
How Social Insecurity and the Social Meaning of Advertising Reinforce Minority Consumers' Preference for National Brands

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This study compares social insecurity among members of racial/ethnic subcultures within U.S. society to that same characteristic among ethnic majorities and likewise compares minority vs. majority choices of nationally advertised brands over their private label counterparts. The study, building on the preference of ethnic minorities for national brands found by Dhar and Hoch (1997), tests the overall idea that the social meaning of such brands, derived at least in part from advertising, plays a role. Data from a simulated shopping exercise are employed to test the influence of status insecurity and of minority ethnicity/race on preference for nationally advertised brands, with positive results.

Given the perspective of Roedder John (1999) that advertising can endow a brand with social meaning, it is reasonable to ask why and how such meaning affects brand choices in unlikely product categories. Does anyone use canned corn to make a social statement? Why does someone purchase a nationally advertised four-pound bag of sugar when a store brand on the shelf next to it costs less and contains exactly the same basic product? Such questions prompted the study described here, which tested the idea that in choosing among brands, predictable categories of consumers disproportionately consider social meaning, reinforced by advertising, rather than simply economic factors.

Specifically, we tested the expectation that in choosing between national brands and private label brands (PLBs) of supermarket items, racial/ethnic minorities within the U.S. population disproportionately take social factors into account and that one explanation, tested here, is status insecurity, a concern about appearing "second class." We expected to find status insecurity in racial/ethnic minority groups more than in racial/ethnic majorities, and expected that status insecurity would predict choice of national brands over PLBs in all ethnic groups.

Such preference is accentuated, we hypothesized, by the perception that whether called national brands

or advertised brands, they are higher in prestige than are private labels. That prestige could be associated with higher prices in comparison to private labels, by higher quality that consumers have discerned in national brands vs. private labels, and/or by a better image that advertising creates and reinforces. The last of these three factors is the focus of this study.

Brands and Status

Bagwell and Bernheim (1996) describe the choice to pay more for a particular brand of a functionally equivalent good as the Veblen effect, the use of purchasing and consumption to advertise wealth and social status (Veblen 1899). Using brand choice to avoid looking "second class" exemplifies the same kind of social motive, reflecting the focus of Corrigan (1997) and Belk (1998) on what buyers believe their choices communicate to others. Support for the importance of social motives also appears in a recent study that found consumers spurning a money-saving opportunity – coupon usage—in a social situation for fear of looking "cheap" (Ashworth, Darke, and Schaller 2005).

Our expectation that such motives would be disproportionately important to racial/ethnic minorities was prompted by data from an IRI study showing that "demographically, store brands have made weak progress with ethnic groups" (*Private Label Magazine* 2003, p.1). We expected the relative "non-quality utility" (Sethuraman 2002) of a national brand to be higher for minority racial/ethnic consumers than for other consumers, based on social status concerns.

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The Role of Demographic Factors

Using race/ethnicity to help in understanding the preference for national brands over PLBs builds on 35 years of studies offering conflicting findings. During the early 1970's, demographic factors were not good predictors (Burger and Schott 1972). However, anecdotal evidence and some academic research thereafter indicate low PLB penetration among racial and ethnic minorities in the United States (Deshpande, Hoyer, and Donthu 1986; Rickard 1994) because minorities disproportionately associate quality with nationally advertised brands. However, opposite findings—high PLB penetration among Hispanic consumers—appear in a study by Mulherne and Williams (1994).

In the most extensive work relating ethnicity to the proportion of national brands selected at a given retail store, Dhar and Hoch (1997) focused on African American and Hispanic shoppers. They hypothesized that the greater the percentage of minority households in a specific retailer's market area, the lower the relative demand for national brands.

Dhar and Hoch reasoned that lower income discourages national brand purchase because private labels are lower in price, and the two minority groups that they studied have lower incomes on average than do Anglo shoppers. However, their hypothesis was not supported. Of 34 product categories examined, ethnicity was only significant in eight of them—and of those eight, six show significant results in the direction opposite to those predicted. Stores experienced significantly higher sales of national brands if their shoppers were primarily African American or Hispanic.

Seeking an explanation for these findings, the research to be described here investigated PLB vs. national brand choices by individuals from various ethnic groups rather than only purchase rates across areas with varying ethnic composition. Also, we included Asians in our study, as Dhar and Hoch did not. Our research focuses on U.S. shoppers self-categorized as African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians. We recognize that each of these categories aggregates a number of individual subgroups, but employ a level of aggregation parallel to the U.S. Census, since advertisers often segment markets at that level.

Culture, Not Economics

The logic of our study is as follows:

- Brand choice takes place within a network of meanings, including social motives (Roedder John 1999).

- The social motives of minority racial/ethnic subcultures in making brand choices differ from those of the white Anglo majority in U.S. society.
- Cultural histories help to explain those differences. While those histories vary across minority subcultures, they all result in a need to "buy status" that exceeds that of "majority" shoppers.

For example, the African American subculture has been described by social scientists as profoundly impacted by oppression and discrimination, with segregation prompting African Americans to create their own society that they sought to keep equal to that of the Anglo world around them. Even in the 21st century, racial discrimination continues, in funding for education (Loubert 2005) and in the job market (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004), discrepancies of which African Americans are very much aware (Sellers and Shelton 2003).

Asian Americans have likewise experienced discrimination, ranging from laws restricting Chinese entry into the United States to internment of U.S. citizens of Japanese origin during World War II. Even Asian Americans native to the U.S. often are viewed as "foreign," based on physical characteristics (Sanchez 1999), and first generation immigrants from Asian nations have the added disadvantage of the need to learn a new language. Consequently, Asian Americans have had every reason to feel as a group "put down" by the majority white Anglo population, despite the respect accorded to individual achievers in their group.

For Hispanics, evidence that they perceive discrimination is mixed. Some authors see them as resenting their low economic level (Shorey, Cowan, and Sullivan 2002). Others believe that they are less interested in approval from the Anglo majority than from within their own subculture (Cheskin Market Insights 2002), so that particularly in areas where they constitute a majority, they might parallel the Anglo majority in feeling no need to "prove something." Where they do constitute a minority, however, it seemed reasonable to expect them to parallel other minority groups, so that when compared to majority shoppers they would exhibit status insecurity. This construct from the work of Cooney, Rogler, and Schroder (1981) was operationalized by Wu (2001) with three scale items (see Appendix A), including "Sometimes others view me as second class." Thus, we hypothesized:

H1a: Minorities in the aggregate report greater status insecurity than do Anglo Americans and "majority" Hispanics.

Also in each ethnic minority population:

H1b: African Americans will report greater status insecurity than do Anglo Americans and "majority" Hispanics.

H1c: "Minority" Hispanics will report greater status insecurity than do Anglo Americans and "majority" Hispanics.

H1d: Asian Americans will report greater status insecurity than do Anglo Americans and "majority" Hispanics.

Justifying the link from status insecurity to brand choice is the observation by Karasawaa (1995) that the goal for stigmatized groups is to minimize any negative social impact. Consequently, we expected that minorities, compared to Anglo buyers and "majority" Hispanics, disproportionately avoid PLBs in favor of national brands. We hypothesized:

H2a: Minorities in the aggregate select a significantly higher percentage of national brands than do Anglo Americans and "majority" Hispanics.

Each minority population shows the same effect:

H2b: African Americans select a significantly higher percentage of national brands than do Anglo Americans and "majority" Hispanics.

H2c: "Minority" Hispanics select a significantly higher percentage of national brands than do Anglo Americans and "majority" Hispanics.

H2d: Asian Americans select a significantly higher percentage of national brands than do Anglo Americans and "majority" Hispanics.

Given our expectations concerning the importance of status insecurity in brand choice it seemed wise to assess its significance independent of ethnic group. Thus, across all ethnic groups, both majority and minority, we hypothesized that it would influence brand choice. We also expected that regardless of racial/ethnic background, status insecurity would interact with the perception that national brands are more prestigious than are PLBs. Adapting the scale of Burton and Lichtenstein (1998), we measured such perceptions by items like "A well-known brand has more prestige than a store brand." Also, given the observation of Lichtenstein, Ridgway, and Netemeyer (1993) that the price a purchaser pays for a product signals something to others in a social sense, it seemed likely that such a signal is most important to those insecure about their social status. Thus, we hypothesized:

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between status insecurity and selection of national brands over PLBs.

H4: The higher the prestige attributed to national brands, the stronger the relationship between status insecurity and preference for national brands over PLBs.

Method

The first phase of the research involved exploratory interviews, individually, with ten African American, Asian American, and minority Hispanic consumers concerning their thoughts on private label products; excerpts are offered in Table 1. Their comments, associating brand choice with status and in some cases with specific avoidance of "looking bad," help to justify our hypotheses that status insecurity and perception of higher prestige for national brands predict selecting such brands over PLBs.

Quantitative Phase

We employed an online survey instrument with two distinct parts to test the hypotheses. First, we measured among 810 respondents the likelihood of selecting national brands in preference to PLBs before asking any questions related to ethnicity. Our measure was a simulated shopping exercise. Respondents chose among brands in 13 product categories, with one choice always being the store brand. The dependent variable was the proportion of nationally national brand choices among all product choices: national brand share. For example, for a respondent choosing 11 national brands and 2 private label brands out of 13 simulated purchase decisions, the share for national brands is 11/13 or .846.

Asking respondents to make their brand selections in a simulated supermarket provides a severe test of the hypotheses. Supermarket purchases are not routinely associated with status considerations. However, we tested the salience of status where it would not be necessarily expected in order to assess its importance even in this unlikely setting.

Those participating in the study were young adults, university students in two large urban areas in the Southwest United States. One city, the smaller of the two, has a 55% Hispanic population; in the other, the population is one-third Hispanic. All respondents attended commuter schools whose students work at least part-time, and in many cases full time, off campus.

Cognizant of the academic debate for and against using students as subjects (Sheth 1970; Cunningham, Anderson, and Murphy 1974; Burnett and Dunne 1986; Peterson 2001), we followed the conclusions of James and Sonner (2001), who found that older, working adults who are "non-traditional" students provide re-

Table 1
Excerpts from Interviews on National vs. Private Label Brands

<i>Interview Participant</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Thoughts on Brand Choice</i>
African American woman	Professional, early 40s	"You don't want to let people see those no names."
African American man	Professional, mid 30s	"...bad for your image and it's all about image."
African American man	Non professional, late 40s	"People just don't like that store stuff, even though it's probably the same. They just want that name brand."
African American woman	Semi professional, mid 40s	"My father never let my mother buy that. He always said I'm working and I don't want that cheap (expletive) in my house."
Hispanic woman	Semi-professional, early 30s	"I think they're not as good, especially when you're preparing something special like for a big family get together."
Hispanic man	Professional, late 30s	"My father always says, even today, that they (PLBs) have low quality; that they're not as good as the brand name stuff"
Asian woman	Professional, mid 30s	"Some private labels are okay, but quality is the biggest consideration."
Asian woman	Professional, early 20s	"I have a perception that it (store brand) has a lower quality. Maybe the price is lower because the quality is lower...A brand not advertised must not be good."

search results close to those among non-student adult consumers. Consequently, we filtered the data from our 810 respondents, analyzing responses only from 534 whose parents pay less than half of their living expenses and who report that they shop for groceries at least once every two weeks. These respondents are 81 African Americans, 198 Anglo Americans, 88 Asian Americans, and 167 Hispanics, 42 from the city where they constitute a majority of the population and 125 from the city where they do not. The average age is 26.

Procedure

Most participants were offered extra credit to participate, and all were given the Web address of the study and told only that it was a survey on grocery shopping. The opening screen told them they would be shopping at a supermarket familiar to them, Harris's (an entirely fictional name) and to shop as they usually would. Given the findings of Hansen, Singh, and Chintagunta (2006) that choice of national vs. store brands is a household trait rather than product category specific, we felt free to select categories simply based on product parity: at a supermarket chain common to both cities, the PLB and national brands were identical in form and size. At the study Website, shown in Figure 1, respondents were asked to select

brands of products from screens offering four brands each of 13 grocery items: milk, facial tissues, corn, sugar, paper towels, bleach, cooking oil, orange juice, flour, spaghetti sauce, rice, peanut butter, and jam.

The brand selection task was a simple point and click. First respondents selected one brand in each product category. Next, as a check on the validity of the findings, they answered general questions about shopping (e.g., number of trips per week), including two items about frequency of private label purchases. Then they advanced to the second part of the survey, which measured the constructs of status insecurity and national brand prestige, using items adapted from previous research and pre-tested with 171 respondents similar to those in the actual study. These constructs were measured using a 7 point Likert-type scale from 1-Strongly Disagree to 7-Strongly Agree. Finally, respondents provided demographic information including age, gender, ethnicity, household income, and employment status.

Results

Preliminary Analyses and Measures

We determined the final items for the constructs by using exploratory factor analysis and then eliminating any item that did not load on the related construct

Figure 1
Excerpt from the Shopping Task

Grocery Shopping Research Study
Part I – Shopping Exercise

Imagine the following: (continued)

- You arrive at Harris's with your shopping list in hand, all set to select the items on your list.
- On this particular occasion none of the items on your list are on special sale and you have no coupons.
- Now you're ready to shop.

Shopping Exercise

Grocery List Item #1—Orange Juice (64 oz. carton)

- Florida's Natural, \$3.39
- Tropicana, \$3.29
- Minute Maid, \$3.29
- Harris's store brand, \$2.39

Grocery List Item #2—Sugar (4 pound bag)

- Pillsbury, \$1.79
- Domino, \$1.79
- Imperial, \$1.89
- Harris's store brand, \$1.49

at the $p \leq .05$ level. We then used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the measurement model. The results of our CFA produced the following fit indices: Goodness of Fit (GFI)=.983, Adjusted Goodness of Fit (AGFI)=.964, Normed Fit Index (NFI)=.976, Comparative Fit Index (CFI)=.987 and root mean square error=.047. Although our chi-square statistic measuring the extent to which the data differ from the pattern predicted by the measurement model is significant ($\chi^2=37.380$, d.f.=7, $p<.003$), the fit indices outlined above suggest a good fit of the data to our constructs.

The final measures used in this study, selected as indicated in the appendices, are as follows:

- Status insecurity—a three-item, seven point Likert scale. Items were as follows:

I sometimes have to work very hard to prove that I am just as good as anyone else.

People are biased against people like me sometimes.

Sometimes others view me as second class.

Cronbach's alpha was .74, exceeding the recommended .70 level (Nunnally 1978).

- Prestige Attribution—a two item measure. Items were as follows:

A well known brand has more prestige than a store brand.

National brands have higher prestige than store brands.

Cronbach's alpha was .83, exceeding the recommended .70 level (Nunnally 1978).

An analysis of the 534 responses used to test the third and fourth hypotheses showed no significant differences across ethnic groups in education, income, or frequency of shopping trips. All respondents earned more than one-half of their support, since those earning a lower proportion were dropped from data analysis.

Tests of Hypotheses

To test H1 we performed a simple one-way ANOVA to test the relationship between minority status (0=minority, 1= not) and status insecurity, then parallel tests for each ethnicity (African American, Anglo American, Hispanic minority, Asian). Minority status was significant ($M_{\min} = 3.914$ vs. $M_{\max} = 2.936$, $F = 43.47$, $p < .001$). ANOVA also revealed significant differences among ethnic groups ($F = 25.185$, $p < .001$). We found that African Americans reported higher levels of sta-

Table 2
Status Insecurity by Ethnic Group^a

<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Average Status Insecurity</i>	<i>% Difference from Majority (Anglo American and Majority Hispanic respondents)</i>
African Americans	4.98	-1.554 ^{**}
Anglo Americans and Majority Hispanics	2.95	—
Minority Hispanics	3.58	-.653 ^{**}
Asians	5.00	-1.064 ^{**}

^aF= 25.185

^{*}p<.05

^{**}η²=.125, p <.01

Table 3
National Brand Choices by Ethnic Group^a

<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Percent of National Brands Chosen</i>	<i>% Difference from Majority (Anglo American and Majority Hispanic respondents)</i>
African Americans	73.3	7.6 ^{**}
Anglo Americans and Majority Hispanics	65.7	—
Minority Hispanics	71.7	6.0 [*]
Asians	72.5	6.8 [*]

^aF= 4.099

^{*}p<.05,

^{**}η²=.044, p<.01

tus insecurity than did majority respondents (Anglo American and "majority" Hispanics). Similar results were found for both Asian Americans and minority (in their city) Hispanics. Table 2 shows detailed results of post-hoc analyses. Minorities in the aggregate and each minority group analyzed separately showed significantly higher status insecurity than did the combined population of Anglos and "majority" Hispanics. Therefore, all H1 sub-hypotheses were fully supported.

To test H2, the hypothesis that minority respondents overall would choose a higher percentage of national brands in our shopping task than would Anglo respondents and "majority" Hispanics, we again performed a simple one-way ANOVA. Differences between minority respondents in the aggregate and majority respondents (Anglo Americans and the "majority" Hispanics) were significant (72.1% versus 65.7% national brand choices, F= 10.72, p<.001). Next we performed the same analysis between each individual minority group and majority respondents. We found significant differences between African Ameri-

can and majority-group respondents (Anglo American and "majority" Hispanics). We also found significant differences between Asian and majority respondents. Lastly, we found significant differences between minority (in their city) Hispanic respondents and majority respondents. Therefore, all H2 sub-hypotheses were fully supported. Table 3 shows the national brand choice percentages for each ethnic minority group and compares each to the percentage for majority shoppers.

We used multiple regression to test H3 and H4, using data from all 534 qualified respondents. We found a significant positive relationship between status insecurity and the proportion of national brands chosen in the shopping exercise, as expected ($\beta = .089$; $t(533) = 2.040$, $p < .05$). Thus, our hypothesis of a main effect for status insecurity on national brand selection was supported.

H4 tested the idea that level of prestige attributed to national brands moderates the relationship between status insecurity and the proportion of national brand

choices, regardless of ethnicity. The interaction between status insecurity and prestige attributed to national brands vs. PLBs and the interaction term was significant ($\beta_{\text{status insecurity} \times \text{prestige}} = .287$; $t(530) = 2.113$, $p < .05$). Thus, H4 was supported.

Discussion of Results and Implications

Results from this research support the overall expectations tested. Status insecurity disproportionately is found in minority racial/ethnic populations, and shoppers in these populations disproportionately select national brands over private labels. Furthermore, status insecurity is associated with national brand preference regardless of ethnicity, and is associated with that preference most strongly when interacting with the perception that PLBs lack the prestige level of national brands. In other words, the power of advertising to create brand preference appears most effective among racial/ethnic minorities, but for all groups is most effective as they feel a need to make a social statement with purchases and see PLBs as incompatible with the kind of social statement they want to make.

Certainly the results should be considered in full recognition of the limitations of the study, which argue against undue generalization. Use of college students as respondents may be one concern, but we filtered our data to analyze responses only from young adults who regularly shop for groceries and use their own funds to do so. It could also be argued that ethnic minority college students are more likely to be "strivers," vs. Anglos, for whom college may be expected. We cannot refute that challenge, and can only observe that the results of Dhar and Hoch's work, on which our study builds, found parallel preferences for national brands in minority neighborhoods that clearly were not limited to student populations.

We also note as a limitation that all respondents were forced to select a brand, regardless of their level of experience with the product, and that national brand vs. PLB choices, not actual purchases, served as the dependent variable. We did say to subjects in the shopping exercise, "Now you are ready to shop," not "now you are ready to select the brand you would like to buy." However, the latter is in essence what they did, and we cannot say that the difference is irrelevant. We can only again refer to the Dhar and Hoch study, which used actual purchase data and found minorities likelier to buy national brands than were Anglo shoppers.

An additional limitation concerns our dependent measure: proportion of PLB purchases. That measure ignores the issue of whether respondents are selecting the highest market share national brand, or know

what brand has that distinction. If we had indicated in some way the top-share brand in each category, we could have gained additional information: does minority ethnicity and/or status insecurity disproportionately lead to selection of the category leader?

Conclusions

Taking into account the limitations just noted, tentative conclusions can be drawn. Dhar and Hoch (1997) expected Hispanic and African American shoppers to be price sensitive, and therefore disproportionately to choose PLBs over national brands. Our study, like theirs, finds the opposite, with our results indicating that prestige is differentially important to these shoppers, and also to Asian Americans—that they are, in that sense, less price sensitive and more advertising sensitive when compared to "majority" shoppers. Also, the same conclusion is suggested for those within any ethnic group who experience status insecurity and see a prestige gap between national brands and PLBs.

While all of the hypotheses are supported, it would be an oversimplification to conclude that even for racial/ethnic minorities, image is all that matters; Sethuraman (2002) suggests that consumers can be two, maybe even three-dimensional when it comes to looking at private labels versus national brands. It is not difficult to imagine a situation in which the consumer wants and expects it all, a low priced product that has high prestige and high quality. However, the research presented here suggests that a difference in the weighting of these three desirable qualities in a branded product will differ for minorities vs. racial/ethnic majorities and will differ for those influenced by status insecurity, particularly when coupled with the perception of higher prestige for national brands. Often, as our results show, these are the same people.

The possibility exists, then, that as the incomes of minority group purchasers come closer to those of Anglo Americans, giving them the purchasing power to buy whatever brands they prefer, market share for national brands will increase. The key to that prediction, however, appears to be continued prestige for "well-known" brands. Advertisers who believe that dollars spent a decade ago achieved that result, enabling them to cut current budgets, may find that they have given away their advantage among ethnic minorities, a growing proportion of U.S. customers.

The counter-argument is that as minority group shoppers gain purchasing power they will feel less status insecurity, take prestige less into account, and therefore select national brands no more than Anglo Americans and, in this study, "majority" Hispanics.

That is one possible scenario. However, from the literature cited here, it appears inapplicable to the minority ethnic groups we studied. For African Americans, such a scenario vastly underestimates the effect of belonging to a racial group labeled second-class by so many people over so many years, as Utsey et al. (2000) note. For minority Hispanics and Asian American consumers as well, the history of these subcultures also seems compatible with continuing perceptions of status insecurity. Of course, we cannot say that these groups differ from each other in the likelihood of a continuing need to prove themselves, nor can we say that need is or will continue to be uniform.

In any case, to the extent that status insecurity persists, one might plausibly predict *increased* preference for national brands as minority ethnic groups gain purchasing power. If so, the applications of this study become broadly pertinent, since any purchase may make a social statement. Thus, any advertising plan may benefit from taking race/ethnicity into account in positioning a brand as high in prestige not only *even* if the product thereby costs more, but possibly *because* it does. It should be noted, however, that all product categories are not equal in consumer willingness to pay more for a national brand; Sethuraman and Cole (1999) found that perceived quality differences between national brands and PLBs increase that willingness.

It is important to point out, however, that once the purchase of a national brand enables a shopper to avoid the "second class" label, it is not at all clear that such a shopper is looking for a luxury brand. Our results point to a concern with not lagging behind, in contrast to a concern with showing oneself ahead of the crowd, which is a concept we simply did not test. The results of this study would suggest a disproportionate preference among racial/ethnic minorities, in other words, for mainstream national brands that make a statement that the buyer is as good as everyone else, and our data should not be over-interpreted to suggest that such a buyer intends to communicate that he or she is better than everyone else.

Another over-interpretation that we hope to discourage is the idea that advertisers are exploiting ethnic minorities by, in effect, advertising. If shoppers could save on sugar or canned corn by purchasing the private label brand, is a national advertiser exploiting status insecurity by implying that it's better to buy the "well-known name," or a comparable claim? That is surely not a conclusion we would draw. From one perspective, advertisers allow shoppers to feel that they are keeping up appearances for a 30-cent premium on a four-pound bag of sugar. However, advertising is certainly not the whole story influencing

that choice. It interacts with the cue of higher price and with shoppers' impressions of quality over the years to influence brand choices. The frequency of failure among highly advertised brands over the years surely demonstrates that shoppers make value calculations and buy accordingly. Our point is simply to explore, in this study, what influences those calculations.

Directions for Future Research

Certainly, the results of this study should prompt further research. One extension might be to explore dimensions of brand prestige across cultures and learn more about what cues signal it to consumers in various ethnic/racial groups. Another might be to explore at what point ethnic minorities see themselves as majorities. We used city population to make the distinction between "minority" and "majority" Hispanics, but that line is an arbitrary one, not necessarily the best indicator of how people view themselves. Is being the majority ethnic group in one's neighborhood—or one's state—a better clue to, for example, status insecurity or PLB choices?

Another research challenge is to investigate the reactions of minority shoppers to efforts by national advertisers to target their ethnic group if such efforts signal an association with higher prices than would be the case for PLBs. Often such ads show minority consumers and/or appear in ethnic-targeted publications and television shows. Is the implication of such advertising—that one's ethnic group can afford an extra 30 cents for a four-pound bag of sugar—seen as a compliment, or as exploitation? More important—what factors prompt each of those conflicting interpretations?

An additional research issue is the retail setting. Advertisers may sensibly infer that the importance attached to prestige by minorities will be clear to retailers and offer them an opportunity to increase sales of some private label products. If a retail chain invests in raising its own image and then puts its name on high quality PLB products, the approach employed by such stores as Trader Joe's and Whole Foods (Olson 2005), it is not clear whether such an investment will pay off disproportionately among minorities. One clue, certainly open to further study, is the finding that for racial/ethnic minorities, increased quality unaccompanied by a concomitant increase in perceptions of increased prestige may not help; Dhar and Hoch (1997) found minority ethnicity to be negatively associated with purchase of high quality private label brands.

A related question is simply the possible relationship between number of PLBs in a store and their acceptability to those who, in this study, appear to disproportion-

ately reject them. If a store offers more categories of PLBs, does it thereby increase the likelihood that at least one such product is purchased by more shoppers, thereby possibly raising the acceptability of PLB purchase for others? Either a field study or a lab study might be a setting for research on such a question.

Also, our results invite consideration of the weight of brand prestige when members of any ethnic group shop with others vs. shopping alone. Our test of the hypothesis relating status insecurity to the proportion of national brands selected included the responses of Anglo and majority Hispanic consumers and found a significant positive relationship overall. Possibly a wise message for a national brand marketer to convey in advertising to any population is the desirability of shopping with a friend, neighbor, co-worker, or family member. To the extent that avoiding the appearance of second-class status is salient, surely it is particularly salient in the eyes of someone shopping with a companion, who makes a social statement with every item placed in the shopping cart. How that social factor influences brand choice is at least a researchable question.

Equally promising, however, is extending to other marketing issues the study of racial and ethnic cultures and their consequences. Given the evidence provided here that all three minority groups of interest in this study exhibit greater status insecurity than do Anglos and "majority" Hispanics, it is reasonable to ask in what contexts such differences may prove consequential. These might include brand names and packaging, as well as advertising. It is difficult to think of any question important to those who communicate brand information and brand image that is not more complex when viewed through the lens of culture, with meaningful consequences as the U.S. population continues to diversify.

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Appendix A Factor Analysis of Status Insecurity Scale

	<i>Factor Loadings</i>
I am happy with my social status.	-.142*
I sometimes have to work very hard just to prove that I am just as good as anyone else.	.877
People are biased against me sometimes.	.899
Sometimes others view me as second class.	.715

*Note: This item was dropped from the scale due to poor factor loading.

Appendix B Factor Analysis of Perceived Prestige of Private Label Brands Scale

	<i>Factor Loadings</i>
A well-known brand has more prestige than a store brand.	.875
Buying store brands makes me appear second class.	.464*
National brands have higher prestige than store brands.	.890
The idea that a brand has "prestige" is a myth.	-.503*

N= 533

*Note: These items were dropped due to poor factor loadings.

The prestige of private label versus national brand scale was adapted from Burton et al. (1998) Scale for Measuring Attitude Toward Private Label Products. Their scale measured attitude toward PLBs along three dimensions including price-quality perception. For our study, items that related to quality perception of private label products were amended to substitute the word "prestige" for "quality," and other items that specifically mentioned perception of private label prestige were included. Items with poor factor loadings were dropped.

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