Transcending Habitus with IT:
Understanding How Marginalized Consumers Use Information Technology

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THESIS
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To Lula Sutton, my late grandmother, whose lessons in faith remain with me; and to my mother, Patricia Ekpo, whose love and support surpasses all understanding.
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“Let your mind start a journey thru a strange new world. Leave all thoughts of the world you knew before. Let your soul take you where you long to be...Close your eyes let your spirit start to soar, and you'll live as you've never lived before.” --Erich Fromm

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SUMMARY

Media coverage of lawsuits against firms and academic literature have well established the history and presence of discrimination in the marketplace. Marketplace discrimination refers to the differential treatment consumers receive based on out-group status of one’s possession of a stigmatized identity, and creates systematic marginalization, where restrictions are placed on a consumer’s consumption. Motivated by the desire to achieve normalcy, marginalized consumers invoke coping strategies that help them to escape marketplace discrimination. Thus, seeking normalcy can be viewed as a phenomenon of escaping one’s social conditions, to which can be viewed from a theoretical lens of habitus.

Habitus, a concept advanced by Bourdieu, refers to a set of acquired characteristics which are the product of social conditions and which, for that reason, may be totally or partially common to people who have been the product of similar social conditions. Habitus has been of particular interest in consumer research as it captures the habituated dispositional aspects of status consumption in which tastes and consumption practices emanate. Consumer literature had asserted its guiding influence on consumption practices. However, growing evidence shows that consumers are able to break free of this force and escape (or even transcend) habitus.
SUMMARY (continued)

In light of the above, this research addressed several gaps: First, this study addressed the role of technology, as one of the many mechanisms by which marginalized consumers transcend habitus. Given the growing ubiquity of technology and its incorporation into the everyday lives of consumers, technology is capable of enabling a more permanent escape from habitus. Thus, understanding just one of the mechanisms marginalized consumers use to transcend habitus is important since it not only recognizes the heterogeneity of social groups in their consumption practices, but also privileges issues of marginalization in the marketplace, highlighting the importance of the context within which consumers are situated and the critical role IT plays in consumption practices as it relates to habitus.

Second, this study addressed prior issues with understanding habitus escape due to its temporary nature, by illustrating its permanence capability and the drivers that facilitate this process. Understanding both the drivers and the temporality of the transcendence process helps to shed light on the overall habitus transcendence process, and helps to paint a more holistic picture of how transcendence occurs.

Third, this study addressed how consumers use IT with respect to their habitus. Understanding how consumers use IT with respect to habitus illustrates the manner in which marginalized consumers pursue normalcy within the marketplace. The consumer normalcy literature to date has focused its attention on the outcomes
SUMMARY (continued)

of normalcy achievement through IT use, but has yet to investigate the ways in which consumers pursue normalcy through IT usage. This has implications not only to theories of consumer normalcy, but also to how marketers can accommodate marginalized groups whose consumption practices change due to defecting as a result of discriminatory encounters.

Finally, this study shed light on the many roles IT plays with respect to habitus. Of the many ways consumers can use IT, its role changes as a result normalcy pursuit. Understanding the role of IT provides critical insight into how IT creates access to normalcy for marginalized consumers in their pursuit to achieve normalcy.

This research employed multi-source data collection approach. Netnographic observation of and semi-structured interviews with eighteen African American consumers from varying income and educational backgrounds were the primary data collection methods. Online archival data complemented the netnographic and interview data.

This study found that IT enables new habitus by enabling consumers to change their consumption rituals, such that they are no longer subject to the consumption by coping that marked their initial habitus. This process is marked by a general movement in how consumers pursue normalcy, shaped by consumers’ experience and comfort level with IT, how normalcy is pursued, type of access to normalcy, and possessing key supporting processes to pursue normalcy, together
enabled the transcendence process and has implications to the role that IT plays (access to normalcy) in habitus.
I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Events in the media, as well as, extant literature have well established the history and presence of discrimination in the marketplace (Crockett, Grier, and Williams 2003; Harris, Henderson, and Williams 2005; Williams, Henderson, and Harris 2001). Marketplace discrimination occurs in the context of interpersonal interactions between customers and service providers. Such interactions may serve to disadvantage out-group members, favor in-group members, or both (Crockett et al. 2003). As a result, consumers toward whom discrimination is directed, are often left vulnerable in consumption situations due to restrictions placed on their consumption choices and practices (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004). Vulnerability describes situations where consumers experience a state of powerlessness in a marketplace interaction, whereby an imbalance in the exchange relationship is attributable to factors that are largely not controllable by the consumer at the time of the transaction, and thus hinders the consumption goals of the consumer (Andreasen and Manning 1990; Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg 2005; Hillier and Rooksby 2005). Thus, vulnerability stems from the way consumers are treated in the marketplace situations.

Add to this that the political and socioeconomic forces that both move to inhibit access to necessary goods and services only exacerbates and eventually reproduces these conditions over generations creating systematic marginalization in the marketplace. Marginalization refers to the process by which society deems certain groups as deviant or the “other”, thereby creating a sense of being set apart from the rest of society. It is an outcome of how consumers are treated in the
marketplace and reflects an internalized feeling of being an outsider. Groups are marginalized not only because of the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities but also through the exercise of power in the social, cultural, and political dimensions of everyday life (Ozanne and Saatcioglu 2008; Thompson 2004). Among the various groups that are marginalized, disadvantaged consumers (i.e. the elderly, physically disabled, poor, uneducated, and those with language barriers), stigmatized consumers, and racial/ethnic minorities, are among the most prevalent groups that experience marginalization.

Marginalized consumers invoke coping strategies in an attempt to overcome the discrimination they experience to achieve some sense of normalcy (Adkins and Ozanne 2005; Baker 2006). Normalcy refers to the perception of something being within the limits of what is considered natural and ordinary. For something to not be normal, it is perceived as inconsistent with the way things are supposed to be. Thus, when people have an attribute that is perceived as unusual, uncommon, or undesirable they may wish to live like a person that fits within the normal limits and be accepted for who they really are (Baker 2006; Goffman 1963). This desire to be within the parameters of what is ordinary is what Baker (2006) refers to as consumer normalcy. She defines consumer normalcy as the desire to live like other (normal) consumers, be accepted just as other consumers are accepted, and be acceptable to one's self in consumption contexts (Baker 2006). When pursuing normalcy, consumers seek to fully participate in the marketplace, achieve distinction through the marketplace, demonstrate competence and control, and be perceived as equal in the marketplace (Baker 2006). When consumers are marginalized and are not perceived as normal, these consumers cope by anchoring their behaviors in their
own perceptions of consumer normalcy, as a self-preservation mechanism, and attempt to overcome their social situation. Thus, when pursuing normalcy, one seeks to escape from their social conditions. Because social conditions shape the manner to which consumers consume and are embedded in one’s habitus (Bourdieu 1984), this can be viewed from a theoretical lens of habitus escape.

B. **Purpose of the Study**

The objective of this dissertation is to develop a model of habitus transcendence. Research has asserted that marginalized consumers engage in a variety of coping strategies, some of which may elevate their status or may be consistent with the sociohistorical conditioning of the group (Hamilton and Catterall 2008). This study is particularly interested in how marginalized consumers escape that conditioning and the role technology plays in doing so. Studying marginalized consumers is ideal as it provides ample opportunity for theory extension through the widely varied nature in which this consumer group may participate in the consumption field, and as such, are capable of providing rich contextual accounts of mechanisms used to escape habitus. Thus, in keeping with calls for context-specific theory of cultural capital (Chaudhuri and Majumdar 2006), this study centers its investigation on the technology mechanisms in which marginalized consumers use to escape the social conditions in which they are socially embedded in and the nature of the cultural capital accrued through transcendence.

To address the research objective, this dissertation proposes a qualitative approach utilizing netnography, a form of ethnographic research methods adapted to include the Internet’s influence on contemporary worlds (Kozinets 2002, 2010). This
method is well suited for this research agenda since it can yield descriptions based on intense meanings of social life from the everyday perspectives of consumers. A purposive sample of 18 consumers who have been marginalized in the marketplace was drawn, to collect in-depth interview responses, in addition to the collection of archival and field note data over an estimated period of 8 months. Participants were recruited using personal connections on- and offline and snowballing. The goal was to attain an in-depth understanding of informants’ lived experiences (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989). As such, findings from this study contribute to theories of cultural capital, while contributing to the literature on marginalized consumers, technology consumption practices, and habitus escape.

C. Statement of the Problem

Normalcy and marginalization are psychosocial concepts that reflect one’s position in the status game of life. Whereby, consumers who achieve normalcy or are deemed “normal” are situated at one social position, while those who are marginalized are situated at another. The social positioning of actors within a status game is organized as a hierarchy of class status, where those with higher status are considered more distinguished than those with lower status. Thus, marginalized consumers are situated below “normal” consumers in the status hierarchy. Status is heavily influenced by the social conditions to which one operates within, and these social conditions become reflected within one’s habitus.

Habitus, a concept advanced by Bourdieu, has a long intellectual history and has been used to underscore how consumption is sociohistorically shaped (Allen 2002). It describes a set of acquired characteristics which are the product of social
conditions and which, for that reason, may be totally or partially common to people who have been the product of similar social conditions, embodied through one's consumption tastes and preferences (Bourdieu 1984, 2005). For example, Bourdieu posited that the taste for necessity signified the habitus of the lower social classes in that they prioritized a product's functional superiority over aesthetics, which Bourdieu asserts represents the high social class of the French Bourgeoisie. Bourdieu argued that people learn and develop these preferences due to their social upbringing, and these preferences or tastes are what influence their consumption choices and practices. Thus, habitus is the internalized form of class condition and the conditionings it entails (Bourdieu 1984). In other words, through inculcating exposure to certain ways of enacting consumption, consumers develop sociocultural consumption practices, rituals, customs, and predispositions or particular tastes and preferences that shape their consumption experience. These predispositions are the subjectively embodied ways of feeling, thinking, and acting through a “generative social psychological structure” (Holt 1998). It is an abstracted, transposable system of schema that both classify the world and structure action. In other words, habitus describes the propensity for consumers to consume in the manner in which they do, due to social class-based inculcating experiences that taught them to value a set of consumption practices over others. Therefore, habitus is viewed as the conduit between social class conditioning and patterns of consumption (Henry 2005).

Habitus has been of particular interest in consumer research as it captures the habituated dispositional aspects of status consumption in which tastes manifest and consumption practices emanate (Üstüner and Holt 2010). Prior research in the consumer literature asserted its guiding influence on consumption practices,
focusing mainly on the differences in consumption patterns between social classes (Dubelaar 2006; Holt 1998) or the patterning of consumption choices based on social class position (Allen 2002; Piacentini and Mailer 2004; Sandikçi and Ger 2010). Essentially, these studies assert that consumption practices are learned through inculcating experiences from which social conditioning teaches consumers how and what to consume. These consumption practices differ based on social class, thereby creating differences in consumption knowledge/skills based on social standing. In other words, one’s predispositions, or habitus, guides the type of knowledge/skills, or cultural capital, one acquires in the consumption world. The knowledge and skills one gains and the predispositions they possess work together to guide and shape their consumption practices. Thus, these studies conclude that consumers with low cultural capital experience their world through a disempowered orientation and result in powerless, trapped, and financial stability-seeking consumption practices. Whereas, consumers that possess high cultural capital experience their world through empowered orientations, invoking consumption practices that open doors and expand economic boundaries (Henry 2005).

However, there is growing evidence that consumers are able to break free of this force and escape or transcend habitus. First, the deterministic link between habitus and consumption became reason for questioning when Kates (2002) demonstrated that consumption within a social group varied. His findings showed that the kaleidoscopic nature by which social groups enacted consumption practices severely weaken arguments that social conditioning played a deterministic role in consumption practices. This finding suggests that opportunity for escaping habitus are indeed possible. Second, taking the lens of escape as migration, Friedmann
(2005) illustrated that through migratory movement, one can leave behind or break free from old predispositions of a particular place, while adopting new dispositions as one navigates habitus associated with a new place (Friedmann 2005). Finally, the ability of Turkish elites to temporarily transcend their local habitus illustrated the possibility to escape based on their possession of cultural capital not available to the Turkish masses (Üstüner and Holt 2010). Thus, taken together, these studies have provided great insight into the ability to escape habitus.

Yet, existing research has not addressed several critical gaps in the literature. First, these studies focus their investigation on the *ability* to escape habitus, rather than the *mechanisms* consumers use to escape habitus. While we begin to understand potential enablers of habitus escape, such as deterritorialized cultural capital, the temporary nature of escape makes it difficult to understand the process. Further, the escape literature suggests that researchers have romanticized the phenomenon of escape such that studies have assumed the empowered position of consumers to be able to act (Arnould 2007). This calls attention to the need to investigate marginalized consumers’ habitus escape process, which not only changes the underlying motivations for habitus escape, but also sheds light on questions of the temporal nature of escape. Research on coping has found that marginalized consumers seek normalcy by using the Internet (Baker 2006; Kaufman-Scarborough and Childers 2009) and may benefit over and above non-marginalized groups in their Internet use (Zettelmeyer, Morton, and Silva-Risso 2006). This suggests that technology may be one of many mechanisms by which marginalized consumers escape habitus. Moreover, given the growing ubiquity of technology and its incorporation into the everyday lives of consumers, it is suspected that technology
is capable of enabling a more permanent escape from habitus. Thus, the question arises, how does information technology enable habitus transcendence? Understanding just one of the mechanisms marginalized consumers use to transcend habitus is important since it not only recognizes the heterogeneity of social groups in their consumption practices, but also privileges issues of marginalization in the marketplace, highlighting the importance of the context within which consumers are situated (DeBerry-Spence 2008; Murray 2002) and the critical role IT plays in consumption practices as it relates to habitus.

Second, the literature on escape has yet to be able to investigate the drivers of the transcendence process. Because the studies that have investigated escape have found it to be a temporary endeavor (Üstüner and Holt 2010), researchers have yet to be able to understand the underlying drivers of this process. This temporary nature of escape can partially be the result of the context within which transcendence is pursued and the resources available to consumers during the transcendence process. This calls into question the temporal nature of transcendence and the drivers that facilitate this process. Understanding both the drivers and the temporality of the transcendence process helps to shed light on the overall habitus transcendence process, and helps to paint a more holistic picture of how transcendence occurs.

Third, because IT is expected to be a valuable resource for consumers situated within the context of marginalization, the natural question that arise, is how do consumers use IT with respect to their habitus? Understanding how consumers use IT with respect to habitus illustrates the manner in which marginalized consumers pursue normalcy within the marketplace. The consumer normalcy
literature to date has focused its attention on the outcomes normalcy achievement through IT use (Baker 2006), but has yet to investigate the ways in which consumers pursue normalcy through IT usage. This has implications not only to theories of consumer normalcy, but also to how marketers can accommodate marginalized groups whose consumption practices change due to defecting as a result of discriminatory encounters.

Finally, the manner to which marginalized consumers pursue normalcy within the marketplace has implications to the role with which IT plays with respect to habitus. Of the many ways consumers can use IT, its role changes as a result normalcy pursuit. This question then is raised, what roles does IT play in marginalized consumers’ habitus? Understanding the role of IT provides critical insight into how IT creates access to normalcy for marginalized consumers in their pursuit to achieve normalcy.

Studying the process of habitus transcendence of marginalized consumers presents interesting questions. Specifically: (1) How does information technology (IT) enable new habitus? (2) How do marginalized consumers use IT with respect to their habitus? And, (3) What role does IT play in marginalized consumers’ habitus? These questions represent unchartered territory in the marketing literature, and have implications to both marketing practice and theory.

D. Significance of the Study

Understanding the mechanisms of habitus transcendence has implications to both marketing practice and theory. From the marketing practice standpoint, understanding such phenomenon can inform practitioners on how to recognize the
emergence of new markets and trends. Habitus escape affords a consumption group with opportunities to participate in the marketplace in ways that they were not able to before. Such opportunities may create new consumption practices amongst a group of consumers who had not engaged in such practices before, which may subsequently lead the emergence of new consumption trends. Implications of new consumption trends may include increased demand for products and services directly and indirectly associated new consumption practices, which may suggest new marketing opportunities to firms. Firms that are able to spot emerging trends in consumption practices are more likely to realize first mover advantage, thus creating a form of competitive advantage for a firm (Carpenter and Nakamoto 1989; Lieberman and Montgomery 1988).

Secondly, to sustain competitiveness in the marketplace, a firm’s marketing intelligence must be on par with, if not superior to, its competitors. This means that a firm must: put the interests of its customers first (Deshpandé, Farley, and Webster 1993); generate, disseminate and use superior information about customers (Kohli and Jaworski 1990); and, create superior customer value (Narver and Slater 1990; Shapiro 1988). However, given the prevalence of segmentation and targeting strategies, firms have typically focused their attention on mainstream consumers, while less attractive segments, typically marginalized groups, go underserved by firms. This leaves firms with outdated assumptions about those segments when they look to move into new markets. However, if a firm’s current assumptions about the consumption practices of marginalized groups are based on a homogenous status consumption premise, this could be misleading and biased to the point that
consumers feel alienated and abandon core consumption practices, which could have significant negative financial impact on a firm (Williams et al. 2008).

Thirdly, firms develop poor reputations from negative press from both the media and word of mouth (WOM) due to negative experiences, such as discriminatory practices. Studies show that negative WOM can negatively affect the financial and social performance of firms in the long run (Luo 2009; Waddock 2000). And, with the speed of the Internet, this can have a more dramatic impact in the global competitive landscape. Thus, corporations must pay careful attention to its corporate reputation. Corporate reputation is the overall estimation in which a company is held by its constituents (Fombrun 1996). A corporation’s reputation represents the “net” affective or emotional reaction – good or bad, weak or strong – of customers, investors, employee, and the general public to the company’s name. Firms seeking to strengthen its reputation can focus their attention on the impacts that marginalization, due to discrimination, has on consumers to avoid perpetuating the issue (even if unintentional). As mentioned before, marginalization stems from the discriminatory treatment of consumers by firm employees, and plays a role in the way consumers view a firm. Firms can learn from the findings of this study and implement policies and procedures that sensitize issues of discrimination and marginalization, and promote diversity and tolerance in the workplace.

From a theoretical standpoint, understanding the process of habitus transcendence sheds light on underlying motivations that contribute to shifts in consumer behavior. Research has shown that when consumers experience life events that signify transitions into new roles and create stress, consumers modify their consumption lifestyles (including brand preferences) to adapt to new life
circumstances (Mathur, Moschis, and Lee 2003). The bedrock of these types of changes stem from consumers’ consumption practices. The conventions and standards of consumption practices steer behavior (Warde 2005), which studies have found to be influenced by habitus. Therefore, escape from habitus provides opportunities for which consumption practices may change, which may lead to subsequent change in consumer behavior.

Furthermore, whereas prior studies have treated consumption groups as homogenous, this study takes into account the heterogeneity of such groups (which not only makes escape possible, but also makes what consumers do, once transcended, subject to that same heterogeneity). The presence of heterogeneity can lead to broader, more richer forms of cultural capital that is accrued by consumers through secondary socialization processes (Kates 2002). These processes may create conditions in which consumption patterns move in directions that are unexpected. Not only creating new forms of cultural capital, but also changing the trajectory in which practices develop. Recent calls for extensions to theories of practice have called for the conditions and mechanisms by which practice trajectories develop and change. Habitus escape may provide insight into this phenomenon. Therefore, this study has implications to theories of cultural capital and practice.

E. Organization of Dissertation

My dissertation contains five main components. I begin with a review of pertinent literature on everyday discrimination, marketplace marginalization, coping strategies, and habitus. This is followed by a brief overview of the conceptual
framework for this study on how marginalized consumers are able to transcend their habitus. Next, I describe the methodological procedures undertaken to understand the phenomenon of IT-enabled habitus transcendence. This is followed by a detailed description of the findings and conclusions for this study. And finally, the contributions and implications are discussed.
II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to critically review the literature on marginalization, responses to marginalization, and the impacts of these responses to illustrate and motivate the conceptual framework of this study. This study focuses on the point of view of the marginalized consumer in an effort to highlight and privilege the autonomy of the marginalized consumer and the widely varied nature of their consumption activity. By highlighting the point of view of these consumers, we begin to unfold new ways in which consumption practices develop. First, this chapter presents an overview of marketplace discrimination and the nature of marginalization, highlighting the different ways consumers are marginalized. Second, this chapter identifies the key responses that marginalized consumers invoke to cope with such situations, while motivating habitus escape as a viable response to marginalization in the marketplace. Finally, this chapter utilizes the research on cultural capital to explicate the role that escape may have in these consumers’ own social world and their ability to maneuver within it.

B. Marketplace Discrimination

The enactment of the Title II of the Civil Right Act of 1964 served to make unlawful the act of discrimination or segregation of individuals on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin in settings of public accommodations. Yet, the prevalence of marketplace discrimination remains well established in a multitude of consumption contexts, such as purchasing automobiles and real estate, browsing at retail stores, eating at restaurants, and even attempting to hail a taxicab (Brewster
and Rusche 2012; Feagin and Sikes 1995; Oliver and Shapiro 2006; Williams et al. 2001). Whereas 50 years ago when discriminatory acts were more overt and widespread, the nature of discrimination today has become harder to assess the degree to which everyday experiences are shaped by ongoing marketplace discrimination. Marketplace discrimination refers to differential treatment in the marketplace based on a person’s group membership (i.e. African American, disabled, low-income). Admittedly, the overt forms of marketplace discrimination that characterized the Jim Crow era have and will likely continue to subside (Fiske 2000; Tomaskovic-Devey, Mason, and Zingraff 2004). However, discrimination has not been totally eliminated from society and has arguably not even declined. Rather, it has simply reemerged in a new form characterized by indirectness, subtlety, and covertness (Bonilla-Silva 2002; Bonilla-Silva 2006; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Coates 2008). For example, Harris et al (2005) found that over half of the federal court cases from 1990 to 2002 involving allegations of race or ethnic-based discrimination were acts of degradation of service (67%), while denial of service represented only 33% (Harris et al. 2005). This suggests that discrimination in the marketplace has given rise to the more subtle form of discrimination rather than major events, such as denial of housing or service.

Research on racism suggests that discrimination is not declining, but rather has been replaced by less overt enactments, which some researchers have termed as: ‘modern racism’ (McConahay, 1986), ‘aversive racism’ (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986) or ‘ambivalent racism’ (Katz & Hass, 1988). With these forms of racism, individuals can hold racist attitudes while supplementing those attitudes with non-racially based rationales for discriminatory behavior (e.g. beliefs in opportunity and
individual mobility). This allows them to maintain a view of themselves as non-prejudiced. However, despite assertions of not being ‘prejudiced,’ racist views do 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 discrimination, such as using racial slurs, but do engage in more subtle discriminatory behaviors, such as avoidance of Blacks, unfriendly verbal and nonverbal communication, or failure to provide assistance in retail settings. Thus, as ‘modern’ racism tends to displace blatant racism, the forms of discrimination encountered by Blacks shift from ‘big,’ explicit discriminatory events to the more subtle, everyday forms of discrimination. This point is further clarified by Essed’s (1991) work with Blacks focusing on ‘everyday racism,’ which she asserts constitutes the ‘lived experience’ of being Black (Essed 1991). Everyday encounters with discrimination are not rare instances, but instead are familiar and recurrent patterns of being devalued in many 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 (Feagin 1991, 2009; Feagin and Sikes 1995).

The subtle acts of everyday discrimination that pervade the lives of underrepresented consumers, foster an environment in which these consumers become invisible, must adapt to ambiguous conditions, and manage their own frustrations. These consumers must constantly be alert to fight unfair treatment in the marketplace, and are under constant pressure to protect themselves again injustice that operate in many places and locations, in looks, gestures, conversations, interactions, store policy, and through all social relations. In having
to deal with this constant pressure, it effectively places the consumer in a marginalized position within the marketplace. These marginalized positions are created through everyday exclusion and everyday inequities, in which the consumption environment stands at the forefront. Encountering exclusionary practices in everyday life eventually takes its toll on a consumer, and its cumulative effects begin to shape the sense of marginalization in these consumers.

C. Understanding Marginalization in the Marketplace

Marginalization is the process by which dominant societies identify groups and individuals who are deemed deviant, dangerous, or “other” (Densham 1997). This differs from discrimination, in that marginalization reflects one’s sense of their social position as a result of being treated differently in the marketplace, whereas, discrimination reflects the differential treatment that is perceived. Through interaction between marginalized consumers and dominant society, the dominant society uses particular identities as repressive tools that limit individuals, characterized with these identities, access to resources. Cohen (1999) asserted that “designating a population as marginal is not necessarily based on denial of access to resources but about the ‘stigmatized or illegitimate’ social identity that such groups have in the larger dominant society. (Cohen 1999)” As a result, these individuals feel a sense of being set apart from the rest of society.

The literature reveals that there are three ways in which marginalization can come about: socially, economically, and politically (Cohen 1999; Snyder and Mitchell 2006; Wacquant 2008; Young Jr. 2004), the responses to which may differ according to type. This study focuses on marginalization that stems from racially/ethnic-based
discrimination in the marketplace, and as such focuses on the social aspect of marginalization. The marketing literature reflects this importance of understanding the social and socioeconomic sources of marginalization. Table 1 presents a brief summary of studies in the marketing literature and their corresponding marginalization category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point of Marginalization</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Research Context</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social</strong></td>
<td>Adkins &amp; Ozanne (2005)</td>
<td>Coping strategies of low literate consumers within the marketplace.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ainscough &amp; Motley (2000)</td>
<td>The influence of visible physical characteristics on customer wait times for service</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Crockett, Grier, &amp; Williams (2003)</td>
<td>African American men's response to discriminatory treatment during sales transactions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Griffin &amp; Sturdivant (1973)</td>
<td>Role of race and ethnicity in marketplace discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harris, Henderson, &amp; Williams (2005)</td>
<td>Judicial court cases that provide insight into the extent of the discriminatory treatment of marginalized consumers in the marketplace</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kates (2005)</td>
<td>Contested meanings within subcultural consumption</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kaufman-Scarborough &amp; Childers (2009)</td>
<td>Disabled consumers use of the Internet as public place</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Peñaloza (1994)</td>
<td>Acculturation process of Mexican immigrants and their social status within the U.S. marketplace</td>
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<td>Rosenbaum (2005)</td>
<td>Ethnic consumers' response to the symbolic servicescape</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Thompson (2004)</td>
<td>Role of marketplace myths in the conferring of status between marketers and consumers</td>
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<td>Point of Marginalization</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Williams, Henderson, &amp; Harris (2001)</td>
<td>Role of racial-profiling in consumer retailing experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hill (2001)</td>
<td>In-depth investigation into how consumers living in poverty shape and are shaped by the “cycle of poverty”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pager &amp; Shepherd (2008)</td>
<td>Employment, housing, and credit impacts of racial and ethnic discrimination in the marketplace</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Branchik &amp; Davis (2009)</td>
<td>Development and consumption behaviors of African-American elite market segment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social &amp; Economic</td>
<td>Brumbaugh &amp; Rosa (2008)</td>
<td>The role of perceived discrimination and customer metaperceptions of cashier attitude on ethnoracial consumers’ coupon usage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Henry (2005)</td>
<td>Role of (dis)empowerment in social mobility. Self-perceptual differences in low and high social class consumers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holt (1998)</td>
<td>Role of cultural capital in consumption within U.S. marketplace</td>
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</tbody>
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Table I: Marketing Research by Marginalization Type

Consumers who experience differential treatment based on perceived group-level traits become targets of marketplace discrimination. These situations produce outcomes favorable to “in-groups” and unfavorable to “out-groups”, in which consumers, who are situated on the unfavorable side of outcomes, are left vulnerable in consumption situations whereby restrictions are placed on their consumption choices and practices (Crockett et al. 2003; Crockett and Wallendorf 2004). Research on marketplace discrimination has recognized that this phenomenon often occurs within the interpersonal interactions between consumers.
and service providers, but becomes quite difficult to verify and document, except through the eyes of its victims due to the subtlety in which it is now practiced (Crockett et al. 2003; Dovidio 2001). Events in the media and court cases have testified to consumers’ accounts of receiving poor treatment during store visits, being followed in a store as a suspected shoplifter, and being ignored as others received assistance (Crockett et al. 2003; Harris et al. 2005; Williams et al. 2001). However, inequity is often embedded within social institutions like the marketplace in ways that render groups disadvantaged apart from their interactions with service providers (Hill 2001). Such inequities create systematic marginalization, such that groups become marginalized not only because of the inequitable distribution of economic resources and opportunities but also through the exercise of power in the social, cultural, and political dimensions of everyday life (Ozanne and Saatcioglu 2008; Thompson 2004).

Many studies have described the everyday life of different marginalized consumers, highlighting the difficulties they encounter while attempting to consume. For example, Adkins and Ozanne’s (2005) study focused on how low literate consumers must overcome literacy related barriers (i.e. reading labels, relying on pneumonic devices to must consumption choices, etc.) in order to function within the marketplace. Penaloza’s (1994) study described how immigrant consumers with language barriers must contend with their low status in America while attempting to make ends meet in order to function in the marketplace. Other studies that have researched marginalized consumer groups, have run the gamut of topics such as consumer vulnerability, racial profiling, low income, and status consumption (Adkins and Ozanne 2005; Baker et al. 2005; Harris et al. 2005; Holt 1998; Kates 2002;
Kaufman-Scarborough and Childers 2009; Peñaloza 1994; Williams et al. 2001). These studies highlight how socially embedded inequities in the marketplace dictate the manner by which these groups are capable of participating in the market. Often characterized as disempowered, having low social class and low cultural capital, research on marginalized groups typically focus on comparisons against those in higher social classes and those possessing high cultural capital. For example, research in the consumer literature focused mainly on the differences in consumption patterns between social classes (Dubelaar 2006; Holt 1998) or the patterning of consumption choices based on social class position (Allen 2002; Piacentini and Mailer 2004; Sandikçi and Ger 2010). These studies posit that consumers with low cultural capital experienced their world through a disempowered orientation resulting in their self-perception as an impotent reactor to life's circumstances and as such viewed themselves as nothing outstanding; perceived their future as threatening thus needed to work hard to secure their future (e.g. in case of losing one’s job); and enacted financial stability-seeking consumption practices, such as saving for a “rainy day”. Whereas, consumers possessing high cultural capital experienced their world through empowered orientations and enact consumption practices that opened doors, and expand their economic boundaries (Henry 2005). However, these comparisons overemphasize differences in consumption between groups, while assuming that all members within a particular group are homogenously capable of enacting certain consumption practices. Furthermore, it understates the field-specific nature of cultural capital by overemphasizing a dominant societal perspective of the type of cultural capital consumers possess. Consumers possess local cultural capital that allow them
maneuver within their social field (Arsel and Thompson 2011; Kates 2002; Thornton 1996), and thus are able to enact consumption practices specific to their context.

The work on stigma management suggests that members within marginalized groups respond to marginalization through their consumption in various ways, given the coping strategies available to them (Adkins and Ozanne 2005; Kates 2002). Still further, the work on subcultural consumption illustrates the existence of “internal diversity” in the consumption practices of a social group in response to marginalization, which further suggest differences in coping strategies (Kates 2002). Thus, responses to marginalization are not homogenously enacted among individuals within a social group. Therefore, consumption, which is characterized as influenced by social position, may actually differ from one’s social conditions, possibly to the benefit of the consumer. Thus, investigating how consumption, as a coping mechanism to marginalization, varies may provide valuable insights into how consumption plays a role in social mobility.

D. Coping with Situations of Marginalization

Coping refers to the “set of cognitive and behavioral processes initiated by consumers in response to emotionally arousing, stress inducing interactions with the environment aimed at bring forth more desirable emotional states and reduced levels of stress. (Duhachek 2005)” The literature on coping points to two main strategies in which consumers invoke when encountering stressful situations: (1) problem-focused and (2) emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping deals with consumers’ attempt to manipulate the environment to reduce stress. Whereas, emotion-focused coping deals with consumers’ attempt to re-appraise the
environment in an effort to control one’s emotions regarding the stressful condition. Marginalization in the marketplace creates situations whereby consumers become stressed, and therefore the need to cope becomes commonplace.

Racially based discrimination has been conceptualized as a culturally specific stressor (Landrine and Klonoff 1996), in which consumers, specifically African Americans, have responded using culture-specific coping strategies (Utsey et al. 2007). Utsey (2007) found that African Americans rely on traditional cultural factors, namely, spiritual and collective coping, along with family cohesiveness and adaptability, to improve quality of life. Brown (2008) found that racial socialization messages contributed to the coping options available to African Americans, which had further implications to their ability to improve their quality of life. In understanding how African Americans cope with racially based discrimination, these studies illustrate how marginalized individuals rely mainly on emotion-focused coping tactics to deal with discrimination. This is illustrated in the context of marketplace discrimination with Crockett et al’s (2003) study that found that African American men invoked emotional distancing and internalization as coping strategies when faced with discrimination in the retail setting. Taken together, these studies suggest the vulnerable position that discrimination positions marginalized consumers.

Coping strategies of marginalized consumers is most commonly investigated from the perspective of vulnerability. Vulnerability describes situations where consumers experience a state of powerlessness in a marketplace interaction, whereby an imbalance in the exchange relationship is attributable to factors that are largely not controllable by the consumer at the time of the transaction, thus hindering the consumption goals of the consumer (Andreasen and Manning 1990; Baker et al.
While all consumers experience vulnerability at some point in time, it is especially prevalent among socially disadvantaged groups such as: low income consumers, the stigmatized, physically disabled, racial/ethnic minorities, and consumers with language barriers. The persistent vulnerability these groups experience, stem from social structures that continuously situate them in unfavorable “out-group” status, thereby marginalizing them. But, not all marginalized consumers sit complacently on the margins. While some of these consumers may be unaware of their marginal status, some actively seek to move away from this unfavorable position.

A recent study on visually impaired consumers revealed that these marginalized consumers are motivated by normalcy (Baker 2006). Consumer normalcy is a desire to live like other consumers, be accepted as other consumers are, and be acceptable to one’s self in consumption contexts. Thus, people who have an attribute that is perceived as unusual, uncommon, or undesirable may wish to live like any other person and be accepted for who they really are (Baker 2006; Goffman 1963). As such, marginalized consumers enact consumption practices that help them to preserve their sense of normalcy by anchoring their behaviors in their own perceptions of normalcy as a self-preservation mechanism, seeking to no longer be an outsider. This runs counter to prior studies that insist on the resignation and acceptance of power imbalances in markets by marginalized groups (Henry 2010), and suggests that one of the underlying motives for marginalized consumers is to be viewed as normal, and as such engage in consumption practices that help them achieve such normalcy.
When looking at the coping strategies of marginalized consumers, the literature has mainly focused on coping from an interpersonal perspective (Adkins and Ozanne 2005; Crockett et al. 2003; Pavia and Mason 2004). However, marginalization is reinforced by institutional structures that work to reproduce social conditions, suggesting the need to investigate the interaction between social institutions and marginalized consumers. Less work has focused on the coping strategies invoked as a result of a more reflexive consumer-institution interaction.

One study however, on the role of normative political ideology in consumption, has provided great insight into consumers’ coping strategies from this perspective. This study found that consumers living in predominantly African-American neighborhoods coped with stress brought on from not having access to quality grocery shopping choices within their community by enacting consumption practices that were based on their internalized political values and ideals and corresponded to the strategies laid out by the EVL framework (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004). Building on the EVL framework, this study investigated how consumer’s deeply held political values influenced their response to attenuated access by either (1) exiting the relationship with local service providers, (2) voicing opinions/concerns/complaints about the nature of the relationship with local service providers, or (3) being loyal to local service providers that hindered access in an effort to demonstrate purchasing power (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004; Hirschman 1970). Specifically, the study found that consumers engaged in outmigration or outside shopping (Exit), neighborhood preference or Black entrepreneurship (Loyalty), and critiques of Black working class consumer behavior and racist assumptions/racial chauvinism (Voice). This study not only highlights that
consumers as more autonomous, but also highlights the reflexive interaction a consumer engages in with social institutions that work to inhibit access to goods and services. This study simultaneously investigates the consumer-institution interaction and the nature of its relationship with the consumer-firm relationship. Furthermore, it acknowledges the role of the consumer’s social position in the consumption choices available and their ability to respond to these oft-restricted choices found in offline consumption practices.

One thing to note is that coping strategies can only be invoked if they are available to the consumer. Thus, one can only enact an exit response to poor quality food choices, if other alternatives are available in order to exit the current provider relationship. It is suspected that the availability of coping strategies to consumers is based on one’s habitus or the set of inculcating experiences that forms into predispositions as a result of social conditioning. Thus, it remains that while some consumers are able and willing to respond in ways noted in the EVL framework, some consumers, namely those experiencing vulnerability, do not. When vulnerability is the source of marginalization, consumers may cope in ways that differ from the responses posited. One response may be to escape or transcend the social conditions that reproduce marginalization in the first place. Thus, building on this work, this dissertation focuses on the consumer-institution interaction and the mechanisms marginalized consumers use to free themselves of their social conditioning in particular.
E. **Coping Beyond Situations**

_Habitus_ /hab-ət-əs/: a set of acquired characteristics which are the product of social conditions and which for that reason, may be totally or partially common to people who have been the product of similar social conditions. It may be changed by history, that is by new experiences, education, or training. (Hillier and Rooksby 2005)

The concept of habitus has a long intellectual history and has been used to underscore how consumption is socially and historically shaped (Allen 2002). Habitus, refers to the subjectively embodied ways of feeling, thinking, and acting through a "generative social psychological structure" (Holt 1998). It is an abstracted, transposable system of schema that both classify the world and structure action. Specifically, habitus is the conduit between social classes and patterns of practice (Henry 2005). Thus, it is well understood in the literature that habitus guides consumption. As such, literature that has incorporated habitus has focused on the trajectory nature of habitus-guided consumption, such that consumption logically follows or is similar to the predisposition of the consumer. Thus, if an individual has been enculturated in high society/elite culture, his/her consumption practices will reflect the tastes of high society, such that high social class begets high social class (Bourdieu 1984). As such, habitus contributes to the _reproduction_ of social conditioning through consumption practices.

However, the link between habitus and consumption has been weakened in a number of studies in which consumers are able to transcend their habitus. Most recently, a study by Üstüner and Holt’ (2010) on status consumption in less industrialized countries found that Turkish elites quested for transcendence of
habitus through accumulation of deterritorialized cultural capital (Üstüner and Holt 2010). Deterritorialized cultural capital, in the context of this study, referred to the intelligence, knowledge, skills, and advantages associated with the tastes and sensibilities associated with the Western middle class lifestyle. In other words, the form of cultural capital to which this group aspired to achieve was essentially the tastes and sensibilities of the Western middle class. However, the authors found that these consumers felt like posers trying to imitate the Western lifestyle. As such, the authors concluded that because the Western lifestyle was not part of the Turkish elite’s habitus, these consumers only possessed “borrowed culture”. However, although these consumers were unable to fully appropriate the Western culture as their own, they were able to transcend their own (locally-based) habitus nonetheless. This not only empirically demonstrates the ability to escape; it provides a great springboard for theory extension by investigating the mechanisms by which escape is possible.

One mechanism, suggested by studies on vulnerable consumers, is the use of technology. A recent study on physically disabled consumers found that online shopping helped to elevate experiences of consumer normalcy by helping marginalized consumers feel like full participants in the marketplace, enhance their individuality by shopping according to their own preferences, and transcend the social stigma they encounter in the marketplace (Kaufman-Scarborough and Childers 2009). Moreover, research suggests that technology plays a prominent role in the shaping of society such that it is more than just a means to a particular reality, but is “a way of revealing, of bringing forth, of constructing new realities” (Berthon, Hulbert, and Pitt 2005). As such, technology has the potential to construct
new realities especially for those who not only aspire to but also could benefit from new social conditions. A study on Internet usage further attests to the potential for consumers to benefit from their consumption of technology. Specifically, this study found that consumers accrued economic and, to a lesser extent, social benefits from their use of the internet while purchasing an automobile (Zettelmeyer et al. 2006).

Interestingly, this study found that these benefits had differential impacts on different groups of consumers. Namely, consumers who disliked bargaining derived, on average, an extra 2.1% (significant at the p < .001 level) benefit in using the Internet during their automobile purchase. However, those who did like bargaining derived no extra benefit over and above those from utilizing the Internet. These findings not only suggest that information technology can help consumers realize added benefits in their consumption practices, but also illustrated that benefits derived from information technology are not equally distributed between various consumer groups, suggesting that consumers, who are at a disadvantage, are able to accrue benefits from the use of technology over and above that of consumers who are not.

Thus, marginalized consumers, who are at a social and sometimes economic disadvantage, may gain benefits over and above non-marginalized groups through their technology consumption practices. Taken together, this implies that meanings of technology consumption play an all-important role in the lives of marginalized consumers and that their technology consumption practices act as a mechanism of escape. Thus, through their use of technology, marginalized consumers are able to socially propel themselves, such that the benefits accrued from their technology use dislodges the connection between their social conditioning and their consumption practices. As such, marginalized consumers are able to transcend their social
conditioning, and thus transcend their habitus through their use of information technology.

F. The Augmented Consumption Field

“Habitus must not be considered in isolation. Rather, it must be used in relation to the notion of field which contains a principle of dynamics by itself as well as in relation to habitus.” (Bourdieu 2005)

The consumption field refers to the set of social relations between marketers and consumers that delineate status in everyday consumer life (Üstüner and Holt 2010). It is a social space where consumer tastes and preferences are enacted. Consumers, situated in various social positions, compete for symbolic power in different status games, creating forces in which tensions, contradictions, stability and structure all reside. Thus, the consumption field is a system of relations among social actors in which social power is wielded and status is conferred. Within this field, consumers typically act according to their social position and habitus, projecting a particular life trajectory. However, where contradictions and tension reside, changes in the consumption field are inevitable.

Given the social power of technology to facilitate habitus escape, it calls to question how the consumption field changes in accordance to the new social rules by which one would abide by. Üstüner and Holt’s (2010) study on status consumption suggests that transcendence of habitus augments the consumption field such that, in the case of high cultural capital consumers in low-industrialized countries (LIC), it pushes the boundaries of the consumption field from local to global (Üstüner and Holt 2010). Here, the study found that despite their inability to
appropriate the Western lifestyle, high-cultural capital consumers transcended the habitus associated with their local consumption field, thus changing the social boundaries for which they operated within. However, speaks to the dominant position of transcended consumers and furthermore brackets out social factors, such as ethnicity, that affect consumers’ consumption world. The augmented consumption field in which transcended LIC Turkish elite operate would be different from that of transcended marginalized consumers.

First, struggles that take place within the consumption field are experienced by non-dominant actors while dominant actors attempt to produce a “local” stable world where they produce meanings that allow them to reproduce their advantage (Sallaz and Zavisca 2007). In the case of Üstüner and Holt’s study, the Turkish elite’s dominant social position allowed them to capitalize on their accrued cultural capital by placing a premium on meanings of Western culture and the consumption practices associated with it. However, non-dominant groups are not afforded this capability. Instead, non-dominant (i.e. marginalized) consumers invoke consumption practices that stem from confrontation between dispositions and positions, which becomes the basis for generating change in the consumption field. As such, the nature of the consumption field in which marginalized consumers operates looks differently.

Second, marginalized consumers routinely form social networks that act as sources of social capital and mutual assistance, known as “fictive kin”, that allows them to virtually embed themselves in the consumption field (Stack 1975; Valdez, Neaigus, and Kaplan 2008). The term fictive kin was introduced sixty years ago in the sociology and anthropology fields, however the concept stems from the pre-
colonial West African era (Chatters, Taylor, and Jayakody 1994). Fictive kin, refers to family-typed relationships, based not on blood or marriage, but rather on close friendship ties or religious rituals that constitute a type of social capital (Ebaugh and Curry 2000). It is a concept that allows individuals who would otherwise be strangers, to take on and carry out family-like obligations and responsibility for each other. This very close-knit and special type of relationship has been extensively researched in the African-American and immigrant communities and marks a critical source of informal social support for vulnerable/disadvantaged consumers (Chatters et al. 1994; Ebaugh and Curry 2000). It is through fictive kinships that marginalized consumers are introduced to and possibly enact consumption practices. For example, research on community-based internet usage suggests that family and friend networks play a pivotal role in technology adoption and use among members of low-income communities (Bishop et al. 1999). Fictive kinships have the power to create bridges for the introduction of new consumption practices as well as provide material support to acquire/procure the necessary resources to enact a consumption practice especially in the case of consumers unfamiliar with a practice (Valdez et al. 2008). In the case of marginalized consumers, fictive kinships provide exposure to and the resources for the enactment of consumption practices that lie outside of the consumer’s repertoire of experiences. As such, unlike the Turkish elite who required “sustained proactive work” in order to fully appropriate the Western culture as their own, marginalized consumers embed themselves, through their use of fictive kinships, in the consumption field in such a way that their social capital can be readily converted into new forms cultural capital.
The consumption field is a significant societal domain because it displays the level of cultural capital consumers possess (Lamont and Lareau 1988). For example, the work on rave culture has argued that members of this subculture vie for status by displaying knowledge of cutting-edge trends in music, dance, and fashion, and other areas specific to the rave culture (Thornton 1996). Similarly, Kates (2002) showed how gay consumers utilized their subcultural capital to strategically play with conventional norms of gay subculture to establish distinction (Kates 2002). Fields are defined by sets of historical relations between social positions, anchored in certain forms of power and capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). In order to reap the benefits of accumulated cultural capital, consumers must transform their knowledge and skills into something specific to the consumption field they find themselves (Holt 1997a). To this end, cultural capital is a field-specific resource. One that is a social relation, such that it is “an energy which only exists and only produces its effects in the field in which it is produced and reproduced, each of the properties attached to class is given its value and efficacy by the specific laws of each field. (Bourdieu 1984)” We see this demonstrated in the work on brand communities whereby the appreciation of a specific brand’s history differentiates a consumer as a true believer as opposed to an opportunist, allowing that consumer to move from marginal to insider status (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001). When the consumption fields in which consumers operate, changes, the cultural capital they accrue takes on a new form; suggesting that new forms of cultural capital accrue in accordance with the augmented consumption field.

Again, Üstüner and Holt’s (2010) study provides some insight into the nature of this new cultural capital. This study confirms that the cultural capital accrued by
transcended consumers is of a different type, namely deterritorialized. Deterritorialization refers to the decoupling of linkages between space and culture, typically by external forces, such that a particular group no longer is the sole embodiment of a particular culture as indicated by their physical location. Instead, the culture is dispersed in such a way that it can be found virtually anywhere. We see instances of this in research on virtual ethnicity that posits that the internet creates a means by which one’s ethnicity is shifted to a form no longer based on territory but by socially constructed criteria (Macfadyen 2006). Through the process of deterritorialization, the Internet facilitates the reconfiguration of an ethnic group in which meanings normally attached to that group are disembodied and shifted such that a new set of socially constructed parameters become “authentic” identity markers. This concept signifies a break from traditional cultural patterns of a community, identity, and communication associated with a particular ethnic group and as such blurs the line between the traditional and virtual views of what constitutes a group. Thus, in the case of marginalized consumers, this process of deterritorialization may still be at play for transcended consumers, however in the context of this study, the cultural capital that is pursued is not “borrowed” but rather is part of the social milieu that engage in and has been simultaneously familiar and foreign to these consumers. Therefore, in the case of marginalized consumers, their use of information technology allows for the meanings typically associated with marginalized consumers to become disembodied, signifying a break from the traditional view of disadvantage and forging a new (although virtual) consumer identity, setting the stage for a different kind of relationship with the marketplace.
G. Towards Habitus Transcendence

The literature on cultural capital has asserted its field-specificity and its lack of value outside of its consumption field (Arsel and Thompson 2011; Holt 1997a, 1998). This problematizes consumers’ ability to utilize their field-specific cultural capital in other consumption contexts. However, as Sewell (1992) has acknowledged, the real test of knowing and possessing cultural capital is the ability to successfully apply this resource in unfamiliar cases (Sewell 1992). Bourdieu’s conceptualization of cultural capital suggests this same notion in his assertion that through embodied forms of cultural capital, individuals possess a set of “transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions, and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems. (Bourdieu 2003)”

Unfortunately, the field-specific nature of cultural capital tends to be interpreted as the universal or general nature of cultural capital (Holt 1997a; Lamont and Lareau 1988). However, this really speaks to the agency consumers possess in their own capacity to reinterpret and mobilize an array of knowledge (in terms of cultural capital) to transpose or extend that knowledge into new contexts.

Research on consumer learning has alluded to the capability of the consumer as able to apply knowledge and/or knowledge rules across various consumption situations. For example, Alba and Hutchinson (1987) used the cognitive concept of elaboration to refer to the consumer’s ability to internally generate new knowledge from old knowledge, whereby reasoning and problem solving enhance their capability to apply newly generated knowledge to unfamiliar consumption contexts.
Furthermore, Hutchinson and Alba’s (1991) study on analytic processing, found that consumers’ capability for applying knowledge varied by their learning efforts. Finally, works by Dillon et al (2001) and Spence and Brucks (1997) attests to consumers’ prior experience influencing their brand impressions and choices. Taken together, these studies illustrate consumers’ capacity to utilize their cultural capital and apply them in different contexts. However this research tends to narrowly focus on consumers’ capacity to utilize prior *product* knowledge in their subsequent consumption choices. On the other hand, consumer culture literature has all but resolved to the impossibility to traverse consumption fields utilizing field-specific cultural capital. As Sewell has asserted, “whether a given problem is similarly shaped enough to be solved by analogical transfers of schemes cannot be decided in advance…but must be determined case by case by the actors, which means that there is no fixed limit to the possible transpositions. (Sewell 1992)” This suggests that the ability to traverse consumption fields is more about the consumer and their creative capacity to apply their cultural capital and less about the static value their field-specific cultural capital holds in other consumption fields.

Sewell refers to this application of knowledge rules across [consumption] contexts as transposition. Transposition is the act of applying knowledge learned in one social field to another. It occurs because knowledge can be creatively applied to a wide and not fully predictable range of cases outside the context in which knowledge is initially learned (Sewell 1992). The act of transposition is one in which consumers traverse multiple consumption fields, the extent to which may depend on the similarity or dissimilarity between the consumption fields. Therefore, in the context of this study, transcended consumers who have accrued new cultural capital,
may be able to traverse multiple consumption fields the extent of their own capability.

* * * * * * *

Growing research has found that marketplace discrimination has moved from overt “big” acts to covert, subtle acts against marginalized consumers, particularly African Americans. Prior research has found that marginalized consumers are motivated by normalcy and pursue that normalcy using information technology. Thus, in their quest for normalcy these consumers engage in technology consumption practices that help them avoid the marginalization they experience. Because marginalization is a systemic phenomenon that reflects consumers’ sociohistorical conditioning and consumption practices, this phenomenon is viewed from a theoretical lens of habitus. Extant literature on habitus has found that consumers are able to escape habitus (even if temporary), however there is limited marketing and consumer research that examines this process, and further the role of information technology in this process. The relevance of this to my research is that information technology provides an especially fertile ground for exploring how marginalized consumers are able to permanently change their consumption rituals with IT, thus transcend their habitus.

My review of current theories of habitus, suggests that they are incomplete. They do not fully capture the process of habitus transcendence and restrict our understanding of how this process works. Specifically, they have not adequately addressed how the context of marginalization, which in a sense may act as motive for consumers to pursue normalcy, shapes consumers’ use of information
technology and the role that IT plays in their ability to transcend habitus. In chapter 3, I describe my methodological procedures for investigating this process, and present a model (in chapter 4) that extend current theories of habitus transcendence.
III. METHODOLOGY

A. Introduction

Building a comprehensive framework of how IT plays a role in consumer habitus that could explain how IT is utilized by and how it operates within the world of the marginalized consumer requires a methodology that allows social and cultural context of marketplace experiences and their personal meanings to surface. It further requires privileging information communication technologies within the lives of consumers. This research is particularly interested in investigating marginalized consumers’ lived experiences and their socially and culturally informed patterns of action as it relates to technology. Qualitative methods are instrumental in investigating the life-worlds of consumers and the meanings they attach to those experiences (Berg 2009). Netnography, in particular, is a method that helps to construct descriptions based on intense meaning of social life from the everyday perspective of consumers, while acknowledging the importance of computer-mediated communication in the lives of consumers (Kozinets 2010). In the context of this study, netnography provides specific benefits in studying marginalization in the marketplace. First, in preserving the stories of marginalization, netnography allows the researcher to gain access to stories told by marginalized consumers to other marginalized consumers in the online context. Stories of marginalization are told as they happen in the marketplace, and capture the lived experience of the marginalized consumer as it unfolds. Second, in maintaining the naturalistic voice of the consumer, netnography provides the researcher with access to the stories of marginalization as told by marginalized consumers to other marginalized consumers,
within a natural dialog between like-minded people. This provides the researcher with a truer sense of the phenomenon absent of the social desirability that often comes with researcher presence. Third, in capturing the sociocultural context, netnography is able to paint a vivid and more holistic picture of the marketplace marginalization from the viewpoint of the consumer facing this issue. Finally, in revealing deep meaning and identity projects of marginalized consumers, netnography gives the researcher access to personal motives and reasoning behind marginalized consumers actions. Thus, given these specific benefits and the nature of this study, netnography stands as the most appropriate method to examine the research questions guiding this study.

FIGURE I: Netnographic Study of Marginalization

Adapted from Kozinets (2011)
Netnography is a qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study cultures, communities, and social situations that emerge from or expand into computer-mediated communication mediums (Kozinets 2010). Netnography provides understanding of consumers’ behaviors and experiences in an online context with the goal of gathering untapped facets of consumers’ consumption stories to describe a richer portrayal of their experiences (Cova and Pace 2006; Kozinets 2002). As suggested by Kozinets (2002), netnographic research requires an immersive combination of participation and/or observation, and encompasses techniques such as interviewing, visual and discourse analysis to build into a body of knowledge that is comprehensive and grounded in context. Thus, the research methods that will inform this dissertation include: in-depth interviews, observations, and online archival data.

Qualitative research methods such as participant observation and interviewing have a long history as data collection methods in the social sciences. Particularly in consumer research, these techniques have been well established as methods to explore the significance of social and cultural contexts to which consumer behavior takes place and lived experiences are endured (Adkins and Ozanne 2005; Belk, Sherry Jr, and Wallendorf 1988; Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993; DeBerry-Spence 2008). Participant observation and in-depth interviews allow the researcher to develop sociohistorically-grounded understandings of consumers’ everyday life and the responses that specific contexts invoke. Participant observation provides unique insights into the complexity of the motivational forces that operate in consumption contexts, while in-depth interviews afford the researcher with insight into consumers’ personal tastes, histories, and values through their
verbalized understandings and feelings of their lived experiences. To this end, participant observation along with in-depth interviews complement each other by providing rich insight into consumers' consumption practices in their natural environment while shedding light on the historical and social construction of consumer experience.

However, observation is not specific to offline encounters that occur in consumers' lives. The use of online cultural data can be analyzed to provide a cultural baseline into the phenomenon of interest. The Internet provides unique opportunity to delve into phenomena by seeking and analyzing online interactions that serve as a bank of observational data. Thus, knowledge gleaned from this data allows the researcher to gain access to consumer discussions by observing and/or participating in communications on publicly available online forums. Given that 79 percent of adults use the Internet and 71.6 percent of all Internet users are said to use newsgroups or chat rooms (Pew Research Center 2010), this method was relevant for understanding the social issue of marginalization and the mechanisms consumers use to escape such social conditioning. Thus, netnography will allow for the unobtrusive collection of data, while investigating processes and patterns of behavior, and eliciting first hand accounts of consumers' lived experiences (Jorgensen 1989).

Netnographic studies can focus on two discussion areas, which determine the approach for research: conducting research on ‘online communities’ or on ‘communities online’ (Kozinets 2010). The former investigates phenomena directly relating to online communities and online culture itself, or some manifestation of either or both. Whereas, the latter examines some general social phenomena
whose social existence extends beyond the Internet and online interactions. This study, in particular, investigates the sociocultural role of information technology with respect to habitus in marginalized consumers. Further, this study seeks understanding of the wider social group of marginalized consumers and their experiences within the marketplace. To this end, netnographic methods, such as online participant observation and interviewing were used to elicit data for this study. Netnography has been used extensively in consumer culture research and is recognized as a legitimate method to which archival, elicited, and observational data can be garnered (Cova and Pace 2006; Kozinets 2002, 2010; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001).

B. **Data Collection**

My research was conducted in three phases over a period of 8 months, with each phase building on the previous. Figure II provides a graphic depiction of this process, while Appendix B provides a more detailed view of my data collection procedures. During the first phase, the objective was to gain a cultural baseline as to the prevalence and significance by which information technology plays a role in marketplace marginalization. Online archival data in the form of Internet-based chat forums, personal online blogs and microblogs (i.e. Twitter feeds), and online magazines and news reports were used to provide the baseline of the phenomenon. For a period of 2 weeks, I observed the conversations that took place on Longhaircareforum.com, a popular online chat forum geared towards African Americans to discuss a variety of topics that are of importance and concern to the community. Additionally, I observed reactions to and interactions among consumers
on Blackvoices.com and Bet.com websites as well as Twitter.com regarding reports of discriminatory incidents, such as the discrimination lawsuit brought against a New York City Apple Store alleged by two African American male consumers. Monitoring of all three websites allowed me to gain substantial understanding and cultural background necessary to gain entrée into the online field site to participate in discussions in both on- and off-line contexts. While observing discussions, conversations were saved and archived in their entirety, to be subsequently coded and analyzed for emergent themes. Phase two, conducted over a period of 3 months, consisted of participation in discussions regarding discrimination in the marketplace on Longhaircareforum.com and Twitter.com. The objective for this phase was to engage in dialogue with consumers who felt marginalized in the marketplace as a result of discriminatory treatment by marketers. A combination of follow up postings (comments/questions) to discussion threads already started, as well as, starting new discussion threads were employed to bring about dialog and to gain better understanding of marginalized consumers’ lived experiences in the marketplace. The third phase, lasting a period of 4 months, consisted of 18 in-depth interviews where first hand accounts of discrimination experiences and response to such encounters were elicited.
C. **Online Field Site**

The site chosen for participant observation was Longhaircareforum.com (LHCF), an online discussion forum geared towards African Americans as a source for information on various needs within the community. While the site initially started as an online forum for African Americans to be able to get information on hair care products and advice on how to best maintain their hair, it has since expanded its
focus to more general and current events that occur in the African American community. Within this forum, consumers are able to get career advice, discuss politics, social justice, and education, as well as get access to personal hair care products that may be hard to get in offline settings. Topics related to: travel, financial wellbeing, relationships, healthcare and wellness, caring for children and the elderly, fashion, pop culture, and religion, all make up the discussions within the forum. LHCF currently has over 148,000 subscribers and contains over 9 million posts discussed within 360,000+ discussion threads. The site was chosen for a number of reasons: (1) there is a significant number of members on the site that allow for meaningful and rich discussions on various topics including consumers’ experiences within the marketplace, (2) the site requires a fee to join the group, which deters gawkers and those with ulterior motives from clogging up the discussion boards with spam and hate speech, which detracts from the objective of the forum, and finally (3) the site is one of the longest standing discussion forums available for African Americans where historical context can be easily determined. Given the website’s popularity and growth, along with its un-moderated access to discussions and interactions among marginalized consumers, this site was ideal to understand marginalized consumers’ experiences with discrimination and the paths they take in response to those experiences.

D. Archival Data

Use of archival data began the data collection phase of this study and supplemented interview data in subsequent phases of the data collection process. Archival data consisted of discussion threads from the online field site
(longhaircareforum.com), formal complaints to companies on general consumer complaint websites, and where available news reports of discrimination complaints from various news media. Data were collected using a search engine for terms such as “discrimination case”, “marketplace racism”, “consumer profiling”, “shopping while black”, and “corporate discrimination lawsuits”. This provided an initial set of events, companies/firms, and situations to focus on within the online field site. In cases where there was a similar incident discussed within the forum or discussion about the same event within the forum, this data/report acted as supplemental data and was included for analysis.

Within the discussion forum, I searched specifically for those events found during my general search on the search engine. Additionally, I searched for terms: “discrimination”, “race”, and “racial” to get a collection of threads that might be included in the data. For each thread that came up in the search, a reading of the entire thread for understanding and only threads that involved marketplace discrimination were included in the dataset. Once a thread was determined to be included in the study, a printable version of the entire thread (a .pdf file) and imported into Atlas.ti for coding and thematic analysis. There were a total of 13 separate discussion threads included in the analysis, which resulted in 182 pages of single spaced text. Table II provides a brief overview of the archival data used for this study.

The main topics discussed within the discussion threads centered on personal incidents involving marketplace discrimination and critiques of institutional discrimination. Examples of institutional discrimination included criticisms of non-representation of African Americans in advertisements, lack of African American
employee presence in retail stores, and lack of products that catered to African Americans in national chain stores. Example of marketplace discrimination included personal accounts of encounters with being treated as criminals, denied service, verbally reprimanded and degraded, and ignored while shopping for various products and services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thread title</th>
<th>Unique members</th>
<th>Total postings</th>
<th>Total pages</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Focal actor role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offensive Ethnic Hair Care Aisle</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3/4/11 – 4/27/11</td>
<td>Initiated by Deana; Semi-active participation; Many personal experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Buy</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2/14/05 – 2/15/05</td>
<td>Initiated by Nadia; active participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AppleBee’s</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1/9/11 – 1/9/11</td>
<td>Initiated by Adel; active participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination Experience</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9/2/11 – 9/14/11</td>
<td>Initiated by Carla; Inactive partic’n; Multiple posts by 3 main respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant Seating</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9/16/11 – 9/17/11</td>
<td>Initiated by Adel; inactive thereafter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth Cole</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4/15/08 – 4/15/08</td>
<td>Initiated by Betty; active participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money in Hand</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1/20/11 – 1/24/11</td>
<td>Initiated by Kacy; active participation; Debate between 2 members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Hair Discrimination</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6/9/11 – 6/9/11</td>
<td>Initiated by Coco; Inactive thereafter; Many chime in w/ support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overt Racism Abroad</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4/1/10 – 1/1/11</td>
<td>Initiated by Mena; semi-active participation; Many respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping While Black</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7/10/10 – 7/10/10</td>
<td>Initiated to Deana; active participation; Multiple personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thread title</td>
<td>Unique members</td>
<td>Total postings</td>
<td>Total pages</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Focal actor role</td>
</tr>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won’t shop at Ulta</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6/9/10 – 6/25/10</td>
<td>experiences shared by 3 posters Initiated by Nikki; Inactive participation after 1 additional post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Ulta Experience</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7/28/11 – 7/30/11</td>
<td>Initiated by Dejah; active participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE II: Descriptive Characteristics of Archival Data**

E. **Depth Interviews**

Interviews were characterized as a conversational quality in which the course of the interview dialogue promoted a back-and-forth question and detailed answer in order to elicit the informant’s experiences. Interviews began with grand-tour questions that helped to situate the informant within the general context of their shopping experiences. Grand tour questions centered on typical shopping experiences, the types of stores they frequent, with who informants typically shop with, and the characteristics of experiences they considered would constitute pleasant and unpleasant shopping experiences. More focused questions, asked informants to give specific examples of their best and worst shopping experiences and the outcomes of both experiences. Appendix A contains the interview guide used to elicit data.

Over a period of 4 months, 18 depth interviews were conducted in mostly online, however, there were exceptions where offline context was the only feasible
option. In the offline context, interviews were conducted either in informants’ homes or a neutral place, such as at a local café. In the online context, interviews were conducted using Skype software. All interviews were immediately transcribed and initially analyzed for understanding and as input into subsequent interviews. Transcription of all interviews resulted in 197 single-spaced transcribed text.

F. Participants

Participants were selected by purposive sampling of consumers who had experienced racially based discrimination in the marketplace. In recruiting potential informants, the aim was to include consumers with a wide range of use of and comfort with information technology. However, my criterion for selecting informants was that they must have experienced discrimination in the marketplace, be African American, and at least 18 years of age or older. Individuals were excluded from the sample if their only experience with discrimination were from contexts outside of the marketplace (e.g. Driving While Black (DWB) incidents). Furthermore, encounters with discrimination not perceived as race/ethnicity based, were excluded from my sample. During my early interviews, I did embark on one interview where the criterion was not fully met due to the respondent’s inability to recall any discrimination encounters. A follow up interview with the respondent, proved useful in that she had recently encountered discriminatory treatment in the marketplace and was able to recall other encounters once she began to talk about the more recent encounter. The initial interview was then combined with the follow-up interview to create one extended interview.
Informants were recruited by email to members of various social and professional organizations as well as through my own personal network. Just over half of the respondents (10) were recruited from social/professional organization recruitment, while only 3 were from my personal network. The remaining 5 respondents were recruited using snowball. The 18 informants were all African-American consumers who encountered discrimination in the marketplace and consisted of 10 men and 8 women. Their age range of informants was between early 20s to late 60s, with a wide variety in educational background. Table III provides a summary of informants’ background.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>U.S. Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keisha</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>60K-69K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bentley</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>60K-69K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Antwoine</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>100K-149K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>20K-29K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>East Coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>50K-59K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>East Coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmad</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>80K-89K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jamal</td>
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<td>100K-149K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>South</td>
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<td>Nikita</td>
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<td>31-40</td>
<td>60K-69K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walter</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>60K-69K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>20K-29K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frieda</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>100K-149K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>West Coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>150K+</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>East Coast</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>100K-149K</td>
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<td>Kandace</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>150K+</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myesha</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>100K-</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>149K</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jocelyn</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>60K-69K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>149K</td>
<td></td>
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<td>South</td>
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<td>Midwest</td>
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</table>

**Table III: Demographic Characteristics of Informants**

G. **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using a thematic analytic approach, which is an iterative process that organizes and describes a data set in thick and rich detail (Boyatzis 1998; Braun and Clarke 2006). It is also an interpretative process whereby the researcher takes the context into consideration. Thematic analysis “allows a researcher using a qualitative method to more easily communicate his or her observations, findings and interpretation of meaning to others who are using different methods. This increased ability to communicate allows more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis 1998, p. 6).

Data analysis began soon after the first phase of data collection had begun and involved reviewing archival text, reviewing transcripts after each interview, writing field notes regarding observations while in the online field and notes from interviews. To begin the analysis process, transcribed interview text and archival data were initially read to get an overview of the content and flow of the data (Spiggle 1994). Data were initially broken into concepts meant to describe the raw data in terms of it’s properties and dimensions (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Through repeated reading, segments emerged from the data that formed repeated patterns, which inductively led to new codes and subsequent categorization of related data.
While at the same time the use of the marginalization, coping, and habitus literature streams, provided a priori codes that were used to categorize the data; reflecting comparisons and descriptions of the phenomenon as echoed in extant theory (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Concentrating on the dominant discourses across the data, new codes were generated and subsequently assigned units of meaning (Miles and Huberman 1999). Each code was defined and captured the qualitative richness of the discrimination, marginalization, habitus, and coping phenomenon in broad themes (Boyatzis 1998; Spiggle 1994). Integrating the themes with theoretical insights from information technology literature, drew together the conditions, contexts, strategies and outcomes of how technology utilization and coping is manifested in the marketplace (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Spiggle 1994).
IV. FINDINGS

A. Introduction

In this chapter I address three research questions: (1) How does information technology (IT) enable new habitus? (2) How do marginalized consumers use IT with respect to their habitus? And, (3) what role does IT play in marginalized consumers’ habitus? The answers to these questions yield a more comprehensive framework of how habitus transcendence occurs in the marketplace and expand theoretical boundaries by including the marginalized perspective on how consumers pursue normalcy, how IT provides access to normalcy, and how IT experience and comfort plays a role in habitus transcendence. The chapter is divided into four sections that first provide the context with which this process plays out, and then for each of the research questions. Within each section, I present the emergent themes, while incorporating examples drawn from the data.

B. Discrimination in the Marketplace

In this section, I present the contextual backdrop against which the habitus transcendence process unfolds. Marginalized consumers experience both positive and negative encounters in the marketplace while interacting with store personnel. While positive experiences result in informants re-patronizing an establishment (Oliver 1999; Szymanski and Henard 2001), engaging in complimenting behavior (Payne et al. 2002), and enacting positive word of mouth/referral behavior (Brown et al. 2005), negative experiences result in invoking coping behaviors (Crockett et al. 2003). These coping behaviors are the result of consumers perceiving negative experiences as stemming from discriminatory treatment. Extant literature attests to
the prevalence of discrimination in the marketplace and how consumers alter their consumption behavior in response. Critical to this prevalence is the growing subtlety with which discrimination presents itself in the marketplace. Harris et al (2005) distinguishes between the overt and subtle discrimination that marginalized consumers typically encounter. Consistent with these subtle acts, informants discussed the many derogations they encountered. The discrimination consumers mainly encountered can be described as microaggressions, or brief, commonplace and daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults towards marginalized consumers (Sue et al. 2007). These encounters may represent seemingly “small acts” from the perspective of the perpetrator; however have detrimental repercussions to the targeted individual (Holmes and Holmes 1970). Microaggressions are marked by the seemingly banal and trivial nature of the discrimination act, which are often dismissed as “innocent” acts by the offender. Thus, what makes these actions “micro” is the trivial nature of the act as perceived by the perpetrator, which as my informants illustrate are more aggressive in nature. Consistent with the social psychology literature on discrimination, informants discussed three kinds of microaggressions in the marketplace: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. Microassaults reflect the perceived intentionality behind the offender’s behavior and communication, while microinsult and microinvalidation reflect the perceived unintended nature of the communication message(s) received by the targeted individual. The perception of intentionality behind the act lies within the interpreter and have implications to the coping strategies invoked by the marginalized consumer. Figure III provides an overview of
the microaggressions encountered by marginalized consumers and highlights the intentionality for each type.

1. **Microassault**

   The first form of microaggressions that informants discussed experiencing during marketplace encounters is microassaults. Microassaults refer to explicit (racial) derogation characterized primarily by verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt them (Sue et al. 2007). These encounters are marked by action that posed a
threat to the marginalized consumer’s ability to freely consume in the marketplace.

While these derogations can take many forms, informants discussed the most prevalent as: being treated as a criminal, being verbally reprimanded, and being intentionally overlooked by sales representatives in favor of other non-minority patrons.

Take for example, Brain, who is currently a doctoral student at a highly respected university in the northeast region of the U.S., when he is denied the ability to complete a transaction by being treated as a criminal:

I was hired by Unilever, they gave me a large signing bonus... and I was in Connecticut and wanted to fly home to North Carolina. I had [a physical check for] half of the money and went to cash the check so I could get back home. The [bank teller] looked at the check and went and got the manager. He came and told me they couldn’t cash my check because of the amount. He then called Unilever and spoke to HR to see if I actually worked there and wanted to report me for forging a check. Even though the check was good, [the manager] froze my account, and would not deposit the check and I was livid. I [ended up] using the company [credit] card to fill my truck with gas and drove to North Carolina. When I got to North Carolina, I went to my branch and complained. All I got was ‘we’re very sorry.’ I talked to the people at HR and they said ‘we told the manager the check was good.’ I called my branch and asked to speak to the manager’s boss and gave him ‘the business’. All I got was a bunch of ‘I’m sorry’s.’ There were no excuses [for this treatment]. I closed my account and moved to another bank... [Brian]

Brian’s attempt to cash a valid check at a different branch of his bank resulted in being treated as a criminal instead (Harris et al. 2005). The bank manager’s dogged enforcement of an unwarranted bank policy demonstrates a perceived explicit and intentional attack on Brian. Even though the manager verified Brian’s employment with Unilever’s human resource department (which in of itself would be an unusual action for a bank manager to pursue even under suspicion of fraud), the manager was excessive in his actions when freezing all of Brian’s accounts. This action served to disrupt Brian’s ability to consume and prevent him from conducting any
business and was perceived by Brian as an intentional attack. Brian's perception of this incident as racially based discrimination colored his perceptions of the banking institution as a whole and dictated his subsequent action of closing all of his accounts with the banking institution. This is consistent with Crockett, et al. (2003) description of how marginalized consumers make profile-based attributions to explain their less than satisfactory treatment in the marketplace. Specifically, Crockett, et al (2003) found that African American men made causal attributions of discrimination based on their group affiliation and as a result, enacted coping strategies to deal with this type of treatment. Similar to their findings, this study found that marginalized consumers attributed profile-based discrimination, however this study extends Crockett, et al. (2003) findings by illustrating how marginalized consumers attribute discrimination. Here, Brian did not just attribute discrimination as the reason for his poor treatment. He goes beyond this by attributing discrimination specifically to both the branch and subsequently the firm, which became the basis for his switching behavior.

Aside from being treated as a criminal, microassault may also take the form of being verbally reprimanded by store personnel (Kelley, Hoffman, and Davis 1993) as a way of putting the marginalized consumer “in their place”. Nikita, a CPA and entrepreneur speaks of her experience while grocery shopping for a friend who is on public assistance and unable to physically shop:

I was buying baby food [for her] at this time, the first thing the cashier did was...tell me that I'm not allowed to buy certain foods and all of a sudden, some of the baby food had to go back. She was very ‘by the book.’ Even though I had the food separated so that I could pay with cash those that were ineligible for public assistance...So in my mind I'm like, ‘Is it really this difficult? Really? Or do you just don’t like when Black people get up in here with this public aid card?’ [Nikita]
Nikita attempts to purchase baby food at a small grocery store chain with a public assistance card, which results in her being verbally reprimanded by the cashier regarding her purchase. This discriminatory incident originated from a common stereotype about African Americans as being unknowledgeable and/or untrustworthy (Gilbert and Lownes-Jackson 2005) and thus requiring the cashier to remind Nikita of the terms and conditions of public assistance card use. Further, Nikita’s questioning of the cashier’s intentions points to how she felt singled out and made to feel uncomfortable during her transaction by being scolded by the cashier. The cashier’s insistence on being “by the book”, called into question whether the cashier would have been this thorough with other (white) patrons. This calls attention to the intentional nature of the cashier’s actions. This is reiterated in the Patrick’s experience where another cashier attempts to overlook him while in line to complete his shopping:

I was in Costco in line waiting and I was the next one to be checked out and because there was a lady next to me, white lady and a white woman at the register. She said ‘Okay ma’am, can I help you?’ I stopped her and I said, ‘Wait a minute! I was here first.’ ‘Well, sir, um, I just want to go ahead..’ I said, ‘No, I was here first and you should check me out first.’ It is one of those issues where because you’re black, some people think that we should be the last one to get service. [Patrick]

A simple trip to a local bulk item warehouse club, turned into a situation where the consumer, Patrick, had to ‘fight’ for his position in line while buying products. This ‘fighting’ represents one of the socioculturally based consumption practices that marginalized consumers, particularly African Americans, carry out due to marketplace discrimination. The regularity of this type of treatment and belief of how African Americans should be the last to get service, illustrates the normality of Patrick’s experiences with this type of discrimination. Because habitus is embodied
in the habituated dispositions to certain consumption practices (Bourdieu 1984), Patrick’s need to “fight for his position” illustrates his predisposition to act in this particular way. As such, Patrick’s response to this treatment embodies the habitus to which he is currently situated within. Moreover, because of his habitus, Patrick is also able to quickly recognize and respond to the subtle slights from the marketer. Patrick’s decision to confront the offender resulted in his receiving service in the appropriate order. However, the situation further confirms and reinforces Patrick’s belief that marketers perceive him, as an African American, to be inferior.

2. Microinsult

Another type of microaggression that Informants discussed experiencing is microinsults. Microinsults are encounters where interactions with marketers convey an overall rudeness and insensitivity that demeaned their racial heritage and identity (Sue et al. 2007). These interactions differ from microassaults in that they are perceived as less intentional, and not meant to hurt the consumer, but characterize an unconscious insensitivity in the marketer’s actions. From these interactions, informants receive messages in the form of both verbal and nonverbal communications that create a constant reminder of being the other among consumers. Microinsults conveyed many messages of which informants discussed the most common as being: a second-class citizen, abnormal, and invisible. One informant discussed how his experience with marketers at an early age, conveyed the message that he was a second class citizen:

To buy stuff you get your products and then had to place your items in a revolving thing and then they'd swing it around, scan it, and put it back in there. Then you put your money through a slot. But before that we were taught. They'd tell us 'put your money on the table'. You just felt like they were treating you as second-class citizens. So if you were
to buy something, and attempt to place change [i.e. coins] in their hands, they'd tell you 'No. Put it down [on the counter].' And it was like they didn't want to touch us. [Jason]

Jason’s experience with being subjected to consumption through bullet-proof Plexiglas convey subtle but clear messages of being untrustworthy, requiring extra precautions while dealing with this group in the marketplace. Few studies in the urban health literature have acknowledged the use of and messages conveyed with Plexiglas in low-income African American neighborhoods by marketers (Cannuscio, Weiss, and Asch 2010; Freeman 2007). Specifically, these studies find that Plexiglas partitions may serve to alienate rather than welcome customers; and implementing security measures may absolve fast food restaurants from liability for crimes occurring on their property even when the chosen measures prove inadequate. Thus, the message is quite clear to Jason that he and people that looked like him are of lesser status and therefore subject to being treated with disdain. Other informants like, Aisha, discuss the same type of incident, but as a more recent phenomenon (i.e. in adulthood):

After she swiped my card, I put my hand out to take it, but she puts it down on the counter and she does the same thing with the receipt to sign. I thought nothing of it but she did it again with my receipt and it clearly looked like she did not want her skin to touch with mine. [Aisha – LHCF member]

Aisha’s experience illustrates not only the message of being a second-class citizen, as was the case in the previous example, but also the subtlety with which the message is conveyed. The marketer’s actions convey the message that African Americans are abnormal and therefore should not be touched. Here, the marketer’s actions could be construed as trivial by observers viewing this situation from outside the purview of the marginalized consumer. Particularly, if taken as a lone incident, the perception of this as being trivial would be warranted. However, it ignores the
cumulative nature and power of the demeaning message (Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder 2008). Aisha’s experience in this encounter is one of many similar instances and therefore the accumulation of this type of treatment perpetuates the marginalization that is felt. Thus, it is also the banal nature of this act that imbues it with the characteristics of a microaggression and the unconscious insensitivity that is conveyed that categorizes it as a microinsult, in particular.

Takeisha, another informant, discusses the same treatment but in a more obvious manner:

I’d ordered takeout with a gift card. I gave the woman the gift card and $5. She asked if I wanted change back - almost $3. I said yes. I held out my hand for the change and she plopped the money down next to my open hand. [Takeisha – LHCF member]

Consistent with literature that finds microaggressions to be enacted on a continuum of subtlety/overtness (King et al. 2011), Takeisha experiences a microinsult that is more overt than subtle. This treatment is characterized as a microinsult in that it is less intended to hurt the consumer and is more symbolic in its offense. The issue of not placing money in one’s hand during a transaction is deliberate and the message it conveys to the consumer is more antagonistic. The marketer’s dismissal of Takeisha’s wish to have her change handed to her, conveys messages of both lesser status and ascriptions of pathology (as in to convey something is inherently wrong with African Americans) and her desires are unimportant. All three cases taken together illustrate that marginalized consumers are faced with both spoken and unspoken communications that convey they are persistently the “other.” However, it is the symbolic nature of the offense, couple with the commonplace and unconscious insensitivity that mark these cases as microinsults.
Instances of microinsults present themselves in other more traditional forms. Informants discussed their experiences with being ignored by personnel. This is consistent with the growing evidence that marketplace discrimination is becoming subtler (Harris et al. 2005). Take for example, Myesha, a director of a non-profit organization, who discussed the common occurrence of being ignored at department stores:

I’ve been in line at the jewelry counter where this has happened quite a bit. I’m next and I even thought I got the person’s eye while they were helping somebody else, and then next thing I know they are asking someone else what can I get for you. That’s been at department stores like Abraham & Strauss, Macy’s, and Lord & Taylor. I’ve had people even tell me not to go into Lord & Taylors [because] they are pretty racist. [Myesha]

Myesha’s recounting of her experiences of being ignored while waiting in line illustrates the subtlety by which discrimination is enacted in the marketplace (Harris et al. 2005). While immersed in the experience, Myesha receives messages about what the marketer considers Myesha to be. In this instance, the message conveyed is that of invisibility. The action of a marketer of servicing another customer who was not next in the queue to be waited on, is perceived as an egregious act that conveys the message of not being taken seriously as customer or as someone not worth the time and effort to service.

There seems to be a prevalence of this type of discrimination within department stores or large chains that serve a wider target market. This seems counterintuitive as international retail chains with large diverse populations should be more mindful of diversity, and thus would be concerned with its employees’ threshold for tolerance and inclusion while serving these customers. Yet, the same sense of consumers feeling as though they do not belong is illustrated at the point of entry for some consumers typically at smaller national chains or local/private businesses.
Informants discussed their experiences of being given the “side eye”, that is, a particular look from the marketer that conveys the message of not being wanted in the establishment. This form of ascription of the “other” most times act as a signal to marginalized consumers of what is to come or what to expect in the establishment (i.e. the likelihood of discrimination to occur).

3. **Microinvalidation**

The final type of microaggression informants discussed experiencing in the marketplace was that of microinvalidations. Microinvalidations are defined as verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color (Sue et al. 2007). The offender often commits this type of microaggression unconsciously. Nonetheless, they were felt and experienced by the consumer explicitly and consciously. Informants described how the marketer down-played their racial identity by attempting to convey a message that race could not be a factor in their shopping experience because of a denial of the offender’s own role in the perpetuation of racism. Take for example, Keisha, who attempted to dine at a local sports bar:

I was with my girlfriend at Junior’s and that is the type of establishment that you can just go be seated. They told us we had to wait to be seated. When we were waiting to be seated there was a table that was free. The lady wouldn’t acknowledge us to give us the table so we went and sat there. It was a whole bunch of grief, she wouldn’t even serve us a drink. I had to go to the bar and get the drink and I had already heard how they are with African Americans in there. They had an attitude but I actually saw it first hand and I actually went to tell the manager and he didn’t believe me. He goes, ‘Well I don’t think that my servers did anything to you and she said that you were doing this, that and the other.’ I said, ‘I am a customer with a complaint. And you are not going to do anything about it?’ [The manager said]’No.’ Then he said, ‘And you can’t say it’s because I’m white because I have some black in me too.’ Clearly he was straight up white. But he was trying to be funny. [Keisha]
Keisha ran into multiple types of microaggressions in this scenario, however the one that perhaps created a bigger issue for her is the comment that the manager makes about his role in perpetuating the discriminatory treatment. Here, an attempt is being made to deny Keisha her lived experience of discrimination, by the offender attempting to deny his involvement in the discriminatory conduct. Though microinvalidation is often unconsciously committed, here the offender seems to be aware that the entire incident could be construed as discriminatory. Regardless of the intent of the offender, Keisha and her friend perceived the entire experience as discriminatory, and specifically the manager’s comment as an attempt to negate the informant’s reality of the situation. Often times, this type of microaggression is demonstrated in the statement, “I can’t be racist because I have black friends.” In essence, the manager’s remark is conveying the same message. That message is that the offender does not play a role in the perpetuation of discrimination because of his/her connection with African American friends or peers, which is used to falsify the perception of a racist attitude/perception/behavior.

In addition to the denial of the marketer’s role in discriminatory treatment, informants discussed how marketers attempted to down-play the idea of race or racial identity. Again, this is often committed unconsciously on the part of the marketer, however, to the consumer it is an intentional act meant to nullify one’s racial reality. Take for example, Jamal, whose attempt to check out items at the register is met with his being referred to as “Bro” by a Caucasian cashier, even though he expresses a discomfort with being called as such:

There can be 5 white people in front of me and the cashier will say, ‘Thank you for coming. Here’s your bag Mr. So and So.’ I get to the front and it’s, ‘Hey bro!’ How come I don’t get the same personal demeanor that you just showed the other five shoppers? Now we’re
bro’s and you don’t know my name? Why do you think it’s okay to call me ‘bro’?... And its, ‘Aww you know you look so like you’re laid back. So I’m cool with it so why wouldn’t it be okay?’ But again if you don’t know me, you’re going by what you see and making a whole lot of assumptions. [Jamal]

Jamal’s encounter with the cashier calling him “Bro” while giving formal acknowledgements to other patrons represents a more subtle form of microinvalidation. When Jamal asks the cashier why does he though it was okay to call him “Bro”, the cashier’s reply conveyed a tone of disregarding racial identity in why it was deemed appropriate to refer to Jamal in this manner. The assumption here is that African Americans are cool and laid back and so the formality is not necessary. However, as a consumer, Jamal saw this incident as an attempt to disregard the racial undertone of the marketer’s communication.

C. **Overview of IT-Enabled Habitus Transcendence**

This section addresses the first research question: How does information technology (IT) enable marginalized consumers to transcend their habitus? I show that situated within the context of marketplace discrimination (which has been presented in the previous section), marginalized consumers draw on consumption practices and rituals that allow them to cope with discriminatory encounters. These practices are socio-culturally based and embody the interpretive lens by which consumers are able to assess and respond to the consumption environment. As discussed in the previous section, the consumption environment that marginalized consumers often encounter is plagued with everyday discriminatory treatment in which its effect accumulates over time, creating a habitus of “consumption by coping”, in which consumers must often find ways to reduce the stress caused by
marketplace discrimination. The literature suggests that marginalized consumers are motivated to achieve normalcy and use information technology to do so (Baker 2006). My findings show how consumers pursue normalcy and the ways in which they have access to that normalcy, which encompasses a process by which consumers are able to transcend their habitus.

Extant studies have found evidence of habitus escape within the context of subcultural consumption (Kates 2002) and stigmatized cultural consumption (Sandikçi and Ger 2010). Yet, the issue of whether consumers are able to successfully sustain an escape from their habitus is contested by studies showing that deterritorialized cultural capital did not permanently enable elites to transcend their habitus (Üstüner and Holt 2010). My findings show that marginalized consumers are able to transcend their habitus through their use of information technology in ways that enable them to enact changes in their consumption rituals. Key to the transcendence of habitus, IT provides marginalized consumers with the permanency with which they are able to enact changes in their consumption rituals. Though in Üstuner and Holt’s (2010) study consumers were able to temporarily escape their habitus, their quest to transcend was unsuccessful due to their reliance on the reflexive security of the consumer to enact permanent changes in their consumption rituals. Specifically, in their study, Üstuner and Holt (2010) found that elite consumers, situated within a low-industrialized country, attempted to transcend their habitus through the accumulation of deterritorialized cultural capital (i.e. borrowed culture). However, because these consumers lacked the confidence to apply their cultural capital, they were unsuccessful in their quest. This illustrates that the mere possession of cultural capital does not provide consumers the capability to transcend habitus. It also highlights the critical issue of how and the capacity to
which cultural capital can be applied. My findings illustrate this by highlighting three elements with which habitus transcendence occurs: level of experience and comfort with IT, normalcy pursuit, and access to normalcy. These three elements represent drivers of the transcendence process and reflect cultural capital in the form IT knowledge and experience, the application of that knowledge, and the capacity to which it can be applied.

One of the drivers in marginalized consumers’ ability to change their consumption rituals was one’s level of experience and comfort with IT, which provided the knowledge and capability needed to pursue the normalcy they desired. Consumers showed varying levels of comfort and experience with IT and utilized multiple information technologies. Such technologies as: automatic teller machines (ATMs), email, the Internet, mobile phones, online discussion forums, social media, and debit card machines are among the technologies used by marginalized consumers. Important to understanding IT use is the recognition that the IT is not just an object but one that: is used within a particular context, is embedded within some time, place, discourse and community, is dynamic in nature, and emerges from ongoing social and economic practices (Orlikowski and Iacono 2001). Thus, informants’ comfort and experience with IT is situated within the context of discrimination and emerges from one’s need to cope with discrimination in pursuit of normalcy.

Comfort and experience with IT can be categorized as general and shopping-specific. General comfort and experience refers to a person’s overall predisposition to use IT. One’s general level of comfort and experience with IT stems from their ability to successfully maneuver within technology. For example, all informants discuss their general use of IT, however some possess more advanced levels of
experience, while others maintain rudimentary levels of comfort and experience with technology in general. Those with rudimentary IT skill set discuss their comfort with using the Internet to conduct general searches (e.g. Google or Yahoo search engine), while those with more advanced IT skills discuss the ease with which they incorporate IT into their everyday lives (e.g. checking email from a smartphone, using the Internet capability on their smartphone).

Shopping specific comfort and experience refers to a person’s level of skill with using IT for the purpose of completing transactions or procuring items (e.g. using the Internet to shop online; using debit card machines during purchase transaction). Informants discuss having differing levels of shopping specific IT experience and comfort. For some informants, concerns with privacy, identity theft, and general distrust of IT deter them from conducting financial transactions over the Internet (e.g. banking online, shopping online). While these informants incorporate the use IT for the purpose of product/service search online and price comparison, they stop short of procuring the item in the online environment, choosing instead to reserve the item for pick up at a store (e.g. utilizing Sears store pick-up service).

General IT experience and comfort shapes and is shaped by one’s shopping specific IT experience and comfort. Informants develop overall IT experience and comfort as they introduce new product type or category in their shopping specific experience. In other words, as their IT comfort and experience increases, consumers venture into using IT with product categories they have not use IT with before. For example, many informants discussed their experience and comfort with buying clothes, books, and electronics in an online environment, while others discuss their discomfort with buying furniture online. As these informants gained more experience
with online shopping, became more comfortable with buying other product categories in the online environment, such as food or groceries.

The level of comfort and experience with IT is tempered by how consumers pursue normalcy (the ways in which consumers used IT to pursue normalcy). This in turn, shapes the extent to which consumers’ consumption rituals change (i.e. whether the change was temporary or permanent). This also implicates the role that IT plays (i.e. the ways in which IT provides access to normalcy).

D. Pursuit of Normalcy

This section addresses the second research question: How do marginalized consumers use IT with respect to their habitus? Information technology use has become increasingly commonplace among consumers, and more specifically among traditionally marginalized groups. A recent Google report states that African Americans are ahead of the digital curve, utilizing video, mobile, and other platforms to interact online (Google 2011). Moreover, the report states that 49% of African Americans search the web on their smartphone while commuting. This suggests that IT use has become quite prevalent within the habitus of African American consumers.

With respect to habitus, my findings show that marginalized consumers use information technology in three ways: to manage their habitus, to escape habitus, and to transcend habitus. In managing their habitus, marginalized consumers deal with the everyday realities of life and use technology as a way to cope with the discriminatory treatment they encounter as part of their habitus. Informants describe how they use IT to seek advice, share their experiences, and give advice to others experiencing the same discriminatory situations in the marketplace. In contrast to
managing habitus, marginalized consumers escape habitus by seeking a temporary reprieve from their habitus. Here, informants use technology as a way to temporarily remove themselves from their normal consumption practice of coping in an effort to pursue the normalcy (Baker 2006) they seek in the marketplace. Finally, in transcending habitus, marginalized consumers permanently change their consumption practices of coping, such that a new consumption practice becomes part of their normal routine. Here, informants use technology to establish new sociocultural consumption practices, rituals, and customs.

1. Managing Habitus

One of the ways in which marginalized consumers use IT is to cope with the stresses of their habitus by managing it. For managing their habitus, consumers use technology to find ways in which they can deal with the norms of discriminatory treatment, encounters, and interactions normally endured while in the marketplace. Thus, in a sense, marginalized consumers use IT as a platform from which knowledge and emotional support can be tapped, in order to deal with the offline consumption world.

Many informants discuss discriminatory experiences as a “normal” occurrence in the marketplace and their need to find ways on how to handle getting through these encounters. Specifically, many informants participated in online forums where they shared their experiences with and responses to discriminatory encounters as an everyday occurrence in their world. For some marginalized consumers, the conversations served as a way of learning how to manage through these ordeals, while for others these conversations served as a way of providing
advice to someone venting about their experience and/or requesting advice on what they should do:

Me and my mom go into Best Buy last night looking to buy 2 computers...We waited for 10 minutes before getting any help. Finally we talk to the sales guy and decide we wanted 2 of the same computer. As he walks away to check if it's in stock a white guy behind us yells 'make that 3.' The sales guy comes back and says he has 2 in stock and wants us to take a rain check. We say, ‘no’... He comes back with the 2 computers. He asks me and my mom to take a rain check again. We refuse and ask to speak to the manager. The sales guy goes to speak to the manager alone. He comes back and motions for the white guy to meet him at the register...I was disrespected, ignored, laughed at and treated rudely. No one bothered to apologize to me, and I'm taking this to corporate until I am satisfied... Ladies give some ideas on what to do so I can make sure my complaint is heard. Do you think I was overreacting? [Jackie – LHCF member]

Jackie describes her experience with several microassaults while attempting to make a purchase at an electronics store. Her experiences with being deliberately ignored, provided severely degraded service, and denied the opportunity to make a purchase all reflect the type of treatment that is part of the marginalized consumer habitus. These microassaults, in their banality, begin to shape Jackie’s reality, which in its current state, is the normality of consumption by coping. Jackie’s use of the online forum as a means share her experience and to seek the advice allows her to deal with her current reality and thus assists in her ability to manage her habitus. Consistent with coping research, Jackie’s response illustrates how consumers invoke exit, voice, and loyalty as coping strategies when faced with marketplace discrimination (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004; Hirschman 1970). In this case, Jackie utilized multiple voice strategies in both off- and online contexts. Jackie's first voice strategy is invoked when she confronts the offending party of their discriminatory treatment when the personnel suggested that she and her mother (both of whom are African American) take the rain-check rather than the other patron, and her
subsequent vocal displeasure with this treatment to the store’s managers, as well as regional manager. These voicing strategies would be considered the typical coping responses to discrimination in the marketplace. However, Jackie not only utilized the online context to voice her experience of and frustrations with discriminatory treatment, but also solicited advice to her problem. Within the online context, Jackie’s voice strategy serves to garner emotional support (Duhachek 2005), where she sought to gain social and emotional support for her having to deal with the stress of discrimination. In her use of IT, Jackie was able to obtain access to resources beyond that of her immediate (offline) context. In other words, Jackie was able to utilize information technology in such as way that she could optimize how she managed her habitus by garnering support and advice that would not normally be available to her to best deal with the discriminatory treatment she received in the marketplace.

The use of IT to garner support is further illustrated by Lizelle, whose shopping experience turned sour when store personnel treated her unfairly:

I ran into the Kenneth Cole store during my lunch break... I find these shoes, go to the register and am next in line. Then this sales associate whispers to the girl at the register that this white couple is next. :ohwell: So I’m screw-faced [referring to a menacing expression on her face] as hell at that moment. I really wanted to give everyone a piece of my mind, but all I said was ‘his is some bullsh#it!’ Everyone in the store was trying to avoid looking me in the face, because they knew I was PISSED... I mean I was RED and fuming!!! The lil heifer that told the girl at the register to ring up the couple got out of dodge real quick because I was going to tell her how ‘inappropriate’ her actions were and that ‘her managerial/customer relations skills’ were poor... [On] second thought, I was gonna curse her out, I can’t even lie. Anyway, it turns out they rang up my items WRONG and charged me too much, so I have to go back into the store... I AM going to make that heifer help me with my purchase AND tell her about herself... [Lizelle - LHCF Member]
Lizelle responds to this discriminatory treatment by remaining loyal (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004) with a plan to confront the offending salesperson when she returned to the store. Lizelle’s confrontation in this case seemed more passive in she was visibly displeased with the level of service and made certain that store personnel her. Though Lizelle is ready for a ‘fight’, she decides to restrain herself in the presence of store patrons and personnel (Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub 1989). But she then decides to share her story with other African Americans online. In this case, Lizelle initiates the thread in the online forum herself (as opposed to posting her message in response to others’ postings). In initiating this sharing of her experience, Lizelle enacts a coping strategy by which she ultimately seeks emotional support from other consumers. In drawing support from others in an online environment, Lizelle is able to voice her unique, yet common occurrence of discrimination in the marketplace and is able to garner support and coaching on how best to handle such situations.

Lizelle’s thread post results in many responses to her story where other marginalized consumers share similar experiences and voluntarily offered advice on how they have handled similar experiences. This results in Lizelle’s ultimate decision to return to the same store in order to rectify a transactional issue regarding her purchase. While it can possibly be argued that her decision to return to the store was driven by the erroneous transaction, Lizelle’s further posting suggest her contemplating through the ordeal and how to handle such situations. Thus, though her decision to *return to the store* is motivated by the transaction, her need to confront the employee regarding her treatment seems to be motivated by a need to make right on a wrong, in which the offender treated her as less than a “normal” consumer (Sue et al. 2007).
Using IT helps marginalized consumers prepare for future consumption. Informants discussed their use of IT to gather information from others who have provided their input/experiences on the Internet as a way of making a decision about an establishment and whether or not to patronize it.

I went to a restaurant with a friend. The place was known for their buffalo wing seasoning. We asked about getting half of one seasoning and half with another seasoning. We asked the server if it was possible and she had to ask her manager. The manager said, ‘well we’ll do it this time but it wasn’t something we normally do.’ My friend was like is she serious? Is he going to chastise us because we are asking for this? We are paying customers and it wasn’t like the meals were premade. I was thinking about what poor choice that manager made. Because of that, we are not coming back. We felt that we were being chastised. This manager making a statement like she was somehow doing us a favor. But you are not doing me a favor because I’m paying for it. Now, I go online and read reviews beforehand and check the menus of places. I can pretty much tell the level of service for a restaurant [by their menu]. [Denise]

Denise describes how she used the Internet as a way of preparing herself before she patronized a restaurant in order to avoid encountering similar discriminatory experiences like this one. Denise’s questioning of the manager’s intent in her response, signals Denise’s heightened awareness of likely being treated differently in the marketplace. Specifically, Denise alludes to the manager singling them out in their request for what would have normally been perceived as a simple request had it come from a non-minority. Instead, the request is met with chastisement from service personnel, which left both Denise and her friend not wanting to return to the establishment. As a result, Denise has used this experience as impetus for preparing herself before she decides to patronize other restaurants by using technology to gather information and read reviews and menus of restaurants to patronize an establishment. In this manner, Denise is a recipient of the discriminatory experiences that many similar consumers share.
While these cases have focused primarily on the Internet as the technology chosen, in the case of Kyle, this same insight can be extended to other forms of information technology, in this case the cell phone, as a vehicle for accommodating diverse voices:

I went to a liquor store...I didn't realize it, but the guy [store employee] was following me...I never consciously faced discrimination like that at that point, so I didn't know how to recognize it... I went to the back of the store. He kind of ran back. ...and kind of lingered where I was...I moved away from him, next to my friend, and he's [the employee] now standing next to me. He said to me you 'touched the wine.' I said, 'what are you talking about?' He said it again and I said if you mean stealing use the word 'steal' instead of 'touch'. It's okay to touch stuff in this store...I was like do you want me to show you? But, then I thought about it, and I'm like, I'm not showing you anything, because I didn’t steal anything. So, then I was like, 'I'm leaving!' I was really angry afterwards. I was like, did he really just follow me all around the store like I stole something? I was rather upset after the fact. But during, I was really confused. Like what is going on here? ...[Later] I discussed it [the incident] over the phone. I know when it happened, I called one of my friends and was like, guess what just happened to me... [Kyle]

An employee’s unwarranted accusations of theft towards Kyle, reflects a habitus of criminality among marginalized consumers. As an African American male, Kyle is faced with this type of treatment more so than his female counterparts. Though Kyle does not immediately interpret the incident as discriminatory, he comes to this realization when he is followed to more than one area in the store. Kyle’s reluctant to categorize this experience as race-based and making several attributions to the employee’s mental state and capabilities, illustrates how he tends to cope with such situations using emotion coping strategies (Crockett et al. 2003). However, after recognizing that the incident is perhaps beyond that of individual characteristics of the employee, Kyle takes a more active coping approach (Carver et al. 1989) by confronting the employee regarding these accusations. This is extended into Kyle’s refusal to make a purchase and subsequently exiting the store. When Kyle later
phoned his friends to tell them about his experiences, he used that opportunity to not only share his experience but also to garner the social support needed. Though Kyle uses a different technology (cellular phone) to gather support for himself, he nevertheless views utilization of technology as a tool where he can communicate his frustrations, and advise other consumers regarding this type of experience.

2. Escaping Habitus

The second way marginalized consumers use IT with respect to their habitus is to escape. In escaping habitus, marginalized consumers seek temporary reprieve or a way to temporarily remove themselves from the constant discriminatory encounters that afflict their everyday lives. Because marginalized consumers are often faced with the need to cope with stressful consumption experiences, they often seek ways in which they can liberate themselves from such distressing circumstances even if only temporary (Adkins and Ozanne 2005). Informants discussed how they used information technology as an option in order to enact exit as a coping strategy. One informant spoke of how she just wanted to leave the store after being angered by the lack of attention paid to her while shopping:

I was at Banana Republic because I needed a dress and I wanted them to check for me. The lady said she would check. Twenty minutes later she hadn’t checked, and was helping other people, she then said they didn’t have it. I felt she was lying, she didn’t really check. That left a sour taste in my mouth. I did complain to the manager, and the manager basically apologized, said he’ll notate it, and have a conversation with the sales rep. I just left and went online and got the dress. I just chose not to deal with them at that point. I was pissed, because I saw them helping other customers and I hate playing a race card, but when you go into Banana Republic on Main Street, it’s not that many African Americans going in there. But, I’m spending my money. My money spends just as good as anybody else... On the inside you may not show it you are getting hot, you’re getting pissed off because you are not asking them to do anything...
outside of their job. If I ask you to look for a dress, that’s your job. Look for the damn dress! [Keisha]

Keisha believed she was denied service when the sales representative failed to provide her with the level of service she expected, one in which the sales representative at minimum performed her job duties. What became angering for Keisha was that she did not consider her expectation of appropriate service levels to be more than what is to be expected of any employee of any retail store. Thus, she was bewildered by the experience and enraged by the discriminatory treatment. Keisha’s use of the Internet allowed her to purchase the dress she initially wanted and illustrated how information technology provides marginalized consumers with options within the marketplace, without having to give up the desired product or service.

Additionally, informants discussed their utilization of IT to create the desired shopping experience (Babin, Darden, and Griffin 1994; Sherry 1990) as the ability to shop at their leisure without pressure to purchase and ability to avoid interaction with service/sales personnel. This desire to avoid sales personnel is not only rooted in collective memories of how African Americans have historically been treated in the marketplace (Motley, Henderson, and Baker 2003), but also in the personal experiences of microaggressions that have been encountered by marginalized consumers. One informant discussed how using IT allowed him to create a more relaxed shopping experience:

The biggest advantage of online is that it's convenient. You can look and find what you want and take your own time about it. You don't have to worry about someone coming in and if you have a question you can research it yourself. You can go at your own pace. [James]
James found that the accessibility of shopping online allowed him to enact his purchase process in a way that was most suitable to him. He could have items shipped directly to himself or others without having to leave his home (convenience). Most importantly, James could use the Internet to acquire the items he needed at his own pace without someone pressuring him. He could conduct any research on a product himself (browsing behavior) and not feel rushed to make a purchase or complete a transaction in an effort to get him to quickly leave the store premises. This desire for a more pleasant shopping experience is reiterated and extended to include an overall avoidance of personnel in the case of Terrell, an informant who discussed how he used the Internet to avoid personnel interaction in the marketplace:

My easiest escape is to buy things online and I don’t have to interact with anybody at all. If I have the time to wait, meaning if it’s something I don’t have to have immediately, and I can find on line, I’d much rather do purchase it that way. So I avoid the experience all together…that person-to-person interaction. [Terrell]

Terrell used information technology as an ‘easy escape’ from sales associates in the physical shopping environment. And, if given the choice between purchasing items online versus offline, he would prefer to shop online if it meant he could avoid interacting with personnel altogether. The fact that Terrell was so opposed to interaction within the shopping environment is telling in that his everyday experience within this environment has created enough tension and stress that he was motivated to remove himself from the environment from time to time in order to pursue a sense of normalcy in the marketplace.

While all three informants discussed their use of IT to escape the discrimination they encountered in the marketplace, interestingly, it became
apparent that in their use of IT, they were removing themselves from one shopping environment in order to shop in another. This seemed to be true even if the consumer moved from a company’s offline store to shop in the same company’s online store. This was demonstrated in the case with Keisha who left a Banana Republic retail store to shop on the bananarepublic.com website. In all three cases, the use of IT in this manner illustrated that experience plays a critical role in the consumption practices of marginalized consumers, and even suggests its privileging when it comes to researching this group. Jocelyn, who turned to technology when she encountered discriminatory treatment at a major department store, further illustrates this:

I was trying to purchase shoes at Macy’s, and the sales associate I happened upon was kind of too nonchalant. Her demeanor was, ‘I really don’t want to be here but I need the money.’ She was the one who asked if I needed help, and she would go in the back [in the store room], and disappear for like 10 minutes. I’d see others [sales associates] hustling and they would ask me if I needed help. I told them I think I have someone helping me. I think I tried on 4 pairs of shoes and she would go in the back to still look for a shoe. She finally bought me the shoe, I liked. But I didn’t feel right giving her the commission. She really didn’t wait on me. So while in the store, I found the shoes in a store in Arlington, VA [online using the mobile phone’s Internet browser], called the store and the guy was helpful, he gave me a ‘friends and family’ discount and I ordered the shoe. It was shipped for free. [Jocelyn]

Jocelyn’s experience with being persistently ignored created a sense of being the outsider among a group of consumers. While Jocelyn attempted to remain ‘loyal’ to the sales associate supposedly assisting her, however she decided to complete the transaction elsewhere. What is interesting in this case is that IT not only provided Jocelyn with the information she needed, but also seemed to conceal her racial identity, allowing her to create the shopping experience she desired (complete with her successful transaction). Jocelyn’s use of her cell phone’s Internet connection
also acknowledged one of the many ways with which marginalized consumers have access to information technology.

3. **Transcending Habitus**

The third way in which marginalized consumers use IT with respect to their habitus is to transcend it. In transcending their habitus, consumers use IT to permanently change or establish new sociocultural consumption practices, rituals, and customs. Informants discussed how their incorporation of IT in their everyday life helped to create new consumption practices as their way of consuming, thus, contributing to the feeling of normality (Bourdieu 1984; Holt 1998). For example, Kandace, described how she stopped all interaction with personnel inside the bank and began using the drive-thru ATM for her transactions:

> I bank at Plaza Bank, I go to different branches and this day we went to one I haven’t gone to before on Harlem and Addison. My husband had a check which was like a dual-sign check... We were in the drive thru at the bank and she said, ‘We [the bank] are not going to cash this.’ I said, ‘I have been a customer here for 10 years and I don’t understand why you won’t cash this.’ She said, ‘I’ve never seen you before.’ Like she would remember me? I drove to the other branch, and they cashed it immediately and that is why I went back and showed them the receipt and said, ‘They cashed it on Montrose, what’s your problem?’... I went into the bank and up to her desk, showed her the receipt and asked her, ‘what is your problem?’ She said she didn’t know why they did it and I asked ‘What is your name? What is your manager’s name?...Why would we be treated so poorly?’...I never went in that branch again. I just use the drive-up ATM, but I never went back inside.  [Kandace]

Kandace’s encounter with the branch personnel resulted in a permanent change in her consumption habits. Dissatisfied with the lack of service received from one of the bank’s branch employees, she opted to make part of her consumption routine the use of the bank’s drive-thru ATM in order to avoid future interaction with the
bank’s personnel. This new routine created a new normality for Kandace, in which her routine use of the ATM to conduct banking transactions became a natural activity (Ilmonen 2001). Kandace is able to conduct all of her transactions without interacting with bank personnel. Because this has become part of a new consumption ritual, we begin to see Kandace is not longer subject to operating within the same habitus that involved consumption by coping. This suggests that marginalized consumers are able to transcend their habitus through the routinization of the IT use as part of a new consumption practice. This is illustrated by Antwoine, who described his (now) routine use of IT in order to avoid marketplace marginalization:

When I used to go in the Nike stores, the sales associate would try to associate with me as being “hood” or hip hop. And, then you see some other [non-Black] guy around my age or he may be a little younger, and they’re, so as I perceive, getting a little more respect. And you notice it again and again… Do I appreciate it? I really don’t care for it. …If I go to a store, versus another male from another race, don’t say ‘hello’ to him then ‘what’s up?’ to me. Regardless of how I’m dressed this is what normally happens... That’s a slap in my face...[When that happens] I [feel] like I don’t want to be in there...But this makes me prefer to shop online because of that. [Antwoine]

Antoine’s experiences with not receiving the same level of respect as other patrons drives him to shop online. Antoine’s habitus is riddled with employees stereotyping him as one type of consumer, and thus creates dissatisfaction (Andreasen and Manning 1990) with businesses where employees commit discriminatory infractions. Because of this, Antwoine has routinized his use of IT when he shops for various products. Though Antwoine does not cease shopping in the offline context, he does routinely turn to the Internet to conduct most of his shopping. This preference for shopping online is done on a product-by-product level and as shopping for one product becomes natural for the consumer, he is apt to begin using IT for the
purchase of other products not previously purchased online before. This suggests that when consumers use IT to transcend their habitus, they blend both the online and offline worlds, creating an expanded consumption space where they increasingly introduce new products and product categories to their consumption routines. Through the routinization of IT use, consumers experience a shift in social power and create a change in the system of relations between themselves and the marketer, one where the consumer can be themselves, is in control, and is in the marketplace (Baker 2006). This is further reiterated by Jamal, who discussed his overall comfort in the online environment as a consumer:

I shop online because it’s easy and it negates any preconceived notions that may exist on the part of the service provider. I have bought cars online, I have bought clothes online, and I bought groceries online. I’m a big advocate of buying online. [Jamal]

Jamal’s preference of shopping for multiple product categories online (even product categories traditionally purchased solely offline) speaks to the meaning to his IT use. For Jamal, shopping online provides him with the ease with which normal consumers are able to consume in the marketplace. In this regard, Jamal is able to fully participate in the co-creation of his desired shopping experience and be perceived as equal in the marketplace. By remaining in the online environment, Jamal is able to achieve his desired normalcy, thus transcending his habitus.

Üstüner and Holt’s (2010) study found that consumers accumulate deterritorialized cultural capital in an effort to escape their habitus. However, their quest to transcend habitus was unsuccessful because these consumers were unable to apply their cultural capital. My findings show that marginalized consumers do not rely on the successful deployment of deterritorialized cultural capital. Instead, these consumers focus on what they can do for themselves within the capabilities and
resources already available to them. Critical to the successful deployment of deterritorialized cultural capital is the reflexive security of the transcendence-seeking individual (Üstüner and Holt 2007). This suggests that confidence and self-efficacy are central elements of transcendence. Because marginalized consumers are able to achieve their desired normalcy through their routinized utilization of IT, they are able to achieve the transcendence that those relying solely on possessing cultural capital were unsuccessful in accomplishing.

E. Access to Normalcy

This section addresses the third research question: What role does IT play in marginalized consumers’ habitus? According to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), people are motivated to accept certain technologies because of the perceived ease of use and usefulness of a technology (Davis 1989), as well as the enjoyment that technology creates for the user (Childers et al. 2001; Davis, Bagozzi, and Warshaw 1992; Heijden 2004). In other words, a consumer would choose to shop online because of the perceived ease, usefulness, and enjoyment that using the Internet would bring to the consumer. Here, the perceived usefulness of the technology refers to the degree to which using the Internet will improve a consumer’s ability to attain his/her shopping goal (i.e., purchase an outfit online). In contrast, ease of use represents whether the technology is clear and understandable versus difficult to use with a high likelihood of error (e.g., consumer’s navigation through graphic-laden Web pages). Finally, enjoyment captures whether a consumer’s experiences fun through shopping in the virtual store, apart from attainment of his/her particular shopping goal.
Prior studies that have used the TAM have addressed the motivations for the use of mobile commerce (Bruner II and Kumar 2005), the usage of self-service technology (Dabholkar and Bagozzi 2002), general Internet usage (Porter and Donthu 2006), online shopping (Childers et al. 2001), and consumer normalcy (Kaufman-Scarborough and Childers 2009). These studies focused on the completion of activities and tasks associated with the use of a technology. Specifically, in linking technology use and normalcy these studies show how consumers are able to gain independence and control, as well as express their individualism and creativity, through the completion of an online transaction. In contrast, my findings show how technology provides access to the normalcy desired, by illuminating the role that technology plays in the consumption practices, customs, and rituals, of marginalized consumers. While the usefulness of technology is premised on its ability to help the consumer achieve normalcy, my findings demonstrate the ways technology is useful to marginalized consumers in its ability to provide access to normalcy.

I found that information technology played different roles with regard to marginalized consumers’ habitus. These roles illustrate the different ways that IT provides access to the normalcy marginalized consumers desire. There are three ways in which IT provides access to consumer normalcy: (1) accommodating diverse voices, (2) anonymizing the consumer, and (3) game changing (i.e. change the rules by which consumers abide by in the marketplace). While IT can have paradoxical consequences with regards to its use by consumers (Mick and Fournier 1998), informants showed no signs of this occurring. Instead, each role of IT served to provide marginalized consumers with access to their desired level of normalcy (Baker 2006). This suggests that the context of marginalization shapes the role
played by IT, creating a purpose for which marginalized consumers use IT. This would further reiterate the importance of context with regard to information technology.

1. **Accommodating Diverse Voices**

Information technology provides marginalized consumers with the ability to voice their experiences and frustrations. In turn, these consumers are able to provide social support to others that experience the same issues in the marketplace. Informants described their use of technologies, such as the Internet and mobile phones, to be able to voice their concerns and issues, reflecting perspectives that differ from the mainstream and reflect the problems that are unique to marginal groups in the marketplace. One informant, Nia, describes how technology provides a safe space for her to express common but often unspoken thoughts about everyday consumption:

> The online forum is a safe way of coming out of the closet for many of the thoughts and suspicions that people have held in the back of their mind for decades without an outlet to express let alone even think of such things. [Nia -- LHCF member]

The meanings of the online forum expressed by Nia illustrate how IT plays a role in her everyday life. Here, we see that the online forum serves as a platform for which marginalized consumers are able to safely voice their experiences and thoughts about the often systematic discrimination they encounter, without fear of rebuff. Within this safe space, marginalized consumers are able to free themselves from the stifling silence that attempts to question the reality of racial discrimination in the marketplace. Accommodating diverse viewpoints with regard to consumption experiences provide the necessary outlet for marginalized consumers to cope with
the stress of discrimination (Crockett et al. 2003; Duhachek 2005). This is consistent with extant literature that asserts that consumers experiencing vulnerability within the marketplace, are often left without an outlet to express their perspectives (Baker et al. 2005), and as such, turn to technology as a way to assemble and communicate with each other regarding their experiences. This ability to share their experiences combined with IT’s accommodation of those diverse viewpoints, legitimizes the marginalized experience. Nia’s description of the online forum as a space to discuss “suspicions people have” illustrate how IT allows marginalized consumers to actively participate in the marketplace and cultivates a world where multiple realities can exist. Thus within this world, the marginalized experience no longer holds a subordinated position, but is one among equally legitimate realities.

When multiple voices are safely voiced and heard within the online forum, consumers entrust each other with the information that is shared and are able to seek and provide social and emotional support for each other’s concerns. This is analogous to the type of community that is created within brand communities, where rituals and traditions are created and center around shared consumption experience (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001). For example, many consumers used technology to share their experiences with discrimination while in the offline environment. As others chimed in with their own experiences, consumers were provided with a wealth of information that assisted in how to deal with marketplace discrimination. In the process of this sharing of experiences, marginalized consumers were able to garner support for their own responses and sought out opportunities to actively seek advice. For example, one informant, Jackie, utilized the online forum as an information sharing space where she could garner advice and support for actions she should take after having dealt with discriminatory treatment:
I was disrespected, ignored, laughed at and treated rudely. No one bothered to apologize to me, and I’m taking this to corporate until I am satisfied... Ladies give some ideas on what to do so I can make sure my complaint is heard. Do you think I was overreacting? [Jackie – LHCF member]

Jackie’s shopping trip turned for the worse when her attempt to purchase a computer was denied by the sales associate and manager at an electronics store. Despite her queue position for available inventory, her denial of the opportunity to enact a desirable shopping experience exacerbated the dissatisfaction she experienced (Hui and Tse 1996; Taylor 1995). In this case, Jackie decided to voice her frustration and solicit advice from others on the forum. As a result, Jackie is able to elicit useful tips and suggestions on how best to respond to this treatment and is provided further support in her decision to seek restitution. In this regard, the online forum in its accommodation of diverse voices serves as a trusted source for advice and information. Consistent with the coping literature, this illustrates how consumers seek emotional support when faced with vulnerability in the marketplace (Baker et al. 2005).

Information technology has a long tradition of being viewed as a source for shared information (Bock et al. 2005; Constant, Kiesler, and Sproull 1994; He and Wei 2009). Yet in the case of marginalized consumers, IT acts as more than just an information source, it makes a space for voices that are rarely heard within the marketplace. IT provides a platform that legitimizes the realities of marginalized consumers who desire normalcy (Baker 2006). For Jackie, information technology provided her the opportunity to share her own personal experiences with other marginalized consumers contributing to and benefitting from the diverse set of
consumption experiences on the forum. Thus, accommodating diverse voices is one of the ways IT provides marginalized consumers access to normalcy.

2. **Anonymizing the Consumer**

Information technology played the role of an anonymizing agent that enabled marginalized consumers to anonymously obtain products and services. Informants described their use of different technologies (mainly the Internet) as a veil by which they could shop without their racial identity being known by the marketer. One informant, Antwoine, describes how shopping online makes a difference for him and why he prefers the online context for shopping:

> I don’t have to deal with people’s biases, when I shop online. You go into a store like Nike and the sales people automatically think they know what it is you want. I get defensive and say, ‘All of us don’t want that [referring to flashy sneakers]. Don’t assume and say ‘I got you’. You don’t even know me. How do you ‘got me’? [Antwoine]

Antwoine’s preference for shopping online is centered on his ability to not deal with marketer preconceptions of African Americans and their consumption preferences. Antwoine is often offended when he is confronted with such biases and often finds himself voicing his displeasure directly with sales associates (Crockett et al. 2003). Yet, he grows tired of encountering this treatment and as a result finds solace in the use of information technology. Here, Antwoine is able to shop for his preferred items without the disregard he encounters as a consumer and does not have to worry about his racial identity becoming a defining factor in his consumption experience. This illustrates how marginalized consumers are able to cloak their racial identity, which especially for African Americans is obvious from their physical characteristics, without the need for their racial identity to become a liability in their consumption
experience (Baker 2006). For marginalized consumers, the ability to successfully complete an experience without microaggression is a fête in of itself. As such, their habitus is riddled with discriminatory encounters. This creates anxiety, making the shopping experience one to which is often dreaded by marginalized consumers. The ability to conceal one’s identity in order to get through a drama free shopping experience often becomes an attractive option for consumers. Take for example, Keisha, an informant who discussed technology as a viable option for shopping:

I like online shopping because you don't deal with the attitudes. I won't say its equally satisfying, but it's getting up there. So, basically I'm adding options to my shopping experience. [Keisha]

Keisha reiterates the same sentiments as Antwoine in using technology as a way of not dealing with marketer attitudes towards African Americans. Though Keisha acknowledges that shopping online is not as hedonically gratifying as going to a physical store, she weighs her satisfaction from avoidance of marketer attitudes against hedonic gratification from offline shopping. This illustrates how consumers avoid marginalizing experiences attached to physical shopping, while maintaining the ability to obtain the products and services they desire. The ability to shop without external factors inhibiting the experience contributes to consumers’ ability to construct an identity for themselves as a ‘normal’ consumer (Baker 2006). Using the Internet as a way of enacting the ‘normal’ activity of consumption allows consumers to just be consumers without the negative stigma attached to their identity. This suggests IT’s ability to equalize the consumption experiences of all consumers regardless of racial or ethnic background.

The equalization of consumption experiences among consumers is further illustrated in Jamal’s comment about his experiences with shopping on a department store’s website:
I feel more comfortable in the online environment. If I need help there’s a textbox I can type in. If I can’t seem to find a color or size, they’re always friendly very punctual quick with their reply. [Jamal]

Jamal’s comfort with the online environment stems from his ability to shop as if he were in the offline environment. He is able to successfully purchase items online, and if by chance he runs into a problem, he is assured that the problem is technical in nature and not of a social one. Further, Jamal is able to request assistance from sales associated without the need to identify his racial identity. Thus, in the online environment, consumers are treated equally regardless of socio-economic status (Zettelmeyer et al. 2006), racial or ethnic identity, or even physical capabilities (Baker 2006; Kaufman-Scarborough and Childers 2009). As such, any issues that surface during a transaction are technology-related. For a technologically savvy person, technological issues that surface would not be an issue. However, for a non-technologically savvy person, it may create a new set of stress that must be worked through (Mick and Fournier 1998). In the case with Jamal, technical issues are not a problem when weighed against the socio-cultural issues that plague him in the offline marketplace. Jamal sees the online shopping as a more utopic version of his offline experience, that is one without social issues getting in the way. In this regards, Jamal is able to receive the level of service he desires placing him within the realm of a normal consumer.

3. Altering the Game

The final role that information technology plays in marginalized consumer habitus is that of a game changer. In this role IT serves to allow consumers the ability to function within the marketplace by changing the normative rules by which consumers abide by and bypass discrimination they would normally receive. With IT
serving in this capacity, marginalized consumers are able to create the consumption experience they want and function as any other consumer in the marketplace. Informants discussed their ability to bypass discrimination by using IT as a way of changing the dynamics of the interaction between marketer and consumer:

When I actually walked through the door, and they saw me, they were like, ‘DAMN!’ So I could tell because they even took awhile for anyone to say ‘Can we help you? Who are you here to see?’ And, I was like, ‘this is the Internet buying department right? I purchased a car and I'm here to pick up my car.’ And then it was like ‘Oh! Okay, so you're Mr. S [last name concealed]..’ So I could tell that the experience would’ve been very different if I would have actually went into the dealership. [Jamal]

Jamal’s experience with buying a car online allowed him to bypass the microaggressions that he would have normally encountered in the offline environment. The interactional dynamics between him and the marketer moved from one where he was at the mercy of the marketer to provide him with an acceptable product and service to a dynamic where he could command a prominent presence as a customer. In contrast to informants that did not use technology, those informants described their need to establish their legitimacy within the marketplace through other means, such as credentialing:

I felt that they felt I was just browsing. I go in asking about certain [high end] brands and I just started calling off brands, telling them what I typically like and talk about some of them. My goal is to say, ‘Look, I’m not in here just looking around and checking price tags. I know exactly where I am. And, I didn’t come in here because I saw men’s clothing in the window.’ [Jason]

I don’t know if they thought I had the financial means [to purchase items from the store] because I was wearing jeans. So I asked how long they had been working there. Did you [store employee] go to school? Is this what you went to school for? [She replied], ‘No I hadn’t graduated from school. I would like to go to school.’ And I said, ‘I remember when I was an undergrad. Once you get through with your undergrad, where are you going for grad school?’ I was asking questions to let them know that I accomplished things they had not. [James]
Both Jason and James use credentialing as a way of establishing themselves as legitimate consumers in the marketplace, conveying the message that they belong after having encountered microinsults. These responses demonstrate a passive problem-focused coping strategy whereby both consumers are confronting their treatment in a less direct manner. In both situations, the consumption experience is reliant upon the interaction within the shopping environment, which would determine both consumers’ ability to complete a transaction. In contrast, Jamal’s shopping experience is not contingent on the interactions within the physical environment, and thus he is able to focus attention on the completion of his transaction. This seems to suggest how removal of the person-to-person interaction between consumer and marketer may be the key factor in how the use of the Internet benefitted minority consumers in the car buying process beyond what could have been attained in the offline environment (Zettelmeyer et al. 2006). Thus, information technology, such as the Internet, removes the marketer-consumer interaction within the consumption experience, providing marginalized consumers the opportunity to create an experience free from discrimination.

In discussing how technology provided marginalized consumers with the opportunity to create a discrimination-free consumption experience, informants discussed how their use of IT liberated them from preparation rituals they would normally enact in order to counteract the effects of discrimination. Jamal, speaks of his experience with buying groceries online:

I was just trying to try it out. In the back of my mind if it does work, then I don’t need to bother going to the store, I don’t have to bother with the whole ritual of preparing myself in case something does happen. That there was part of this could be something where that’s no longer in the equation. [Jamal]
Jamal speaks of his recent (first) attempt at buying groceries online and thinking about how if this experience worked out, it would provide him the opportunity to permanently change his entire process of grocery shopping. In the offline environment, many informants, including Jamal, go through a preparation ritual in which they must change their physical appearance in the clothes they wear, and/or how they present themselves in order to decrease the likelihood of encountering discrimination:

- I was brought up you don’t wear a big coat in the store and you don’t walk out of the store without a receipt and a bag... even now I’m 39 years old and if I’m going to the store, I’m checking to see it’s [the weather] like outside so that I don’t wear my big coat if I don’t have to. If I wear my big coat I’ll get followed. [Brian]

- I very rarely go shopping looking raggedy. Even if it is just to the store, like to get milk, I have always been kind of aware of how I present myself. I do prepare myself and there is something in the way I present myself when I shop, I am conscious of the fact that I need to look the part of a person who can shop wherever I want to. [Jason]

- When I go shopping, I have a buddy or someone with me, so that I can have a backup. When you are by yourself you are more vulnerable to discrimination. [Kyle]

The preparation rituals enacted in all three cases attempt to prevent discrimination from occurring in the marketplace. While Brian and Jason tackle this issue with their own physical appearance, Kyle enacts a social strategy by always bringing someone along with him while shopping. For all three informants, these preparation rituals are part of their current habitus, whereby their parents inculcated into them the notion that to control the way in which marketers viewed them would decrease the likelihood of them encountering discrimination from an early age. This belief is so ingrained into their consumption practices that it carried into their adult years as part of their consumption ritual. In contrast, in the case of Jamal, technology frees him from those tightly held rituals. Specifically, Jamal sees the possibility of shopping for
groceries online would provide him the opportunity to change his entire process of shopping to one in which he could remove himself from the discrimination encountered in the offline environment all together. This suggests that for those consumers with whom marginalizing experiences pervade their offline shopping experience, hedonic motives are not necessarily the sole underlying motivation for shopping in the offline environment (Gilly and Wolfinbarger 2000). It is possibly a remnant of the inability to shop online for a product that drives the marginalized consumer to shop in the offline environment. However, when presented with the possibility to shop for those products or services, which were initially unavailable in the online context, consumers may defect to the online environment.
V. CONCLUSIONS

A. Discussion

An overarching interest of this research was to investigate how information technology enables new habitus. My findings show that IT enables new habitus by providing a platform for which consumers are able to change their consumption rituals, such that they are no longer subject to the emotional-based coping during consumption that mark their initial habitus. In this regard, consumers are able to transcend habitus with their use of IT. The habitus transcendence process is marked by a general movement in how consumers pursue normalcy, shaped by the discrimination encountered and the level of experience and comfort with IT. This, in turn, has implications to the role that IT plays (access to normalcy) in habitus. Figure IV illustrates this process depicting the path to which marginalized consumers pursue normalcy.

Consumers encountering microinsults and microinvalidations pursue emotion-based strategies, by attempting to regulate their own emotional reaction to a discriminatory encounter. Responses, such as assuming responsibility for a sales associate’s actions by attributing cause of discriminatory treatment to their appearance (i.e. casually dressed versus business attire), is consistent with Crockett, et al.’s (2003) findings that consumers attribute discrimination to situations where the reason for failed/bad service is unwarranted (Crockett et al. 2003). In this regard, consumers sense a marginalized position in the marketplace and thus pursue normalcy by invoking emotion-based coping strategies, that is, strategies in which the consumer attempts to control their own emotions and reactions to a discriminatory experience. Whereas, consumers encountering microassaults, invoke
problem-based coping strategies as a means to pursue normalcy by using information technology. Recall that microassaults differ from microinsults and microinvalidations in that they reflect the consumer’s perception of the intentionality of an act of discrimination. This perceived intentionality serves as motive for consumers to assert agency and enact consumption practices that allow habitus transcendence. The perception of a discriminatory act as intentional versus unintentional is gleaned from one’s habitus (one in which consumers endure discrimination throughout their life). Habitus is the interpreting lens by which consumers understand their environment and to which they make conclusions about and attribute discrimination. Crockett, et al. (2003) argued that consumers attribute discrimination as a self-protective mechanism that serves to explain why consumers receive poor service. In expanding this, my findings show how consumers attribute discrimination and how their attribution serves as a motivating factor to which consumers then pursue normalcy by using information technology, and transcend habitus.
The transcendence process reflects consumers’ movement from managing, to escaping, and finally to transcending one’s habitus. Within this movement, consumers’ consumption practices move from mainly offline to a primarily online way of consuming in the marketplace. Figure V illustrates how consumption practices differ between each phase. However, this process is not a uniform experience; informants were a diverse group of people who experienced marginalization with a wide range of coping strategies and varying levels of IT experience and comfort.
Comfort and experience with IT provide informants with differential skills to cope with the discrimination encountered in the marketplace, and therefore is a key driver in how marginalized consumers transcend habitus.

The transcendence process begins with marginalized consumers managing their habitus as their way of pursuing normalcy. Having been inculcated with a set of coping strategies by parents, guardians, and marketers, informants use IT as a way to complement those coping strategies, allowing them to deal with the discrimination faced in the marketplace. Consumers use IT specifically to share their experiences with other consumers who find themselves in similar situations or have encountered the same types of treatment in the marketplace. These consumers utilize IT as a platform for word of mouth (WOM) communication about an offending company, the consumer’s methods for handling discriminatory situations, and the resulting outcomes. In this regard, IT plays a key role by accommodating diverse voices in

FIGURE V: Consumption Rituals within Habitus Transcendence Process
which marginalized consumers are able to express their views and consumption experiences, while being heard as a legitimate consumer. Thus, allows them to cope with their personal encounters with discrimination, as well as provide and be provided with emotional and social support in order to cope in the offline setting. Use of IT in this manner illustrates how marginalized consumers are situated in both the offline and online consumption environments, and how their use of technology, such as the Internet, informs future shopping experiences (Ekpo, Chenevert, and Henderson 2012). This suggests that marginalized consumers, in their use of IT, in effect are concerned with gaining information as knowledge that can be applied within their current habitus. The use of IT in this way equips consumers with more coping options, and situates the marginalized consumer in the context of discrimination in both the offline and online environments. Thus, consumption practices remain the same, which differs from using IT to escape habitus.

To escape habitus, consumers use IT as a temporary reprieve from their usual consumption practices and/or rituals. As informants develop more experience in and comfort with using IT, marginalized consumers use IT in more sophisticated ways (i.e. in ways that did more than just provide information), which shapes the manner in which they use IT to pursue normalcy. In this regard, consumers are able to attend to matters outside of information provisioning and apply their knowledge (as a competency) to complete a transaction that was disrupted during a discriminatory encounter. Here, consumers pursue normalcy by using IT to escape their habitus. However, as mentioned previously, their comfort with using IT to escape habitus is contingent on the product/product category to be purchased. Thus, informants are willing to use IT to escape habitus for certain product categories, while for other categories they remained in the managing phase. This
illustrates how marginalized consumers are situated between the offline and online environment whereby they experience discrimination in the offline environment, and temporarily move into what is perceived to be a discrimination-less online environment. Here, consumers utilize IT as a way of co-creating an enjoyable (or at least drama-free) experience. They cease the need to confront discriminatory treatment head-on, but instead seek IT as a way of purchasing the items/products/services desired. In this regard, consumers are aware of their many consumption options, and choose to act on the one that successfully completes their transaction. The use of IT, as a temporary reprieve, is what differentiates escape from transcendence.

The transcending phase is one that is characterized by a permanent change in consumption practices and rituals. It is made possible from marginalized consumers’ vast experience and comfort with using IT. By introducing more products/product categories into their consumption habits, consumers are able to create new practices that span the breadth of their everyday consumption. In the transcending phase, consumers are less concerned with completing a one-time transaction; rather they seek to find a permanent solution to achieve their desired consumption experience. Key to achieving this desired experience is the need to bypass the dependency on the consumer-marketer interaction within the shopping experience, which holds the most potential for discriminatory treatment. It is during this phase that IT plays the role of a game changer by altering how marginalized consumers are able to successfully obtain the shopping experience they desire. Specifically, allowing consumers to bypass the person-to-person interaction, and thus the potential for a marginalizing experience, consumers are empowered as being in the marketplace, thus achieving the normalcy they desire. With an
increased level of comfort and experience with using IT for a vast array of products, consumers are situated mainly in the discrimination-free online environment, which enables the ability to permanently change consumption rituals.

While this process is described as a general progression from managing, to escaping, and onto transcending one’s habitus, there are conditions with which this process may play out differently. Take for example, the case of Jamal, who moved from managing his habitus directly to transcending. In this case, Jamal’s advanced comfort with using IT to purchase items that are traditionally not purchased online, supported his jump from managing habitus to quickly transcending. This calls attention to the non-sequentiality of the transcendence process. In other words, transcendence does not develop over time with mere comfort and experience with IT, rather it is contingent on a combination several factors. Specifically, my findings show that comfort and experience with IT, in conjunction with how normalcy is pursued, access to that normalcy, and having key supporting processes to pursue normalcy, together enable the transcendence process. In the case of Jamal, his decision to purchase groceries online was not simply a matter of having the requisite IT skills and comfort with buying such items in an online environment. Rather, he was motivated to transcend his habitus and thus required the necessary support processes to enable the successful purchase of groceries online. This calls attention to the importance of consumers’ underlying motivations for pursuing normalcy. One has to be highly motivated to act and their tolerance for discriminatory treatment low enough to seek a permanent solution to the issue of marketplace discrimination. African American resiliency literature suggests that those who experience discrimination develop personal characteristics that either result in depreciated or transcendent character (Chestang 1972; Miller 1999). Depreciated character
reflects a sense of worthlessness, inadequacy, and disempowerment. While, transcendent character reflects optimism and results in an individual seeking to overcome environmental adversity. Consistent with this transcendent character, these findings suggest that consumers’ tolerance for continued encounters with marketplace discrimination may compel them to advance through the transcendence process more efficiently.

A secondary factor requires the consumer to have the necessary supporting processes or infrastructure to be able to successfully advance to the transcending phase. Though consumers are able to more easily gain access to IT than before, without this support, consumers may be prevented from successfully pursuing certain consumption activities. For example, online shopping would necessitate a safe place to receive packages. If the consumer is unable to receive their packages, this would create a barrier for the consumer in that he/she would be unable to pursue normalcy in this way. This became a noticeable factor when informants spoke endlessly of their reliance on close social ties as a form of support in the transcendence process.

Social ties acted as facilitators of this process, helping consumers progress through the phases more quickly. Social ties included friends, family members, and fictive kin. These social ties provided informants with the exposure and skill needed to utilize IT to pursue normalcy. Friends provided exposure to various technologies by recommending its use. While, family and fictive kin, in addition to providing exposure to technology, insisted on its use by either impelling the consumer to use a certain technology or acting as a surrogate for the consumer. In many cases, informants discussed how some family member or fictive kin, “taught” them how to shop online by showing them how to use the Internet. In other cases, informants
reported how a family member (or a close friend) would order items online for them, acting as surrogate in the consumption process. In all cases, this exposure to technology helped informants become more comfortable in their use of IT, creating the opportunity for marginalized consumers to develop the necessary skill to use IT in more advanced ways. This, in turn, provides consumers with the capability to pursue normalcy in different ways, thus facilitating the transcendence process.

B. Theoretical Contributions

This research is intended to make contributions to current understandings of habitus as explicated in the marketing literature in several ways. First, this study goes beyond current escape research by illustrating how consumers are able to transcend habitus. Transcendence of habitus moves beyond current literature that has theorized and extends this literature by illustrating how consumers are able to permanently escape habitus.

Second, prior studies that have investigated escape have done so from a privileged lens, making critical assumptions about the consumers in their ability to escape habitus. Prior studies that have investigated escape have romanticized consumer agency, making the precarious assumption that escape for consumers is a choice. As Arnould (2007) has pointed to, consumers in marginalized positions do not necessarily have the privilege to escape as they see fit, but must as a necessity of life (Arnould 2007). This calls attention to the underlying motivations of escape as a critical factor in whether consumers are willing, as well as, able to escape habitus. In focusing on the marginalized consumer, this study addresses this critical assumption.

Third, this study is the first to incorporate the role of information technology
with respect to consumer habitus. Prior studies have focused on the patterning of consumption practices (Henry 2005; Holt 1997b, 1998) without regard to the growing importance of IT within the everyday lives of consumers. Further, in studying habitus escape, prior investigations illustrate a reliance on various forms of cultural capital in attempting to escape (Kates 2002; Üstüner and Holt 2010). This study, however, extends theories of consumption practices and habitus by showing how IT enables habitus transcendence.

Finally, this study contributes to the literature on consumer surrogacy by highlighting the critical role that surrogates play for marginalized consumers. This study found that the transcendence process for marginalized consumers was facilitated by the use of social ties. It was the actions of these social ties that ensured access to IT, and by doing so acted as a surrogate for the pursuit normalcy. This, in turn, provided consumers with the necessary IT experience and comfort needed to transcend habitus. Extant literature on consumer surrogates have taken a “hired help” perspective in understanding when consumers employ the services of surrogates (Hollander and Rassuli 1999; Solomon 1986). This study, however, extends this literature, by highlighting how the role of a surrogate is enacted by informal social ties who also act as an agent “to guide, direct, and/or transact marketplace activities. (Solomon 1986)”

C. Managerial Implications

Marginalized consumers’ use of IT with respect to their habitus has implications to our understanding of why consumers use information technology in their consumption endeavors. Extant literature has asserted the goal-oriented motivations for consumers’ decision to shop online, while asserting that only in the
offline environment, consumers are motivated by more experiential desires (Gilly and Wolfinbarger 2000). Yet, the findings of this study suggest that consumers continue to be motivated by the experiential aspects of both the online and offline consumption environments. This suggests that marketers must focus attention on accommodating consumers’ expectations for experiential satisfaction in both online and offline environments.

Additionally, as technologies become increasingly intelligent in their ability to create a more customized experience for consumers, they become viable options that provide the optimal experience consumers seek while shopping; compelling consumers to defect from bricks-and-mortar environments. Normally, under these circumstances it would be a cause for concern, as this behavior would mean a possible threat of brand switching behavior. However, my findings suggest that marketers that can accommodate consumers’ use of IT in this regard could reap benefits by accommodating consumers in their pursuit of an optimal consumption experience. As such, this becomes a win-win for both the marketer and the consumer, where marketers could realize cost benefits from online operations, while potentially reaching an expanded customer base. Where as, consumers may potentially benefit as a result of pass-through savings, while creating a utopic shopping experience.

While it is not necessarily the intentions of marketers to continue to perpetuate marketplace discrimination, its prevalence is a point for concern and addressing. This study moves beyond employee-based prevention tactics, such as increased diversity training, which is not as effective in accommodating marginalized consumers as it may be in preventing lawsuits against firms. Perhaps by
accommodating marginalized consumers, firms could more effectively decrease their involvement in the perpetuation of marketplace discrimination.

D. Limitations

All studies have their limitations, as this study. First, this study recruited informants from mainly business professional organizations. As such, these organizations tend to have a heavy membership consisting of high-income executives and consultants. Attitudes toward marketers may differ in business executives and consultants in general and in coping strategies in particular. Similarly, the ramifications of discrimination may not be as saliently observed by non-executives or consultants alike. Consequently, the practices of habitus transcendence may be less pronounced in lower-income, non-business professionals. Alternatively, these consumers may bear different habitus transcendence processes peculiar to their unique economic, cultural, political, and social dynamics that did not emerge in this research. However, in utilizing these informants, I was able to avoid the use of a convenience sample, which poses it own set of issues in regard to the ability to draw conclusions. As such, my findings reflect a more representative sample of marginalized consumers.

Second, this study’s use of one online field site prevents the ability to capture perspectives that are not tied to the norms and practices of the online forum. Some online forums may encourage more participation in group discussions than others, resulting in those forums consisting of more vocal participants that are willing to freely share their experiences. During data collection in the online setting, I noticed that when I participated in the group discussion, where I shared my own experiences with discrimination, I received more of a response than when I just presented a
general question regarding discrimination. This tendency to share experiences rather than discuss issues may inflate the prevalence of certain types of coping strategies. However, this study overcomes this limitation by approaching this study through a phenomenological lens, which allows the researcher to focus in on the phenomenon itself, rather than who and how it is discussed.

Third, this study’s focus on one marginalized group may potentially mask the culture-specific drivers that facilitate or inhibit the transcendence process. Although the use of African Americans ensures a purposive sample in which everyday discrimination is experienced, the exclusion of other marginalized groups prevent the discovery of commonalities and differences among various marginalized groups. However, the use of an all African American informant pool allows for the study of extremes in discrimination experiences, thus allowing for the study of boundaries of marginalization. Furthermore, this study is able to assert certain cultural nuances specific to one of the largest U.S. subcultures, and thus can serve as a baseline for comparing and contrasting other marginalized groups.

E. Future Research

An immediate future direction for this research is to further explore habitus transcendence in other marginalized groups. Beginning with African American informants provided great insight into how discrimination is experienced and how, as a context, may set the stage for the transcendence process. Issues such as being given the “side-eye” and not receiving money in the hand by marketers, provide culture-specific instances of discriminatory encounters that have the potential to be experienced by other marginalized groups, however, may be experienced differently by other marginalized consumers. This raises the question of whether the coping
strategies enacted in response to these encounters may differ. Understanding this process through a cultural lens would provide theoretical insight into the similarities and differences across multiple marginalized populations and their habitus transcendence process.

A second opportunity for future research would be to further explore microaggressions in the marketplace. Extant research has acknowledged the growing coverture of discrimination in the marketplace, and the findings of this study have supported this assertion. However this study sheds light onto the importance of understanding the everydayness of marketplace discrimination, which may have cumulative effects and may invoke response at the micro and/or macro level. Thus, a prime area for further exploration as a result of this study would be to further understand the micro- and macro-level responses by consumers who encounter various microaggressions in the marketplace. Understanding microaggressions provide insight into the process of marginalization and the motivations that compel consumers to react to discriminatory encounters in the manner they do.

Finally, this research identified several consumption practices that are ripe with meaning and need for further exploration, such as credentialing and preparation rituals. This study support assertions that marginalized consumers invoke a myriad of coping strategies when faced with marketplace discrimination. However, in addition to these coping strategies, this study also found strategies that attempt to reduce anticipated stress due to expectations of marketplace discrimination. This anticipated stress might have implications to the way marginalized consumers pursue normalcy.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Procedures

1. Introduction of researcher, background, etc.

2. Introduction of research, purpose, interviewing procedures, sign Informed Consent Form (if one has not already been signed electronically)

   Opening Script:

   "Thank you for agreeing to this interview. I'm glad you have accepted my invitation to participate in my research. I want to explain how this will work. This interview will last for about 90 minutes and will be tape recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed to gain understanding of your experiences as a consumer while shopping.

   In the interview, I’d like to focus on your actual experiences that really show the challenges, opportunities, and ways you’ve dealt with those experiences (whether pleasant or unpleasant) and the impact those experiences have had. It’s important that we focus the interview on your story and your experience, so I can get a close look into how your experiences, as a consumer, differ from the mainstream. I want to understand what you do as a consumer as you work through these experiences and how it has impacted your consumption behavior.

   Your responses will remain confidential and nothing you say can be traced back to you. Any quotes that are used from your interview will be given a pseudonym (fake name)."

3. Conduct interview according to Interview Guide

4. Thank participant for interview and end
APPENDIX A (continued)

Interview Guide

**Consumer Habitus**
1. What was your most memorable shopping experience with a parent/guardian?
   **PROBE:**
   a. Where did you go?
   b. What time of the year/day/month was this experience?
   c. Who did you see and/or interact with?
   d. What made the experience memorable?
   e. What did you buy/shop for?
   f. How has that experience affected your attitude towards shopping or what you expect when shopping?
   g. What life lessons did you learn from that experience?

2. What was your earliest experience (that you can remember) with discrimination while shopping?
   **PROBE:**
   a. What (if anything) surprised you about that experience (during and/or after)?
   b. What (if anything) was not new about that experience (during and/or after)?

**Grand Tour: Typical Shopping**
3. Describe a typical shopping trip where you interact with service personnel.
   **PROBE:**
   a. Who do you typically go shopping with?
   b. Which stores do you typically go to?
   c. What do you like/dislike about these stores?
   d. What time of the day did you go shopping? Which time of the week do you like to go shopping (i.e. weekdays, weekend)?

**Consumer Experiences (Pleasant & Unpleasant)**
4. Tell me about a specific time you had a pleasant shopping or service experience.
   **PROBE:**
   a. Who did you interact with that made the experience pleasant?
   b. How did your interactions affect what and if you bought anything? The length of your visit?
   c. What did the personnel do to influence your shopping or service experience?
   d. What was the outcome of this experience?
APPENDIX A (continued)

e. How has this interaction affect the way you shop? Your attitude toward the firm?

5. Tell me about a specific time you had an unpleasant shopping or service experience.

PROBE:

a. Who did you interact with that made the experience unpleasant?
b. How did your interactions affect what and if you bought anything? The length of your visit?
c. What did the personnel do to influence your shopping or service experience?
d. What was the outcome of this experience?
e. How has this interaction affect the way you shop? Your attitude toward the firm?

Marketplace Discrimination

6. Tell me about a time when you felt that your shopping experience differed from those around you (in store or otherwise).

PROBE:

a. How did the personnel treat you compared to others around you?
b. What did you attribute the different treatment to?
c. How did you feel when you were treated differently from other patrons?
d. How did you respond to this treatment?
e. How did the company respond to your response?
f. What was the outcome of this experience?
g. How does this affect your attitude toward the company? Your attitude towards shopping in general?

Final Thoughts/Advice from the Consumer (possible impacts)

7. Is there anything you, as a consumer, would want a firm to know about shopping?
APPENDIX B

Detailed Data Collection Procedures of this Study

Phase 1 & 2

- Identify Discussion Forum
- Search for Discrimination Discussions
- Observe/Participate in Discussions
- Print Identified Discussions

Phase 3

- Email:
  - Personal Contacts
  - Professional Organizations
  - Social Organizations
- Social Media Posts:
  - Twitter
  - LinkedIn
  - Facebook
- Message Board Post:
  - LHCF.com
- Acceptance & Schedule of Interview
- Consent/Assent Obtained
- Interview: Semi-structured 60-90 minutes
- Interviews Audio Recorded
- Field Notes
- Interviews Transcribed

Analysis

- Open Coding
- Axial Coding
- Theme Development
APPENDIX C
IRB Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT CHICAGO

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (MC 672)
203 Administrative Office Building
1737 West Polk Street
Chicago, Illinois 60612-7227

Exemption Granted

May 6, 2011

Akon Elizabeth Ekpo, BS
Managerial Studies
601 S Morgan St
M/C 243
Chicago, IL 60612
Phone: (312) 945-8141 / Fax: (708) 851-1701

RE: Research Protocol # 2011-0328
“Mechanisms of Escape: How Marginalized Consumers Escape Habitus”

Dear Akon Elizabeth Ekpo:

Your Claim of Exemption was reviewed on May 6, 2011 and it was determined that your research protocol meets the criteria for exemption as defined in the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects [(45 CFR 46.101(b)]. You may now begin your research.

Please note the following regarding your research:
Exemption Period: May 6, 2011 – May 5, 2014
Sponsor(s): None
Performance Site(s): UIC
Subject Population: Adult (18+ years) subjects only.
Number of Subjects: 24

The specific exemption category under 45 CFR 46.101(b):
(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of
APPENDIX C (Continued)

the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You are reminded that investigators whose research involving human subjects is determined to be exempt from the federal regulations for the protection of human subjects still have responsibilities for the ethical conduct of the research under state law and UIC policy. Please be aware of the following UIC policies and responsibilities for investigators:

1. **Amendments** You are responsible for reporting any amendments to your research protocol that may affect the determination of the exemption and may result in your research no longer being eligible for the exemption that has been granted.

2. **Record Keeping** You are responsible for maintaining a copy all research related records in a secure location in the event future verification is necessary, at a minimum these documents include: the research protocol, the claim of exemption application, all questionnaires, survey instruments, interview questions and/or data collection instruments associated with this research protocol, recruiting or advertising materials, any consent forms or information sheets given to subjects, or any other pertinent documents.

3. **Final Report** When you have completed work on your research protocol, you should submit a final report to the Office for Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS).

4. **Information for Human Subjects** UIC Policy requires investigators to provide information about the research protocol to subjects and to obtain their permission prior to their participating in the research. The information about the research protocol should be presented to subjects in writing or orally from a written script. When appropriate, the following information must be provided to all research subjects participating in exempt studies:
   a. The researchers affiliation; UIC, JBVMAC or other institutions,
   b. The purpose of the research,
   c. The extent of the subject’s involvement and an explanation of the procedures to be followed,
   d. Whether the information being collected will be used for any purposes other than the proposed research,
   e. A description of the procedures to protect the privacy of subjects and the confidentiality of the research information and data,
   f. Description of any reasonable foreseeable risks,
   g. Description of anticipated benefit,
   h. A statement that participation is voluntary and subjects can refuse to participate or can stop at any time,
APPENDIX C (Continued)

i. A statement that the researcher is available to answer any questions that the subject may have and which includes the name and phone number of the investigator(s).

j. A statement that the UIC IRB/OPRS or JBVMAC Patient Advocate Office is available if there are questions about subject’s rights, which includes the appropriate phone numbers.

Please be sure to:

➔ Use your research protocol number (listed above) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact me at (312) 355-2908 or the OPRS office at (312) 996-1711. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

Sincerely,

Charles W. Hoehne, B.S., C.I.P.
Assistant Director, IRB # 2
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

cc: Mark Shanley, Managerial Studies, M/C 243
    Joseph Cherian, Managerial Studies, M/C 243
APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO
Informed Consent
Consumer Experiences of Marginalization in the Marketplace
IRB# 2011-0328

The questions that you will be asked are part of a dissertation project designed to provide insight into how consumers experience marginalization and the role technology plays in that experience. You will not directly benefit from participating in this research; however, the results of this study will help us understand instances of marginalization, how it is experienced by consumers, and the role that technology plays in consumption experiences.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Illinois at Chicago. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your name and other identifying information that you may provide will not be made available to anyone outside the research team. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. If photographs, videos, or audiotape recordings of you will be used for educational purposes, your identity will be protected or disguised.

Risks and discomforts associated with being interviewed are expected to be minimal. Questions are mostly related to your experiences in the marketplace, your technology consumption practices, and the nature of the marginalization you experience as a consumer. However, answering some of these questions could potentially generate a slight level of discomfort to respondents.

By signing below or by orally agreeing to have your consent recorded, you agree to voluntarily participate in this research study. Potential refusal to participate does not involve penalties or loss of benefits to which you are currently entitled. Furthermore, you may discontinue participation at any time (likewise without penalty or loss of benefits you are currently entitled).
APPENDIX D (Continued)

Signature of Participant or Legally Authorized Representative

I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I have been given a copy of this form.

________________________   _____________
Signature                    Date

________________________
Printed Name

________________________   _____________
Signature of Researcher      Date
APPENDIX E

Online Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO
Online Informed Consent
Consumer Experiences of Marginalization in the Marketplace
IRB# 2011-0328

You are being asked to be a participant/volunteer in a research study.

Purpose:
The purpose of this research study is to examine consumption experiences of marginalized participants. We hope to learn more about the experiences of people who have been discriminated against in the marketplace as well as their responses to such discrimination, and to better understand the role of technology in those experiences and intentions. The information gained from this study will be used in the researcher’s dissertation, may be published as a study in an academic journal and/or presented at academic conferences.

Procedures:
If you decide to be part of this study, your participation will involve:

• consenting to an interview to be conducted in person, over the telephone, through videoconferencing, or email
• the same interview taking approximately two (2) hours
• the same interview focusing on your marketplace marginalization and personal experiences
• in the case of a face-to-face interview, the session being audiotaped; a telephone interview" being audiotaped; a videoconference being video- and audiotaped; an e-mail interview being saved for future reference.

Risks
The following risks may occur as a result of your participation in this study:

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts in this study. The risks involved are no greater than those involved in daily activities such as speaking on the telephone or using e-mail. Because some of the topic matter related to marginalization may be sensitive, there is a chance that your recollections may become personal and emotional.

Benefits
The following benefits to you are possible as a result of participating in the study:

You are not likely to benefit in any way from participating in the study. However, your participation in the study will contribute to our understanding of consumers’ experiences
of marginalization and the role of technology in that experience.

Compensation
There is no compensation for your participation in this research.

Confidentiality
The following procedures will be followed in order to keep your personal information confidential:

To protect your confidentiality, your name will not appear in any publications. You will be assigned a pseudonym (a fake name) that will be used instead of your name to disguise your participation. In the case of quotes about things you have done online (such as posts on newsgroups or forums, blog entries or comments), this disguise could be vulnerable. Using a search engine, a motivated person could break it. A person could take a quotation from the research and use a search engine to find the actual page online. They could therefore break the pseudonym disguise assigned in the research and trace the original posting. We do not anticipate uncovering sensitive information about you in this research. In case it does, other strong precautions will be used to protect your confidentiality.

The data that we collect about you will be kept private to the extent allowed by law. To make sure that this research is being conducted in the proper way, UIC’s Institution Review Board (IRB) may have access to the research records.

In the case of electronic communications in online consent, you should be aware that this form is not being run from a 'secure' https server, such as the kind used to handle credit card transactions. There is therefore a small possibility that unauthorized parties, such as computer hackers, could view responses.

Costs to You
Research participants should incur no cost as a result of consenting to be interviewed.

Participant Rights
• Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate in the study.
• You have the right to change your mind and leave the study at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty.

The research is conducted by Akon Ekpo, PhD Student, Department of Managerial Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago. Should you have any questions about the study please contact Ms. Ekpo at aekpo2@uic.edu or (312) 945-8141. This research is being supervised by Dr. Joseph Cherian at the University of Illinois at Chicago. You may contact Dr. Cherian at cherian@uic.edu or (312) 996-4480. If you feel you have not been
treated according to the descriptions in this form, or you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312-996-1711 (local) or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or e-mail OPRS at uicirb@uic.edu.

You may use your browser’s print function to print and take this informed consent with you for future reference.

By selecting the link below, you indicate your agreement with the following statement: “I have read (or some has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research.”

ACCEPT    DECLINE
CITED LITERATURE


Chestang, Leon W. (1972), *Character Development in a Hostile Environment*: University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration.


Thompson, Craig J., William B. Locander, and Howard R. Pollio (1989), "Putting Consumer Experience Back into Consumer Research: The Philosophy and


VITA

Akon Elizabeth Ekpo
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University of Illinois at Chicago
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aekpo2@uic.edu

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Business Administration (Marketing) Expected 2012
University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL

Bachelor of Science in Information Systems June 2000
DePaul University, Chicago, IL

RESEARCH INTERESTS

I study the social role of technology consumption in the lives of consumers, particularly, how technology enables marginalized consumers to transcend social conditioning. My research agenda touches on the intersection between consumers, technology and habitus; and addresses the significant need for continued expression and voice of marginalized consumers in marketing discourse. Topic areas include:

- Technology Consumption
- Social Media
- Habitus
- Marketplace Marginalization
- Consumer Acculturation
- Consumer Culture Theory

TEACHING INTERESTS

- Social Media
- Consumer Culture
- Digital Marketing
- Marketing Research
- Marketing Management
- New Product Development/Open Innovation

DISSERTATION

“Transcending Habitus with IT: Understanding how Marginalized Consumers Use Information Technology”
Dissertation Proposal Defended April 2011
Chair: Joseph Cherian
Committee: Benét DeBerry-Spence, Alan Malter, Geraldine R. Henderson, Albert Muñiz, Jr.

Abstract
Habitus, a concept advanced by Bourdieu, has been of particular interest in consumer research as it captures the habituated dispositional aspects of status consumption. Once thought to determine consumption tastes and practices of consumers, growing evidence suggest the ability to break free of this social force to escape habitus. Yet, the process of how consumers escape habitus remain largely unexplored. My dissertation investigates the role IT plays with respect to marginalized consumers’ habitus. Netnography is employed to understand the lived experience of 18 African American consumers with firsthand accounts of marketplace discrimination. Responses to in-depth interviews and collection of archival data was conducted over an 8 month time period. Findings from this study have implications to theories of consumer agency, habitus creation, and consumer normalcy.

**RESEARCH**

**Under Review**

with Amber Chenevert and Geraldine R. Henderson, “Clicks over Bricks: A Phenomenological Inquiry into Online and Offline Culture of Marginalized Consumers” Submitted to *Journal of Business Research*

**Invited Re-submissions**


with Kevin Thomas, Breagin Riley, Isaac Muñoz, Geraldine R. Henderson, and Zachary Haller, “As Worlds Collide: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Role of Relationship Management in Customer-to-Customer Interactions” Submitted to *Journal of Marketing Management*

**Conference Presentations**

“Shape-Shifters: Exploring Dynamic Culture Through the Shaping of Bicultural Identity” Accepted at North American ACR Conference (poster session).

**Invited Talks**

*May 2012, “Shopseeking: Coping with Offline Discrimination Online”, DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois*

**Work In Progress**

“An Exploration into How Firms Shape ICT use of Customers” *(Data collection completed, analysis in progress)*
“Virtual Being: An Exploration of Social Media as an Acculturation Agent” (Data collection in progress)

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor - Consumer Market Behavior - Undergraduate Course, College of Business Administration, Summer 2010, Fall 2010, Spring 2012

Taught class lecture course to college junior and senior level students on the principles of consumer behavior. Discussions focused on application of marketing techniques to understand influences on consumption behavior. Developed assignments (including rubric and lesson plans), and graded all homework and exams.

Teaching Assistant – Introduction to MIS - Undergraduate Course, College of Business Administration, Spring 2007, Summer 2007, Fall 2008.

Taught lab sessions on the fundamental use of Microsoft Word, Excel, Access, and PowerPoint. Additional topics discussed included introduction to programming logic in Excel (macros) and introduction to database design and development. Met with students upon request. Developed assignments (including rubric and lesson plans), and graded all homework and exams.


Taught lab sessions on various topics such as decision and forecasting methods, project management, and quality management. Met with students upon request, collaborated on the development of homework assignments and graded all homework and exams.

HONORS AND AWARDS

- University of Illinois Student Presenters Award, 2012
- AMA Foundation Valuing Diversity Scholarship, 2011
- H. Naylor Fitzhugh Doctoral Fellow, 2010
- Allstate Insurance Good Hands Award, 2005
- DePaul University CTI Dean’s List Award, 1997-2000
- DePaul University Student Leadership Award, 1997
- DePaul University Alumni Scholarship, 1997-2000
- Environmental Systems Design Corporation First Initiative Scholarship, 1996-1997
- Albertsons/Jewel Osco Academic Scholarship, 1996-1997
- DePaul University Multicultural Scholarship, 1996-2000

COURSE WORK

Marketing:  Consumer Behavior/ Consumer Culture (Benét DeBerry-Spence)
            Consumer Behavior/ Information Processing (Alan Malter)
Marketing Theory (Joseph Cherian)
International Marketing (Cheryl Nakata)
Services Marketing (Albert Page)
New Product Development (Albert Page)

**MIS:**
- Seminar: Technology Adoption & Usage (Chandrasekaran Ranganathan)
- Seminar: Management of Information Systems (Chandrasekaran Ranganathan)

**Methods:**
- Involved Interviewing (University of Chicago, Sharon Hicks-Bartlett)
- Ethnographic Methods (Yolanda Majors)
- Qualitative Research Methods (William Ayers)
- Research in Clinical Psychology (Robin Mermelstein)
- Survey Data Collection Methods (Timothy Johnson)
- Internet Surveys (Timothy Johnson)
- Research Methodology in OB/HR (Robert Liden)
- Regression, Factor Analysis, Causal Modeling (Rebecca Hendricks)
- Mathematical Modeling (Amy Ding)
- Multiple Regression, ANOVA (Michael Berbaum)
- Multivariate Analysis (Stan Sclove)
- Research Methods in Information Systems (Chris Westland)

**PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

- Association for Consumer Research (ACR)
- American Marketing Association (AMA)
- The PhD Project, Marketing Doctoral Student Association
- National Black MBA Association (NBMBAA)

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

*Project Manager*, Allstate Insurance Company, Northbrook, IL 2002-2006

*QA Analyst*, Bank One Corp. (currently JP Morgan Chase), Chicago, IL 2001-2002

*IT Applications Developer*, UOP LLC, Des Plaines, IL 2000-2001