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We Gon' Be Alright: Examining Culturally Relevant Coping Strategies as Promotive Factors for Black Romantic Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Given Black couples live in an environment pervaded by social stress that can compromise relationship integrity, romantic partners' use of effective coping resources is paramount to maintaining romantic relationship function. Culturally relevant coping (CRC) strategies—salient, contextually appropriate resources for Black Americans to deal with living in a racially hostile society—may directly promote relationship adjustment and relational resilience even in the face of racial stressors such as discriminatory encounters. John Henryism (JH; a high-effort coping strategy); and shift-and-persist coping (S&P coping; shifting focus and persisting for the future); are two notable CRC strategies but their relevance for Black couples' relationship functioning is unknown. Using cross-sectional, self-report data from 140 mixed-gender Black couples, we investigated the links between CRC strategies and relationship functioning (partner support; relationship conflict) within an actor-partner interdependence modeling framework; further, we examined the moderating role of racial discrimination in these linkages. Results showed that JH and S&P coping were both related to better relationship functioning for men and women. Unexpectedly, women's discrimination experiences were related to men's reports of lower partner support. Notably, S&P coping was related to less relationship conflict among women reporting less discrimination but not those reporting more discrimination, indicating that S&P coping's conflict-reducing effects may be diminished in the context of discrimination. Together, findings highlight the valuable role of CRC strategies in promoting relationship functioning for Black couples and the need to examine culturally informed coping in the context of racial stressors.

Black families disproportionately encounter psychosocial stressors (e.g., racial discrimination) that compromise intimate relationship functioning (Rice et al. 2023). Culturally relevant coping strategies may be particularly adaptive for intimate relationship

functioning in the face of such stress (Murry et al. 2018). Two notable coping strategies for Black Americans are John Henryism (a high-effort coping strategy; James et al. 1983) and shift-and-persist (shifting focus and persisting for the future; Chen

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et al. 2012). The current study aims to examine the associations between culturally relevant coping (CRC) strategies and relationship functioning among mixed-gender Black couples, testing whether the beneficial effects of these coping strategies are robust to a key psychosocial stressor for Black couples—racial discrimination.

1 | Black Relationships Embedded in the Context of Stress: A Theoretical Frame

The integrative model for the study of stress in Black families (IMSSBF; Murry et al. 2018) reminds us that Black people and families are subject to, and must be viewed within, the historical legacy of macro-level stress (e.g., chattel slavery, Jim Crow, etc.) that marginalizes Black couples based on their social positions (e.g., race, gender). Within this context, Black couples are exposed to mundane, extreme environmental stressors (MEES; Carroll 1998) that place strain on relationship processes. Extant work yields empirical support for this model, showing that Black couples must contend with stressors that are racially charged and environmentally fostered (e.g., discrimination, microaggressions; Rice et al. 2023). Black individuals report experiences and expectations of racial discrimination, which may be met with affirming or unsupportive responses when disclosed to a partner (Rice 2023). Moreover, there is evidence that MEES both jeopardizes positive aspects of relationship functioning, such as partner support (Clavél et al. 2017), and reinforces negative relationship processes, such as conflict and aggression (Lavner et al. 2018). Research also demonstrates how racial stress often (but not always) emerges distinctively at the intersection of race and gender, with growing evidence of partnered Black men's sensitivity to racial stressors (e.g., Kerr et al. 2018).

Notably, the IMSSBF model (Murry et al. 2018) explicates the potential *promotive* effects of CRC strategies as valuable resources for couples living in a racially hostile society. These coping assets may further serve as buffering resources for Black relationships during heightened times of stress by attenuating the effects of MEES (e.g., discriminatory experiences). To date, studies on the role of CRC resources in Black intimate relationships are relatively scant. Still, burgeoning research demonstrates the relational relevance of CRC strategies, finding that religion (Jenkins et al. 2022) and the shared understanding/intimacy derived from racial similarity between partners (Rice et al. 2023) can buoy relationship quality. Thus, it is valuable to continue investigations of CRC strategies and the ways they can be leveraged to maintain relational well-being.

2 | Role of Culturally Relevant Coping: A Resource and Promotive Factor

Two CRC strategies related to Black Americans' health and functioning in multiple domains (e.g., physical, psychological; Bronder et al. 2014; Perez et al. 2023) are John Henryism and shift-and-persist coping. Consequently, the relevance of these coping strategies may also extend to Black Americans' intimate relationships.

2.1 | John Henryism

John Henryism (JH) is a form of high-effort coping defined as “an individual's self-perception that he can meet the demands of his environment through hard work and determination” (James et al. 1983, 263). It originates from epidemiological research on sources of health disparities and evokes the American folklore legend of John Henry—a Black steel driver who died of exhaustion with a hammer in his hand after outperforming a steam-powered drill (James et al. 1983). This active coping strategy is marked by sustained efforts to gain control over one's environment in the face of difficult circumstances, particularly in the context of societal oppression. The JH hypothesis states Black Americans utilizing “more effortful, active coping [i.e., more JH] under difficult conditions” (James 1994, 186) for prolonged periods will demonstrate poorer physical health outcomes, particularly among those with fewer economic resources (Matthews et al. 2013). However, the literature on the effects of JH is mixed. That is, previous work demonstrates the negative physical consequences of JH (e.g., high blood pressure; Bennett et al. 2004). Still, others have found beneficial *psychological* effects of JH, particularly for Black men. For instance, JH was negatively related to depressive symptomology for Black men—an association attributed to the utility of an active coping disposition and feelings of mastery/control (Matthews et al. 2013). Additionally, a recent nationally representative study of Black adults showed JH was related to fewer depressive symptoms for both men and women (Robinson and Thomas Tobin 2021).

Considering its relevance in a relational context, JH could promote relationship functioning and protect against MEES. Specifically, JH may benefit relationship functioning due to its linkages with mental health (i.e., JH is related to enhanced individual functioning, which is also related to better relational functioning; Brown et al. 2023). Moreover, given their tendency toward active, effortful engagement, those high in JH may be inclined to engage in behaviors beneficial to romantic relationships (e.g., providing support, approaching/working through conflict), particularly during times of stress. As a result, partners high in JH may report greater relationship support and lower conflict even during times when individuals encounter MEES.

Notably, the promotive effects of JH may vary by gender. Studies on JH have predominantly focused on Black men (potentially due to the gendered nature of the JH folklore; Neighbors et al. 2012). Empirical evidence supports the salience of this coping style among Black male samples (e.g., Angner et al. 2011). In this work, Black men are hypothesized to benefit psychologically from JH because it allows them to cope with discrimination and environmental stressors in a manner consistent with traditional male role norms (Matthews et al. 2013). However, growing research supports JH's relevance for Black women (Perez et al. 2023; Robinson and Thomas Tobin 2021), with scholars noting that there is no reason to believe JH would not be salient for women (James et al. 1983). Empirical work has found JH to be associated with less psychological distress when examined solely among Black women (Bronder et al. 2014). Still, studies including both men and women have found support for the JH hypothesis only among men (e.g., greater JH was only related to men's hypertensive outcomes;

Subramanyam et al. 2013). Thus, special attention to the role of gender is warranted in work investigating JH and Black relationship functioning.

2.2 | Shift-and-Persist Coping

Shift-and-persist (S&P) coping is another CRC response examined in the literature. This emotion-focused strategy is characterized by deploying cognitive reappraisals, emotional regulation and acceptance, and other strategies to psychologically readjust to stressful life circumstances (i.e., shifting) while maintaining hope for and focus on the future (i.e., persisting; Chen et al. 2012). The combination of *both* shifting and persisting (rather than just one) is believed to be the most adaptive approach in high-stress contexts given the limited ability individuals typically have to exercise control over encountered stressors (Chen et al. 2012). That is, it is theorized that in the absence of sufficient resources, those experiencing chronic and overwhelming environmental conditions may accept constraints and reframe stressor appraisals to identify attainable goals while persisting in their focus on the future (Chen et al. 2012). Originally conceptualized to account for youths' physiological resilience in lower SES settings (Chen et al. 2012), the psychological and physiological benefits of S&P coping have since been demonstrated among racially and ethnically minoritized individuals and in the context of discrimination (Christophe and Stein 2022; Santo et al. 2024).

S&P coping could potentially benefit Black Americans' relationship functioning. Similar to JH coping, S&P coping may enhance mental health—a key pathway for promoting relationship adjustment. Additionally, S&P coping could predispose partners to persist in their relational efforts/support behaviors or to re-appraise stressors as less conflictual or as opportunities for the couple to grow together and support each other. Of further interest is whether these strategies are useful even in the context of elevated levels of MEES.

Despite previous research not attending to gender differences in the effects of S&P coping, it may be useful to investigate whether its potential influence varies by gender. Recent research found that Black women were more likely to cope with discrimination by praying and seeking social support, regardless of how frequently they encountered discrimination; however, Black men were more likely to accept discrimination as a fact of life, particularly when experiencing discrimination (Sullivan et al. 2021). These findings allude to potential gender differences in S&P coping, with Black men engaging in shifting behaviors (i.e., cognitive reappraisals of discrimination as a fact of life) and Black women engaging in persisting behaviors (i.e., optimism through praying). Yet, it is unclear whether the combination of S&P coping has differential promotive effects on men's and women's relationship functioning.

3 | Current Study

We investigated JH and S&P coping as promotive factors for romantic relationship functioning among mixed-gender Black couples, examining their beneficial capability in the context of racial discrimination (an example of MEES) and exploring potential gender differences in these associations (see Figure 1).

We considered relationship functioning in terms of both positive and negative outcomes (partner support, relationship conflict) to provide a more comprehensive presentation of Black couples (rather than reinforcing deficit perspectives via solely examining negative dimensions of functioning). We hypothesized that higher levels of JH and S&P coping strategies would be related to better relationship functioning (more partner support and less relationship conflict) and that this association would be stronger among those experiencing more discrimination. Given the mixed literature concerning gender differences in JH coping and limited work addressing gender differences in S&P, we did not advance hypotheses regarding whether their linkages would be stronger among men or women.

4 | Method

4.1 | Participants

We drew upon cross-sectional, self-report data from mixed-gender Black couples (married or cohabitating in a romantic relationship) who participated in the fifth wave of a larger randomized trial of African-American family dynamics and family-centered prevention programming in the United States (Beach et al. 2023). Of the 224 families participating in data collection, we removed couples not in a romantic relationship at wave 5 (e.g., were divorced; $n=84$), resulting in an analytic sample of 140 couples (280 individuals). The majority of participants in the analytic sample were in midlife (women:

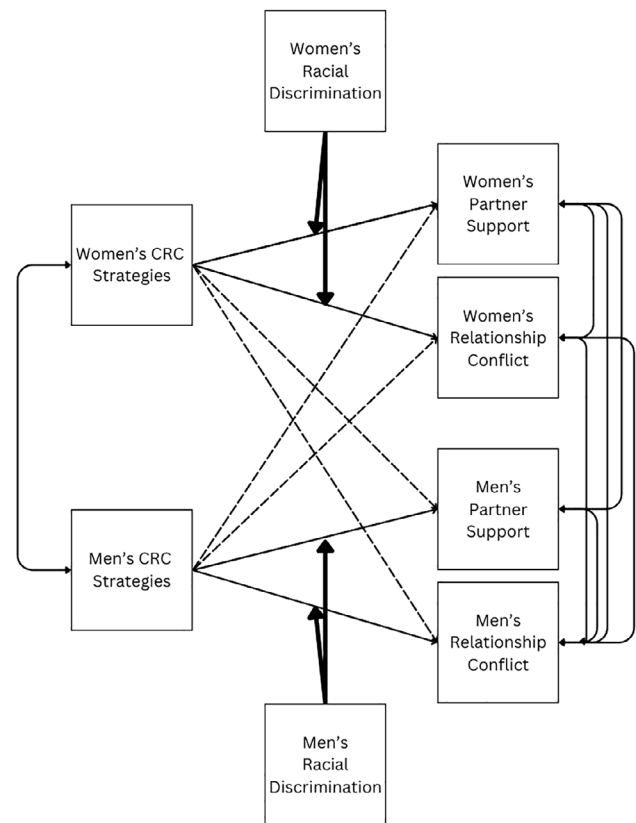


FIGURE 1 | Conceptual model of study aims. CRC, culturally relevant coping. Solid lines represent actor effects; dashed lines represent partner effects. Bolded arrows represent potential moderation.

$M_{\text{age}} = 43.30$, $SD = 7.37$; men: $M_{\text{age}} = 46.77$, $SD = 9.20$), being partnered for 18.09 years on average ($SD = 8.54$). Of the couples in the study, 82% reported being married, 46% were previously assigned to the intervention group, and the average level of family income was between US\$30,000 and \$39,999. Seventy-two percent of women and 73% of men were working at the time of the study. The majority of women (29%) reported their highest level of education as trade school/associate degree, and the majority of men (46%) reported their highest level of education as high school/GED.

4.2 | Procedure

Details on study recruitment and procedures are provided in Beach et al. (2023). Couples were originally recruited in 2013 and 2014 via mail and phone using lists from local schools and advertisements and flyers posted in their communities. Respondents were screened for eligibility (i.e., couples with an African American child between the ages of 9 and 14 years). At enrollment, project staff visited couples' homes, explained the study in more detail, obtained informed consent, and assigned participants to the control or treatment condition. In 2019, approximately 6 years after baseline, families were re-contacted for another assessment (i.e., wave 5). During this wave, couples completed measures of CRC responses and relationship functioning using audio computer-assisted interview-software via internet and phone. Adults were compensated with a US\$50 check at each wave of data collection. All procedures were approved by University of Georgia's institutional review board (2012104112).

4.3 | Measures

4.3.1 | JH Coping

The 12-item John Henryism Active Coping Scale (James 1994) assessed JH. A sample item is, "When things don't go the way I want them to, that makes me work even harder." Item responses (1—*completely false* to 5—*completely true*) were summed, with higher overall scores reflecting greater endorsement of JH. Alpha was 0.93 for men and 0.87 for women.

4.3.2 | S&P Coping

The 17-item Shift-and-Persist Coping Scale (Chen et al. 2012) assessed S&P coping. The shift subscale included six items; the persist subscale 11 items. For the shift subscale, participants received two prompts ("In life, things don't always go the way that we want. Everyone has different preferences for how they deal with situations in which something doesn't turn out the way that they want, and they are not able to change it," and "You will see a list of things that people sometimes do, think, or feel when something stressful happens. Everybody deals with problems in their own way. Please rate how much you do each of the following things when something stressful happens in your life") and rated items on how frequently they used various strategies (e.g., "I think about what I can learn from the situation"). The persist subscale had no prompts and included items such as "I think that things will get better in the future." Two items from the persist subscale were

reverse-coded. For both subscales, responses (1—*not at all* to 4—*a lot*) were averaged to reflect greater strategy use. Consistent with theoretical tenets and extant empirical research (e.g., Christophe and Stein 2022), a single score was created to represent the combination of shifting and persisting. We standardized scores for both the shift and persist subscales; standardized scores were averaged together, with higher scores reflecting greater composite use of S&P coping. For men, the reliability of the shift and persist subscales were 0.94 and 0.84, respectively; for women, the reliabilities were 0.91 and 0.83, respectively. Correlations between subscales were 0.67 for men and 0.57 for women.

4.3.3 | Partner Support

The 15-item Spousal Social Support scale (Culp and Beach 1998) assessed partner support. A sample item is, "I can tell [my partner] about both good things and bad things that happen to me." Responses (1—*almost never* to 5—*almost always*) were summed, with four items reverse-coded so scores reflected greater support. Alpha was 0.77 for men and 0.83 for women.

4.3.4 | Relationship Conflict

The 8-item Ineffective Arguing Inventory (Kurdek 1994) assessed relationship conflict. A sample item is, "When you and your partner argue, nobody really seems to win." Responses (1—*strongly disagree* to 5—*strongly agree*) were summed, with three items reverse-coded so scores reflected greater conflict. Alpha was 0.77 for men and 0.86 for women.

4.3.5 | Racial Discrimination

The 13-item Racist Hassles Questionnaire (Harrell 1997) assessed racial discrimination. A sample item is, "How often has someone said something insulting to you just because of your race or ethnic background?" Responses (1—*never* to 4—*frequently*), were summed to reflect more discrimination experiences. Alpha was 0.93 for men and 0.91 for women.

4.4 | Missing Data and Covariates

There were no missing data for participants in the current study. Marital status (1 = *married*, 0 = *unmarried*), intervention group (1 = *assigned to intervention group*, 0 = *control group*), age, and education level were included as covariates in all models. However, because age and education did not show significant associations with any of the outcomes and their inclusion in models did not change the pattern of results, both age and education were removed for parsimony. The final models only include marital status and intervention group as covariates.

4.5 | Data Analysis

We examined the means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables for men and women. Then, we used an

actor-partner interdependence modeling framework (Kenny et al. 2006) to conduct multivariate analyses via path analyses in Mplus version 8.2 (Muthén & Muthén 1998–2017) using maximum likelihood parameter estimates. Each CRC strategy (JH and S&P coping) was tested in separate models. First, we conducted an omnibus test of distinguishability to determine whether partners were empirically distinguishable by gender (Kenny et al. 2006). Distinguishability tests included comparing models with constrained parameters (i.e., means, variances, and correlations) to freely estimated models. A significant omnibus chi-square (χ^2) for the constrained model indicates that gender was a distinguishable variable. Then, we conducted sequential model building to investigate the associations of interests. Primary independent variables (JH or S&P) were tested as predictors of partner support and relationship conflict simultaneously (Model 1). That is, we estimated models with CRC strategies entered as predictors of both husbands' and wives' partner support and relationship conflict. Both actor effects (i.e., the path from one partner's reports of CRC strategies to their own reports of relationship functioning) and partner effects (i.e., the path from one partner's reports of CRC strategies to the other partner's reports of relationship functioning) were tested. We tested gender differences in estimated paths using chi-square difference tests to compare models where paths between men and women were constrained to be equivalent versus freely estimated. When model fit did not significantly degrade with constrained paths, the more parsimonious model was retained, with constraints employed for subsequent analyses. All predictors were free to covary, and all residuals were free to correlate.

Next, we included the main effects of racial discrimination within each model (Model 2). Finally, we entered interactions between CRC strategies and discrimination (JH \times Discrimination or S&P \times Discrimination; Model 3). Only actor interactive effects were included in these models, given that this is the first study to examine the effects of CRC strategies in a relational context, the limited theoretical basis for the between-partner associations of CRC strategies, and the number of parameters being tested in each model. The covariance between interaction terms and the components comprising the interaction terms was constrained to improve model convergence, but this did not affect the size or direction of effects. All variables were standardized before analyses. Significant interactions were probed and plotted at low (one SD below the mean) and high (one SD above) levels of the moderator. Good model fit was interpreted by a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) greater than or equal to 0.95, a nonsignificant chi-square test, a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) less than or equal to 0.06, and a Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) less than or equal to 0.08 (Hu and Bentler 1999).

5 | Results

5.1 | Descriptive Results

Means, standard deviations, ranges, and correlations among study variables are presented in Table 1. Men and women did not differ significantly in their reports of JH, S&P coping, or partner support ($ps > 0.470$). Relative to women, men reported significantly lower levels of conflict, $t(139) = 2.814$, $p = 0.006$, and higher levels of discrimination, $t(139) = -0.16$, $p = 0.030$. For

both men and women, their own JH was positively, significantly correlated with their own S&P coping (men: $r = 0.64$; women: $r = 0.49$). For men, partner support was associated with more JH ($r = 0.29$) and S&P ($r = 0.40$); conflict was associated with less S&P coping ($r = -0.34$). For women, partner support was associated with more JH ($r = 0.27$) and more S&P coping ($r = 0.27$); conflict was associated with less JH ($r = -0.28$) and less S&P coping ($r = -0.28$). Racial discrimination was not associated with either coping strategy for men or women. CRC strategies were significantly correlated between men and women (JH: $r = 0.39$; S&P coping: $r = 0.34$).

5.2 | Associations Among JH, Discrimination, and Relationship Functioning

We first conducted an omnibus test of distinguishability where the means, variances, intrapersonal covariances, and interpersonal covariances were constrained to be equal across all study variables. Results indicated distinguishability, $\Delta \chi^2(35) = 180.67$, $p < 0.001$. Additionally, distinguishability was still indicated even when variable means constraints were dropped, $\Delta \chi^2(32) = 171.93$, $p < 0.001$. Thus, we specified distinguishable dyadic models.

The unstandardized estimates and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for models focused on JH, discrimination, and relationship functioning are presented in Table 2. Model 1 fit the data well, $\chi^2(6) = 6.169$, $p = 0.405$; RMSEA = 0.01; SRMR = 0.04; CFI = 0.99. Further tests of gender differences revealed that model fit did not worsen once the paths between primary predictors and outcomes were constrained to be equivalent across men and women, suggesting no significant gender differences in the estimated paths. Examining the main effects of JH, results showed that, for both men and women, actors' JH was positively related to partner support and negatively related to relationship conflict. There were no significant partner effects.

Model 2 also fit the data well, $\chi^2(6) = 6.815$, $p = 0.338$; RMSEA = 0.03; SRMR = 0.03; CFI = 1.00. The main actor effects for JH's associations with partner support and relationship conflict were still significant for men and women, with no significant partner effects. There were no significant main effects of actors' racial discrimination for either partner support or relationship conflict among men or women; there was a significant partner effect for wives' discrimination, which was associated with lower levels of support, as reported by men.

The final model (Model 3) provided an acceptable fit, $\chi^2(12) = 22.019$, $p = 0.981$; RMSEA = 0.08; SRMR = 0.05; CFI = 0.94. The JH \times discrimination interaction did not significantly predict either outcome for either men or women, suggesting the effect of JH on relationship functioning did not vary by the level of exposure to discrimination.

5.3 | Associations Among S&P Coping, Discrimination, and Relationship Functioning

Results from the omnibus test comparing constrained and unconstrained models yielded evidence of distinguishability by

TABLE 1 | Correlations, means, standard deviations, and range among culturally-relevant coping strategies, discrimination, and relationship functioning for men and women.

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	M	SD	Range
1. Partner Support (M)	—										59.46	8.19	33.00–75.00
2. Relationship Conflict (M) [±]	-0.55*	—									18.31	4.30	11.00–27.00
3. Discrimination (M)	-0.09	0.12	—								20.49	7.67	13.00–42.00
4. JH Coping (M)	0.29*	-0.15	-0.03	—							49.56	9.22	12.00–60.00
5. S&P Coping (M)	0.40*	-0.34*	0.03	0.64*	—						-0.06	1.02	- 4.56–0.87
6. Partner Support (W)	0.33*	-0.23*	0.00	0.07	0.15 [†]	—					59.06	10.03	31.00–75.00
7. Relationship Conflict (W)	-0.19*	0.32*	0.05*	-0.05	-0.13	-0.62*	—				19.65	5.24	11.00–34.00
8. Discrimination (W) [‡]	-0.13	0.07	0.17*	0.06	-0.01	-0.07	0.16 [†]	—			18.84	6.07	13.00–38.00
9. JH Coping (W)	0.04	0.03	-0.21*	0.39*	0.25*	0.27*	-0.28*	-0.05	—		49.81	7.18	12.00–60.00
10. S&P Coping (W)	0.17*	-0.12	-0.15 [†]	0.42*	0.34*	0.27*	-0.28*	-0.11	0.49*	—	0.01	0.83	-2.82–0.87

Note: Shaded cells represent cross-partner correlations between variables for men and women.

Abbreviations: M, men; W, women.

[±]Significant difference between men and women, with men reporting significantly higher scores or proportions.

[‡]Significant difference between men and women, with women reporting significantly higher scores or proportions.

[†]*p* < 0.10.

**p* < 0.05.

TABLE 2 | Associations among John Henryism (JH), racial discrimination, and relationship functioning.

Outcome	Predictor	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
		B	SE	95% CI	B	SE	95% CI	B	SE	95% CI
Partner support										
<u>Actor effect</u>										
	JH Coping (M)	0.29	0.06	0.17, 0.41	2.66	0.51	1.65, 3.66	2.62	0.52	1.61, 3.63
	JH Coping (W)	0.29	0.06	0.17, 0.41	2.66	0.51	1.65, 3.66	2.62	0.52	1.61, 3.63
	Racial Disc. (M)				-0.59	0.65	-1.86, 0.68	-0.60	0.65	-1.87, 0.67
	Racial Disc. (W)				-0.73	0.82	-2.34, 0.89	-0.76	0.83	-2.38, 0.87
	JH Coping X Disc. (M)							-0.02	0.57	-1.13, 1.10
	JH Coping X Disc. (W)							-0.30	0.84	-1.95, 1.34
	Marital Status (M)	4.55	1.69	1.23, 7.87	4.95	1.67	1.68, 8.21	4.96	1.67	1.70, 8.22
	Intervention Status (M)	-0.24	1.30	-2.79, 2.30	-0.26	1.27	-2.75, 2.24	-0.24	1.27	-2.73, 2.25
	Marital Status (W)	2.18	2.14	-2.02, 6.37	2.38	2.13	-1.80, 6.56	2.42	2.13	-1.76, 6.60
	Intervention Status (W)	-0.99	1.64	-4.20, 2.23	-1.01	1.63	-4.20, 2.18	-0.99	1.63	-4.18, 2.20
<u>Partner effects</u>										
	JH Coping (M)	-0.06	0.07	-0.19, 0.07	-0.69	0.51	-1.69, 0.32	-0.72	0.51	-1.72, 0.29
	JH Coping (W)	-0.06	0.07	-0.19, 0.07	-0.69	0.51	-1.69, 0.32	-0.72	0.51	-1.72, 0.29
	Racial Disc. (M)				0.62	0.83	-1.00, 2.24	0.64	0.83	-0.98, 2.26
	Racial Disc. (W)				-1.32	0.64	-2.58, -0.06	-1.32	0.65	-2.59, -0.06
Relationship conflict										
<u>Actor effect</u>										
	JH Coping (M)	-0.12	0.03	-0.19, -0.06	-1.15	0.28	-1.70, -0.60	-1.06	0.28	-1.61, -0.52
	JH Coping (W)	-0.12	0.03	-0.19, -0.06	-1.15	0.28	-1.70, -0.60	-1.06	0.28	-1.61, -0.52
	Racial Disc. (M)				0.52	0.36	-0.19, 1.23	0.56	0.36	-0.15, 1.27
	Racial Disc. (W)				0.80 [†]	0.43	-0.04, 1.64	0.87	0.43	0.03, 1.71
	JH Coping X Disc. (M)							0.30	0.32	-0.33, 0.92
	JH Coping X Disc. (W)							0.74 [†]	0.44	-0.12, 1.59
	Marital Status (M)	0.28	0.94	-1.57, 2.13	0.18	0.94	-1.66, 2.01	0.15	0.93	-1.68, 1.97
	Intervention Status (M)	-0.35	0.72	-1.77, 1.07	-0.33	0.71	-1.73, 1.07	-0.35	0.71	-1.74, 1.05
	Marital Status (W)	-0.87	1.12	-3.07, 1.33	-1.10	1.11	-3.27, 1.07	-1.19	1.11	-3.36, 0.97
	Intervention Status (W)	0.46	0.86	-1.23, 2.15	0.49	0.85	-1.17, 2.15	0.44	0.84	-1.22, 2.09
<u>Partner effects</u>										
	JH Coping (M)	0.05	0.04	-0.02, 0.12	0.51 [†]	0.28	-0.04, 1.05	0.56	0.28	0.02, 1.10
	JH Coping (W)	0.05	0.04	-0.02, 0.12	0.51 [†]	0.28	-0.04, 1.05	0.56	0.28	0.02, 1.10
	Racial Disc. (M)				-0.08	0.43	-0.92, 0.76	-0.12	0.43	-0.96, 0.72
	Racial Disc. (W)				0.32	0.36	-0.39, 1.02	0.35	0.36	-0.36, 1.06

Note: Bold print represents significant ($p < 0.05$) effects.
 Abbreviations: Disc, Discrimination; M, men; W, women.
[†] $p < 0.10$.

gender, $\Delta \chi^2(35)=174.36, p < 0.001$. Moreover, distinguishability was still indicated when variable means constraints were dropped, $\Delta \chi^2(32)=164.73, p < 0.001$. Thus, we specified distinguishable dyadic models.

The unstandardized estimates and 95% CIs for models focused on S&P coping, discrimination, and relationship functioning are in Table 3. Model 1 fit the data well, $\chi^2(6)=0.80, p=0.992$; RMSEA=0.00; SRMR=0.02; CFI=1.00. Further tests of gender differences revealed model fit did not worsen when the paths between primary predictors and outcomes were constrained to be equivalent across men and women, suggesting no significant gender differences in the estimated paths. Examining the main effects of S&P coping, results showed that, for both men and women, actors' S&P coping was positively related to partner support and negatively related to relationship conflict. There were no significant partner effects.

Model 2 also fit the data well, $\chi^2(6)=1.10, p=0.981$; RMSEA=0.00; SRMR=0.01; CFI=1.00. The main actor effects for S&P's associations with partner support and relationship conflict were still significant for both men and women, with no significant partner effects. There were no significant main effects of actors' or partners' discrimination for either partner support or relationship conflict among men or women.

The final model (Model 3) provided an acceptable fit, $\chi^2(13)=6.60, p=0.922$; RMSEA=0.00; SRMR=0.02; and CFI=1.00. The S&P coping \times discrimination interaction did not significantly predict partner support for either men or women, suggesting the effect of S&P coping on support did not vary by level of exposure to discrimination. However, the S&P coping \times discrimination interaction was significantly related to women's (but not men's) relationship conflict. Figure 2 shows the post hoc probing of this association, illustrating S&P coping was negatively related to conflict for women experiencing less discrimination ($b=-2.38, p < 0.001$); this relation was weaker and nonsignificant for women encountering more discrimination ($b=-0.59, p=0.251$).

6 | Discussion

The IMSSBF model states that Black Americans live in an environment of chronic macro-level stress that works to compromise intimate relationship functioning (Murry et al. 2018), making CRC strategies an important resource for fortifying relational well-being. Notwithstanding existing research on the relational benefits of religiosity and Afrocentricity as coping strategies for Black Americans, limited work has linked CRC strategies to Black couples' relationship functioning or evidenced the strategies most effective in the face of MEES. In the current study, we aimed to expand the literature by using a dyadic analytic framework (APIM) to examine the connections between JH and S&P coping (CRC resources previously linked to Black mental and physical health) with Black relationship functioning. Both strategies were related to better relationship functioning for men and women, with JH linked to better relationship functioning regardless of the level of discrimination encountered. For women, the S&P coping-to-conflict link was stronger among those experiencing less discrimination.

6.1 | CRC Strategies Promotive of Relationship Functioning

Consistent with IMSSBF postulates, CRC strategies were promotive resources for Black relationship functioning. Partners endorsing either greater JH or greater S&P coping reported greater partner support and less relationship conflict. Further, these associations were similar among men and women, supporting the salience of JH as an asset for Black women and not just as a masculine resource (cf. Perez et al. 2023; Subramanyam et al. 2013). The links we found between these CRC strategies and relationship functioning may operate in unique ways to promote adjustment—JH could encourage partners' approach behaviors and the pursuit of relational success, whereas S&P coping might engender optimistic reprisals of relationship experiences. The utility of these strategies may also occur via their protective features for psychological well-being. That we found little evidence of cross-partner effects in these CRC strategies suggests that they may function more as a *personal* resource for individuals that confers relational benefits. Future research should continue to explore whether other CRC strategies (e.g., Afrocentricity) function more dyadically to elicit cross-partner effects.

Given the legacy of focus on Black familial deficits, these findings are notable as they are the first to connect these CRC strategies with Black intimate relationship functioning and show JH and S&P coping to be relationally adaptive—related to more positive and fewer negative relationship behaviors. Importantly, JH is rooted in Black Americans' chronic exposure to societal oppression and has complex implications for well-being (i.e., there is mixed literature, demonstrating negative physical effects and positive psychological effects). Given its cultural significance, more work is needed to substantiate whether this strategy fosters well-being holistically and/or in other domains in the long term. Future work should utilize longitudinal methods to assess the relations among CRC strategies, romantic relationship functioning, and mental/physical health to corroborate the current results and determine the net effects of CRC use. Moreover, future work should attend to the *simultaneous* use of CRC strategies and whether there are multiplicative or synergistic effects for relationship functioning and well-being.

6.2 | Interactive Effects Among S&P Coping, Racial Discrimination, and Relationship Conflict

The current findings underscore the pernicious and gendered effects of interpersonal racism on Black intimate relationships. We found that women's experiences of discrimination were negatively related to men's reports of partner support. Further, the link between S&P coping and relationship conflict was conditioned by experiences of racial discrimination and gender. Specifically, although S&P coping was linked to less relationship conflict on average, in the current study, this link was attenuated among women experiencing more discrimination.

According to theory, S&P coping should be most effective in unpredictable, uncontrollable contexts—namely financial or socioeconomic strain, which has primarily been the focus of previous work on S&P coping (Chen et al. 2012). Experiences

TABLE 3 | Associations among shift & persist (S&P) coping, racial discrimination, and relationship functioning.

Outcome	Predictor	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
		B	SE	95% CI]	B	SE	95% CI	B	SE	95% CI
Partner support										
	<u>Actor effect</u>									
	S&P Coping (M)	2.84	0.53	1.80, 3.88	2.76	0.50	1.78, 3.74	2.75	0.50	1.77, 3.73
	S&P Coping (W)	2.84	0.53	1.80, 3.88	2.76	0.50	1.78, 3.74	2.75	0.50	1.77, 3.73
	Racial Disc. (M)				-0.61	0.62	-1.83, 0.61	-0.67	0.62	-1.88, 0.55
	Racial Disc. (W)				-0.54	0.83	-2.16, 1.08	-0.54	0.83	-2.16, 1.08
	S&P Coping X Disc. (M)							0.86	0.58	-0.27, 1.99
	S&P coping X Disc. (W)							0.09	0.88	-1.65, 1.82
	Marital Status (M)	3.93	1.65	0.70, 7.16	4.33	1.63	1.14, 7.52	4.34	1.61	1.18, 7.50
	Intervention Status (M)	0.07	1.25	-2.38, 2.51	0.04	1.23	-2.37, 2.44	0.01	1.22	-2.37, 2.40
	Marital Status (W)	1.56	2.14	-2.64, 5.75	1.79	2.15	-2.42, 5.99	1.73	2.15	-2.47, 5.94
	Intervention Status (W)	-1.17	1.63	-4.36, 2.02	-1.19	1.63	-4.37, 2.00	-1.19	1.63	-4.37, 2.00
	<u>Partner effects</u>									
	S&P Coping (M)	0.48	0.56	-0.61, 1.58	0.26	0.50	-0.72, 1.24	0.37	0.51	-0.62, 1.36
	S&P Coping (W)	0.48	0.56	-0.61, 1.58	0.26	0.50	-0.72, 1.24	0.37	0.51	-0.62, 1.36
	Racial Disc. (M)				0.47	0.82	-1.15, 2.08	0.46	0.82	-1.16, 2.08
	Racial Disc. (W)				-1.07 [†]	0.62	-2.29, 0.16	-0.95	0.62	-2.17, 0.27
Relationship conflict										
	<u>Actor effect</u>									
	S&P Coping (M)	-1.54	0.29	-2.09, -0.98	-1.46	0.27	-1.99, -0.94	-1.49	0.27	-2.01, -0.96
	S&P Coping (W)	-1.54	0.29	-2.09, -0.98	-1.46	0.27	-1.99, -0.94	-1.49	0.27	-2.01, -0.96
	Racial Disc. (M)				0.51	0.34	-0.16, 1.19	0.53	0.34	-0.14, 1.21
	Racial Disc. (W)				0.71	0.43	-0.13, 1.54	0.69	0.43	-0.15, 1.52
	S&P Coping X Disc. (M)							-0.19	0.32	-0.81, 0.43
	S&P Coping X Disc. (W)							0.90	0.45	0.01, 1.78
	Marital Status (M)	0.73	0.91	-1.05, 2.50	0.60	0.90	-1.16, 2.36	0.60	0.90	-1.16, 2.36
	Intervention Status (M)	-0.45	0.69	-1.79, 0.89	-0.42	0.68	-1.75, 0.91	-0.43	0.68	-1.75, 0.90
	Marital Status (W)	-0.57	1.12	-2.76, 1.62	-0.79	1.11	-2.97, 1.38	-0.76	1.11	-2.93, 1.41
	Intervention Status (W)	0.63	0.85	-1.04, 2.29	0.65	0.84	-1.00, 2.30	0.68	0.84	-0.96, 2.33
	<u>Partner effects</u>									
	S&P Coping (M)	-0.08	0.30	-0.66, 0.50	0.01	0.27	-0.52, 0.53	0.05	0.27	-0.49, 0.58
	S&P Coping (W)	-0.08	0.30	-0.66, 0.50	0.01	0.27	-0.52, 0.53	0.05	0.27	-0.49, 0.58
	Racial Disc. (M)				-0.06	0.43	-0.89, 0.78	-0.07	0.43	-0.90, 0.76
	Racial Disc. (W)				0.20	0.35	-0.48, 0.88	0.18	0.35	-0.50, 0.86

Note: M, men; W, women, Disc., Discrimination. Bold print represents significant ($p < 0.05$) effects.

[†] $p < 0.10$.

of racial discrimination should also be an apt context for S&P coping, given discriminatory encounters are stressful and cannot be predicted. However, discrimination may be a qualitatively

different stressful context than experiencing financial strain due to the ubiquitous and targeted nature of discriminatory encounters for Black Americans (Clavél et al. 2017). This suggests that

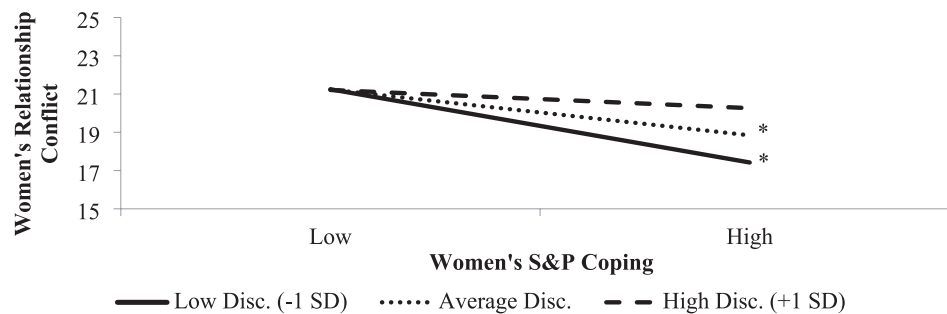


FIGURE 2 | Association between women's S&P coping and relationship conflict by racial discrimination.

there may be other distinguishing factors beyond unpredictability that render certain stressful contexts more apt for S&P coping, as manifestations of discrimination may diminish S&P coping's effectiveness for romantic relationships. Moreover, that S&P coping was not promotive among women reporting higher levels of discrimination could indicate S&P coping could become gendered when overwhelmed by heightened discrimination. We did not advance any hypotheses regarding gender differences in the effects of S&P coping, as prior work has not attended to any distinctive gender patterns in this construct. This preliminary evidence demonstrating S&P coping salience for women adds to the work demonstrating gendered differences in cultural resources among Black couples. Indeed, Jenkins et al. (2022) examined positive and negative religious coping as moderators of Black couples' relationship quality and found distinctive patterns for men and women. Additional research is necessary to investigate the extent to which S&P coping's relational consequences are gendered and under what circumstances.

Given the cross-sectional nature of this study, the direction of these effects is unclear, and variability in the timing of these linkages cannot be ruled out. That is, we speculate that the links between coping and conflict may fluctuate over time as partners' experiences with discrimination fluctuate. For instance, during times of lower stress, S&P coping may help inoculate relationship functioning so that when partners encounter more discrimination, the effectiveness of coping may be attenuated, but overall relationship functioning may not be as severely compromised during these times as it would be if partners had not utilized S&P coping previously. More work is needed to disentangle S&P coping linkages with relationship conflict over time and clarify under what circumstances these associations become attenuated.

6.3 | Clinical and Policy Implications

The current findings suggest bolstering Black couples' CRC resource use may be an effective strategy in relationship prevention efforts—a pressing issue considering the existing and widening disparities in Black American romantic relationships (Bloome and Ang 2020). Clergy, clinicians, and other practitioners working with Black Americans should inventory the availability/use of CRC strategies, exploring their relational utility for clients and among individuals facing elevated racial stress. Couple and family therapists, in particular, will need to build a strong therapeutic alliance so that they can make space for discussions about the impact of race and racism on each member, identify the culturally relevant ways that each member navigates a racialized

society, and reinforce approaches that promote healthy functioning (Kaslow et al. 2024). Policymakers should attend to the specific racial and cultural context in which Black families exist, acknowledging and valuing the unique strengths, such as CRC strategies, that Black couples exhibit. Further, support should be provided to holistic, culturally informed programs and resources that bolster Black intimate relationship functioning. Notwithstanding, more political and economic resources should also be directed to eliminating the social stressors (e.g., discrimination) that Black Americans face and that necessitate the use of CRC strategies. Indeed, such efforts would be aided by future research including structural measures of racism and assessing community strengths that can have a broad impact in counteracting MEES for Black couple relationships.

6.4 | Limitations

The present study had multiple strengths, including the use of a theoretically driven research design, the employment of dyadic data from a racially homogenous sample, and examination of both positive and negative relationship dimensions while accounting for partners' interdependence. Still, there are limitations to this work. First, the cross-sectional nature of the study hinders our ability to disentangle both the direction of effects and within-person variability in the use of coping strategies across time. Second, the study relied solely on self-report data, which could inflate the associations between variables due to shared method variance. Third, the generalizability of these results is limited, as we only investigated the current associations among mixed-gender couples. Studies employing longitudinal designs and observational measures of relationship functioning among more gender-inclusive samples will advance this work.

7 | Conclusion

This study illustrates the links between CRC strategies and Black couples' romantic relationship functioning, suggesting CRC strategies are adaptive for positive and negative relationship outcomes and underscoring the interactive role of gender and racial stress. Further study of Black Americans' relational resources will advance relationship equity efforts.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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