Everyday Racism in American Restaurants

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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13
12:30 PM - 1:30PM
2339 FACULTY/ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
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In contrast to the overt manifestations of racial biases that characterized earlier historical eras, the vast majority of racial discrimination today is said to be expressed in subtle, covert, and insidious ways. While racial minorities report experiencing subtle forms of discrimination across a wide domain of public spaces, existing evidence has highlighted full-service restaurants as one consumer market within which they may be particularly vulnerable to mistreatment. While there are both theoretical and empirical sources of support underlying this line of reasoning there is a scarcity of scholarship that has assessed the posited saliency of such subtle and covert forms of racial discrimination in consumer markets, more generally. Thus, in this talk we advance scholarship on everyday forms of discrimination in consumption contexts by presenting results derived from two surveys of restaurant consumers that were designed to explore the degree to which customers’ perceptions of hospitality differ across racial groups. In each study we measured a multitude of the oft neglected subtle hospitality enhancing server behaviors that have been posited to systematically vary by customers’ perceived race.

Zachary W. Brewster is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Wayne State University. His primary research interests are in the areas of race and ethnic relations and medical sociology. His most recent research focuses on exploring the pervasiveness and nature of racial discrimination in the restaurant industry.

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