people think of me because of my racial/ethnic background.

   1 = Not at all characteristic of me | **5** = Entirely characteristic of me

8) I often worry I will say or do the wrong things because of my racial/ethnic background.

1 = Not at all characteristic of me | **5** = Entirely characteristic of me

Brand-Logo Size (Quality Check) Sample Questions

Imagine you were buying a piece of high-end clothing.

1) Indicate whether you would prefer a **visible** or **nonvisible** logo on the clothing by selecting the number representing your preference.

   1 = non-visible | **5** = visible

2) Indicate whether you would prefer a **small** or a **big** brand-logo on the clothing by selecting the number representing your preference.

   1 = very small | **5** = very large

3) Indicate whether you would prefer an **unnoticeable** or a **noticeable** brand-logo on the clothing by selecting the number representing your preference.

   1 = unnoticeable | **5** = noticeable

4) Indicate whether you would prefer the **brand label** to be **conspicuous** on the clothing by selecting the number representing your preference. **Conspicuous** can be defined as “standing out so as to be clearly visible”.

   1 = conspicuous | **5** = inconspicuous

Brand-Logo Sizes Example