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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2xs6r5v9>

Journal

Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 17(2)

ISSN

1524-9220

Authors

Bowleg, Lisa
English, Devin
del Rio-Gonzalez, Ana Maria
[et al.](#)

Publication Date

2016-04-01

DOI

10.1037/men0000026

Peer reviewed



HHS Public Access

Author manuscript

Psychol Men Masc. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2017 April 01.

Published in final edited form as:

Psychol Men Masc. 2016 April ; 17(2): 177–188. doi:10.1037/men0000026.

Measuring the Pros and Cons of What It Means to Be a Black Man: Development and Validation of the Black Men's Experiences Scale (BMES)

Lisa Bowleg,

The George Washington University

Devin English,

The George Washington University

Ana Maria del Rio-Gonzalez,

The George Washington University

Gary J. Burkholder,

Walden University

Michelle Teti, and

University of Missouri

Jeanne M. Tschann

University of California, San Francisco

Abstract

Although extensive research documents that Black people in the U.S. frequently experience social discrimination, most of this research aggregates these experiences primarily or exclusively by race. Consequently, empirical gaps exist about the psychosocial costs and benefits of Black men's experiences at the intersection of race and gender. Informed by intersectionality, a theoretical framework that highlights how multiple social identities intersect to reflect interlocking social-structural inequality, this study addresses these gaps with the qualitative development and quantitative test of the Black Men's Experiences Scale (BMES). The BMES assesses Black men's negative experiences with overt discrimination and microaggressions, as well their positive evaluations of what it means to be Black men. First, we conducted focus groups and individual interviews with Black men to develop the BMES. Next, we tested the BMES with 578 predominantly low-income urban Black men between the ages of 18 and 44. Exploratory factor analysis suggested a 12-item, 3-factor solution that explained 63.7% of the variance. We labeled the subscales: *Overt Discrimination*, *Microaggressions*, and *Positives: Black Men*. Confirmatory factor analysis supported the three-factor solution. As hypothesized, the BMES's subscales correlated with measures of racial discrimination, depression, resilience, and social class at the neighborhood-level. Preliminary evidence suggests that the BMES is a reliable and valid measure of Black men's experiences at the intersection of race and gender.

Keywords

Black/African American men; Intersectionality; Discrimination; Depression; Resilience

The year 2013 marked the 50th anniversary of the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, in which Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1963) delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech. In that celebrated speech, Dr. King advocated for jobs and an end to poverty for Black people and envisioned a future of racial equality for all Americans. More than 50 years later, some Black men’s lives reflect much of the civil rights progress that Dr. King foresaw; the most visible is that Barack Obama, a Black man, is in his second term as President of the United States. This exemplar notwithstanding, racial discrimination persists as an oppressive reality for many Black men in the U.S.

Microaggressions, the more contemporary, mundane, subtle and often interpersonal manifestations of racial discrimination (Sue et al., 2007), are also pervasive. But whereas a plethora of excellent measures of racial discrimination exist (e.g., Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996; Williams et al., 2008; Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997) — reflecting the longer history of research on discrimination compared with that of microaggressions — measures of microaggressions are in their infancy (e.g., Nadal, 2011; Torres-Harding, Andrade, & Romero Diaz, 2012). A wealth of studies have documented that Black people’s experiences of racial discrimination are disconcertingly frequent and have adverse consequences for mental and physical health (e.g., Brown et al., 2000; J. S. Jackson et al., 1996; Klonoff, Landrine, & Ullman, 1999; Utsey, Payne, Jackson, & Jones, 2002; Williams & Mohammed, 2013). Although conceptual models of racial discrimination or race-related stress (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Essed, 1991; Harrell, 2000; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996) acknowledge the intersection of race and gender on experiences of racial discrimination, most studies of racial discrimination do not reflect this notion of intersectionality. Rather, most research on racial discrimination tends to aggregate experiences primarily or exclusively by race (e.g., Brown et al., 2000; Krieger, Kosheleva, Waterman, Chen, & Koenen, 2011; Krieger & Sidney, 1996; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). Consequently, critical gaps in knowledge exist about how discrimination and microaggressions on the basis of race intersects with Black men’s other social identities such as gender, sexual orientation, and/or socioeconomic status (SES).

Underscoring the importance of examining Black men’s experiences of discrimination at the intersection of race and gender, a handful of studies document that Black men report more frequent experiences of racial discrimination than Black women (Bonham, Sellers, & Neighbors, 2004; Krieger & Sidney, 1996; Pieterse & Carter, 2007; Utsey, 1997; Utsey et al., 2002; Williams & Mohammed, 2009), while other studies have found no gender differences (Borrell, Kiefe, Williams, Diez-Roux, & Gordon-Larsen, 2006). But whereas a small literature on *gendered racism* (F. M. Jackson, Phillips, Hogue, & Curry-Owens, 2001; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2008; Wingfield, 2007) or *gender-specific racism* (Krieger, Rowley, Herman, Avery, & Phillips, 1993) exists to document Black girls’ and women’s experiences of discrimination at the intersection of race, gender, and class, with the notable exception of the African American Men’s Gendered Racism Stress Inventory, a

measure for Black men (Schwing, Wong, & Fann, 2013), there is a comparable dearth of literature focused explicitly on Black men's experiences at the intersection of race, gender, and class. Presumably, because men's gender is perceived to be a privileged status, Black men's gender is often rendered invisible or subsumed under race.

Social class or more commonly, class, refers to "social groups [that] arise from interdependent economic relationships" (Krieger, Williams, & Moss, 1997, pp. 344–345). Class is similarly obscured within race. This is because, as intersectionality scholar Collins (1998) has noted, "Race operates as such an overriding feature of African-American experience in the United States that it not only overshadows economic class relations for Blacks but obscures the significance of economic class within the United States in general" (p. 209). Accordingly, Collins uses the term *race-class intersectionality* to denote the mutually constitutive nature of race and class; neither construct is meaningful without its intersection with the other. Although individual Black men are represented in the middle class, and to a lesser extent, upper class, Black men as a group are disproportionately represented among low-income and impoverished groups due to a complex array of factors including institutionalized racial discrimination, the historical legacy of slavery and Jim Crow, as well as economic factors such as changes in labor market, industrial, and technological sectors (Anderson, 2008; Wilson, 2009).

Although social class is one of the most reliable predictors of health, considerable gaps exist about how to best conceptualize and measure social class, prompting recommendations that class be measured at the individual, household and neighborhood level (Krieger et al., 1997). Measures of neighborhood-level social class are underutilized in social science research but are important because they can characterize the environments in which people live in ways that individual and household-level measures of social class cannot (Krieger et al., 1997). For example, neighborhood-level measures can assess neighborhood disorders such as violence, drug dealing, and public intoxication (Ewart & Suchday, 2002). Other scholars have advocated for using subjective measures of SES in light of evidence that these are more consistently related to outcomes such as psychological functioning and self-rated health than traditional objective measures such as income (Adler et al., 2008). Accordingly, we focus on social class at the individual-level with objective and subjective measures of SES, as well as at the neighborhood-level.

Informed by calls for more research on discrimination at the intersection of race, gender, and class in general (Harrell, 2000; Krieger et al., 1993; Williams & Mohammed, 2009) and for Black men in particular (Bowleg, 2013; Bowleg, Teti, Malebranche, & Tschann, 2013; Elligan & Utsey, 1999; Schwing et al., 2013; Utsey, 1997), we developed this study to develop and test the psychometric properties of the Black Men's Experiences Scale (BMES). The BMES is a preliminary assessment of Black men's negative experiences relevant to the intersection of their race and gender, and positive feelings about being Black men.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that asserts that multiple social identities such as race, gender, SES, sexual orientation, and disability intersect at the individual micro level to reflect multiple and interlocking systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and privilege at the macro social-structural level (Collins, 1991; Crenshaw, 1991, 1995). Historically rooted in Black feminist scholarship and activism, intersectionality critiques the exclusion of Black women from White feminist scholarship and activism, as well as the absence of Black women from (Black) antiracist theory and activism (Crenshaw, 1989). Accordingly, Black women have been the historical focus of intersectionality (Nash, 2008); not men. A small theoretical (Cooper, 2005–2006; Griffith, 2012; Griffith, Metz, & Gunter, 2011) and empirical (Bowleg, 2013; Bowleg et al., 2013; Griffith, Ellis, & Allen, 2013; Hussen et al., 2014; Schwing et al., 2013) literature focused on Black men's intersectionality experiences attests that this is changing, however.

The intersectionality framework posits that social identities are not independent and additive, but multiple and mutually constitutive (Collins, 1991, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991). Black men's experiences at the intersection of "penalty and privilege" (Collins, 1991, p. 225) underscore that Black men are ideally suited for intersectionality's examination of the contexts in which Black men's privileged identities as men interlock with their penalized status as Black people. The experience of being a Black man is not a simple addition (i.e., Black + man). For Black men, race, gender, and class mutually constitute each other such that one social identity (e.g., race) insufficiently explains Black men's disparate social-structural, psychosocial, and health outcomes without its intersection with other social identities (e.g., gender, class; Bowleg et al., 2013; Collins, 1998, 2015). Thus, intersectionality is an important and useful theoretical perspective for understanding the pros and cons of Black men's experiences (Griffith, 2012).

Black Men's Positive Feelings about Being Black Men

The social science literature has given substantial attention to theory and research on the psychosocial and social-structural travails of being a Black man (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000; Gary, 1995; Utsey, 1997; Watkins, Walker, & Griffith, 2010), particularly a low-income urban Black man (Anderson, 2008; Bowleg et al., 2013; Majors & Billson, 1992; Majors, Tyler, Peden, & Hall, 1994; Rich, 2010; Rich & Grey, 2005). There is, however, another understudied reality of Black men's lives; namely, that despite these tribulations, many Black men feel positive about being Black men. The notion that African Americans demonstrate positive self-concepts despite the historical and ongoing legacy of racial discrimination and other social-structural strife is a core theme in much of the theoretical literature on Black mental and physical health (e.g., Chao, 2010; Franklin & Jackson, 1990; Utsey, Bolden, Lanier, & Williams, 2007). However, empirical studies of these concepts, particularly with adult Black men, are rare. There is a need for empirical knowledge about how Black men maintain positive feelings about being Black men despite adversity and how this positive regard may be related to positive mental and physical health outcomes. Research on how Black men maintain positive self-concepts in the midst of deleterious social-structural factors such as racial discrimination, unemployment and mass incarceration

is virtually nonexistent. There are some notable exceptions, however, from research documenting that individual-level (e.g., resilience, religiosity) and external resources (e.g., family social support, support groups to help men cope with discrimination) can buffer the harmful effects of racial discrimination-related stress (see Elligan & Utsey, 1999; Teti et al., 2012; Utsey, Giesbrecht, Hook, & Stanard, 2008; Utsey, Hook, Fischer, & Belvet, 2008; Utsey, Lanier, Williams, Bolden, & Lee, 2006).

Measures of Black Men's Experiences

Validated measures focused specifically on Black men's experiences are rare. Indeed, we are aware of just two. The Masculinity Inventory Scale (MIS), is a culturally-specific assessment of masculinity in Black undergraduate men attending a historically Black college and university and a predominantly White university (Mincey, Alfonso, Hackney, & Luque, 2014). Factor analyses of the 50-item MIS indicated five subscales: Mainstream society (i.e., ideas of what it means to be a man regardless of race); Black masculinity (i.e., what it means to be a Black man specifically); Primary group (i.e., the role of family members, other than fathers in shaping masculinity); Mainstream society/Black masculinity (i.e., items relevant to being a man and Black man); and Primary/peer group (i.e., the influence of fathers on masculinity and social support). The African American Men's Gendered Racism Stress Inventory (AMGRaSI; Schwing et al., 2013) is a 15-item measure of Black men's experiences of stress at the intersection of race and gender. Factor analyses of the AMGRaSI showed three subscales indicative of stress due to common stereotypes of Black men as: physically and sexually violent (Violence subscale); being financially or emotionally detached fathers (Absent Fatherhood subscale); and being proficient and interested in sports (Sports subscale).

Although the MIS, AMGRaSI and BMES share the common goal of providing reliable and validated measures of Black men's experiences, each has a distinctly different focus. Whereas Black men's masculinity is the explicit focus of the MIS, the AMGRaSI hones in on Black men's experiences of gendered racism stress related to common stereotypes about Black men as violent, bad fathers, and gifted athletes. The BMES addresses gaps in the literature and recent measures of Black men's experiences with an assessment of Black men's negative experiences of both discrimination and microaggressions at the intersection of race and gender, and a novel emphasis on the positive aspects of what it means to be a Black man. As such, the BMES aims to assess a breadth of Black men's experiences.

The Current Study

We designed this study to assess the psychometric properties of the BMES. To assess validity, we hypothesized that the negative experiences measured by the BMES would be positively correlated with racial discrimination and depression, but would be negatively correlated with resilience. Conversely, we hypothesized that positive feelings about being Black men would correlate positively with resilience and negatively with depression and racial discrimination. To assess incremental validity we hypothesized that the negative experiences measured by the BMES would contribute significantly to explain depression above and beyond the effects of racial discrimination, and that positive feelings about being

Black men would contribute significantly to explain depression above and beyond that accounted by resilience. In line with intersectionality's assertion that race, gender and class interlock to mutually construct each other (Collins, 1998), we assessed two class-related hypotheses, that: (1) Black men's negative experiences would be negatively correlated with subjective social status (SSS) and objective socioeconomic status (SES) indicators (i.e., education, income, employment status), and positively correlated with neighborhood stress, an indicator of neighborhood-level SES; and (2) positive feelings about being Black men would be positively correlated with subjective and objective SES indicators, and negatively associated with neighborhood stress.

Method

Participants

Participants were 578 self-identified Black/African American men between the ages of 18 and 44 ($M = 28.83$, $SD = 7.70$). The majority of participants were unemployed 65% ($n = 376$), and almost half reported annual incomes below \$10,000 (49%; $n = 286$). Fifty-four percent reported having been incarcerated ($n = 325$), with an average total incarcerated time of 2.9 years ($SD = 3.4$). Most participants reported their relationship status as single (73%; $n = 424$).

Procedure

As part of a larger mixed methods study focused on social structural factors, masculinity, sexual scripts, and Black men's sexual HIV risk behaviors, we used a venue-based probability sampling approach (MacKellar, Valleroy, Karon, Lemp, & Janssen, 1996) in which we sampled from randomly-selected venues such as corner grocery stores and restaurants in Philadelphia, PA. Sixty U.S. Census blocks that had a Black population of at least 50% were eligible for selection. Trained Black women and men recruiters first canvassed block groups to identify venues where at least 2 Black men were present during a 30-minute canvassing session. After receiving the permission of venue owners to recruit, we developed a sampling frame — a list of 1 to 5 venues in 54 block groups from which we could potentially recruit — during two-hour recruitment timeframes. Recruiters approached and screened prospective participants on-site to determine whether or not they met the eligibility criteria of self-identifying as Black and/or African American, and being at least 18 years old. A total of 578 study-eligible men, recruited over an approximately 2-1/2 year period, completed a questionnaire at the project's university office, using Audio Computer Assisted Self Interview (ACASI). ACASI facilitates survey completion with the use of a recorded voice to read survey options to respondents. Participants received a \$50 cash incentive. The Institutional Review Board at Drexel University, the first author's former institution, approved all study procedures.

BMES Measurement Development

We developed the BMES using an exploratory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark, & Smith, 2011) in which we first conducted focus groups and individual interviews with a sample of 71 Black men to gain an in-depth understanding of Black men's negative experiences relevant to the intersection of their race and gender, and

positive feelings about being Black men. A sample question was: “How would you describe what it’s like to be a Black man?” Findings showed general difficulties relevant to being Black men (e.g., “It’s not easy”); narratives about discrimination, such as in the workplace; recollections of microaggressions such as White people showing their discomfort with Black men by crossing the street or locking their car doors); and positive descriptions about being a Black man despite challenges (e.g., “feeling blessed”). We grouped these findings into brief phrase codes that we used to develop items for the BMES.

To facilitate statistical analyses, we converted the phrase codes into frequency-related items (e.g., “How often have you felt that it is a constant struggle to be a Black man?”) with Likert-type response options. We shared the list of developed items and discussed and resolved disagreements until we agreed on a final list of 20 items that we included in the study’s quantitative questionnaire. The introduction to the BMES read: “The next set of questions is about some experiences you may have had as a Black man. Please say how often you have had each experience.” The 6-point Likert-type scale assessed the frequency of the reported experiences and feelings (1 = *Never* to 6 = *Always*). Because some items did not fit well with the anchor response of *Always* (e.g., “How often have you been fired from a job because you are Black?”), we combined the *Very often* and *Always* responses for each item into a single category (5 = *Very often/Always*) before conducting the psychometric analyses. Therefore, we conducted all analyses using a 5-point scale rather than the original 6-point scale. The BMES is a preliminary assessment of Black men’s negative experiences with discrimination and microaggressions, as well as their positive evaluations of what it means to be Black men.

Measures

Racial discrimination—The 10-item *Everyday Discrimination* (Williams et al., 2008; Williams et al., 1997) measure assesses the frequency of routine and chronic unfair treatment. Sample items include: “How often have you received poorer services than other people at restaurants or stores?” and “How often have people acted as if they’re better than you?” To prime participants to think about racial discrimination, we revised each item from the original measure to include “because you are Black” at the end. Respondents used a 4-point scale (*Never* to *Very Often*). Higher scores represent more perceptions of unfair treatment due to race. In the present study Cronbach’s alpha was .86. Similar reliability scores have been found in U.S. ($\alpha = .88$) and South African ($\alpha = .84$) studies (Williams et al., 2012).

Depression—The Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9; Kroenke, Spitzer, & Williams, 2001) includes 9 items assessing the frequency of each of the diagnostic criteria for Major Depressive Disorder covered in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV (DSM-IV). Scale items are rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *Not At All*; 4 = *Nearly Every Day*) according to the increased frequency that a participant has experienced each item over the past two weeks. Scores are summed and can range from 9 to 36. Higher scores indicated more moderate to severe depression. Cronbach’s alpha of the scale has ranged from .89 to .86 in previous studies (Kroenke et al., 2001), and was .87 in this study.

Resilience—We used qualitative findings about resilience from the same sample to develop a measure of resilience (see Teti et al., 2012). The resulting scale consisted of 11 items to measure resilience, namely how participants perceived their ability to overcome challenges, and show positive outcomes despite adversity. Scale items are rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*; 5 = *Strongly Agree*), and were averaged to create a single indicator of resilience. Sample items include: “I try to turn bad situations into good ones,” and “When I know that somebody’s expecting me to fail, it gives me that extra push to succeed.” Higher scores indicated greater resilience. Cronbach’s alpha was .93.

Social Class—In line with Krieger et al.’s (1997) recommendation that social class be measured at multiple levels, we measured social class at the individual and neighborhood level.

Individual-level social class—Socioeconomic variables included in the analyses as indicators of social class were: (1) *Education*, which ranged from 1 (some high school) to 5 (graduate degree); (2) *Income*, ranging from 1 (< \$10,000) to 4 (> \$40,000); and (3) *Employment Status*, based on responses to two questions (“Are you employed?” and “If not, how long has it been since you were last employed?”), and ranging from 0 (employed) to 4 (last employed more than 12 months ago). We used the SES ladder of the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler & Stewart, 2007) to assess people’s sense of their social position or SES. The measure shows a ladder with 10 rungs, numbered from 1 to 10, and includes these instructions:

At the **top** of the ladder are the people who are the best off - those who have the most money, the most education and the most respected jobs. At the **bottom** are the people who are the worst off — who have the least money, least education, and the least respected jobs or no job. The higher up you are on this ladder, the closer you are to the people at the very top; the lower you are, the closer you are to the people at the very bottom. Where would you place yourself on this ladder?

Respondents indicated the number that best represented their social position in terms of money, education and jobs. Previous research supports the validity and reliability of this measure (Operario, Adler, & Williams, 2004).

Neighborhood-level stress/class—We used eight items from the Neighborhood Disorder subscale of the City Stress Inventory (Ewart & Suchday, 2002) as an indicator of neighborhood-level social class. Sample items include: “How often are there gang fights near your home?” and “How often do people deal drugs near your home?” We used a 4-point response scale (1 = *Never*; 4 = *Very Often*) and averaged scores to create a single indicator of neighborhood stress. Higher values indicated higher neighborhood level stress. Cronbach’s alpha for this sample was .90, and .88 in the original scale (Ewart & Suchday, 2002).

Data Analysis

To explore the underlying dimensions of the items developed to measure Black men’s experiences, we conducted an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) on half of the sample ($n =$

289), using Principal Axis Factoring with direct oblimin rotation. We used parallel analysis to determine the number of factors to retain (Patil, Singh, Mishra, & Donavan, 2007; 2008) by comparing the eigenvalues obtained in the EFA to those produced by 100 randomly generated correlation matrices (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). A factor in the original analysis was retained only if its eigenvalue was larger than that of the corresponding eigenvalue for that factor number in the randomly generated data. We then computed Cronbach's alpha for each emerging subscale. These analyses were conducted using SPSS V. 21.

With the second half of the sample ($n = 289$) we tested the resulting factor structure with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), using Robust Maximum Likelihood and oblimin rotation. A non-significant Chi-square value was used as a general indicator of model fit. In addition, model fit was evaluated using the cutoff values proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999) for the following indicators: comparative fit index (CFI) $> .95$; Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) $> .95$; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) $< .06$; and standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR) $< .08$. Composite reliability estimates, in lieu of Cronbach's alpha coefficients, were computed for each latent factor included in the CFA model (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2011).

To test for convergent and predictive validity, we examined correlations between the factorial scores from the CFA for each BMES subscale and racial discrimination, depression and resilience. To assess incremental validity, we conducted a separate hierarchical lineal model for each BMES subscale, using depression as the outcome measure. In the first step of each model we included either racial discrimination (for BMES subscales assessing negative experiences) or resilience (for BMES subscale assessing positive feelings about being Black men). BMES factorial scores were added at step 2 for each respective analysis.

To test associations between the BMES and social class, we examined correlations between the resulting CFA factorial scores and the objective socioeconomic variables: education, income, employment status, subjective social status, and neighborhood stress. We used *Mplus 7* to conduct these analyses (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012).

Results

Exploratory Factor Analyses

We deleted seven items with communalities lower than .40 (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). Based on the results from the parallel analyses, we retained three factors. From this three-factor solution we deleted one item that loaded on two factors with a cross-loading difference of less than .15. A final EFA with the remaining 12 items supported the three-factor structure and explained 63.7% of the variance in the item pool (Table 1). The first factor, which we labeled "*Overt Discrimination*," included six items that assessed experiences of unconcealed discrimination in different settings (35.5% variance; Eigenvalue = 4.3; $\alpha = .84$). The second factor, labeled "*Positives: Black men*," included three items that reflected positive feelings about being a Black man (18.3% variance; Eigenvalue = 2.2; $\alpha = .71$). The final factor, labeled "*Microaggressions*," included three items that assessed

experiences of White people's behavior conveying discomfort and fear toward respondents as Black men (10.0% variance; Eigenvalue = 1.2; $\alpha = .80$).

Reports of experiences of overt discrimination were rare ($M = 1.8$; $SD = 0.9$), compared with the more frequently reported microaggressions ($M = 3.1$; $SD = 1.1$). Participants frequently reported positive feelings about being Black men ($M = 4.3$; $SD = 1.0$), and did so more frequently than they reported microaggressions, $t(295) = 15.8$; $p < .001$; $d = 1.1$, and overt discrimination, $t(295) = 32.1$; $p < .001$; $d = 1.9$. Respondents' reports of microaggressions were more frequent than their reports of overt discrimination, $t(295) = 20.6$; $p < .001$; $d = 1.6$.

Confirmatory Factor Analyses

CFA fit indices supported the three-factor model that emerged in the EFA ($n = 289$; $\chi^2(51) = 72.25$, $p = .027$; TLI = .95; CFI = .96; RMSEA = .038; SRMR = 0.05). The factor structure loadings for the CFA are shown in Table 1. As presented in Table 2, only the intercorrelation between the *Overt Discrimination* and the *Microaggressions* subscales was significant ($r = .46$; $p = .001$). Estimates for composite reliability were: .79, 95% CI [.74, .84] for the *Overt Discrimination* subscale; .82, 95% CI [.77, .87] for the *Microaggressions* subscale; and .62, 95% CI [.45, .80] for the *Positives: Black Men* subscale.

BMES Validity

As presented in Table 2, racial discrimination was positively associated with scores on the *Overt Discrimination* ($r = .57$, $p < .001$) and *Microaggressions* ($r = .46$, $p < .001$) subscales, but uncorrelated with scores on the *Positives: Black Men* subscale. Regarding the associations between the BMES subscales and depression, both the *Overt Discrimination* ($r = .28$, $p < .001$) and *Microaggressions* ($r = .23$, $p < .001$) subscales were positively associated with depression, while the association was negative with the *Positives: Black Men* subscale ($r = -.22$, $p < .001$). Finally, resilience was positively correlated with the *Positives: Black Men* subscale ($r = .23$, $p < .001$), but unrelated to experiences of *Overt Discrimination* and *Microaggressions*.

Table 3 presents the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analyses assessing incremental validity. As can be seen in models 1 and 2, racial discrimination is a significant predictor of depression (step 1), but adding *Overt Discrimination* and *Microaggressions* in step 2 do not contribute significantly to their respective models. Similarly, in model 3, the addition of the *Positives* subscale does not contribute significantly to the explanation of depression above and beyond the influence of resilience.

BMES and Social Class

All correlations between the individual-level indicators of social class and BMES subscales were non-significant (see Table 2). With regards to the neighborhood-level indicator of social class, a positive correlation was found between neighborhood stress and *Overt Discrimination* ($r = .25$, $p < .001$) and *Microaggressions* ($r = .24$, $p = .001$), but the association with the *Positives: Black Men* subscale was not significant.

Discussion

The 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom provided an apt historical marker for the development and test of the *Black Men's Experiences Scale* (BMES). On the one hand, the anniversary spotlighted many positive changes in Black men's lives as exemplified by numerous federal, state and local statutes that outlaw racial discrimination. On the other, it reveals the persistent and seemingly intractable impact of discrimination and microaggressions on Black men. Guided by an intersectionality-informed perspective, we developed the BMES. Although several excellent validated measures of racial discrimination already exist (e.g., Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996; Williams et al., 2008; Williams et al., 1997), as do two measures focused specifically on Black men (Mincey et al., 2014; Schwing et al., 2013), this study is the first to develop and test a measure of both the costs (i.e., overt discrimination and microaggressions) and benefits (i.e., positive feelings) of Black men's experiences at the intersection of race and gender.

The exploratory factor analysis revealed three BMES subscales: *Overt Discrimination*, *Microaggressions*, and *Positives: Black Men*. The confirmatory factor analysis supported this factorial structure. The results show that the BMES is a reliable measure of Black men's experiences of discrimination and positive feelings about being a Black man. As hypothesized, the BMES demonstrated convergent validity with a validated racial discrimination scale (Williams et al., 2008; Williams et al., 1997), and predictive validity with depression and resilience. This finding is consistent with empirical evidence documenting the relationship between Black men's experiences with racial discrimination and depression (Brown et al., 2000; Hammond, 2012; Pieterse & Carter, 2007; Utsey, 1997; Watkins, Hudson, Howard Caldwell, Siefert, & Jackson, 2011). Specifically, the *Overt Discrimination* and *Microaggressions* subscales were associated with higher depression, but countering our hypothesis, not correlated with resilience. This result suggests that Black men can report high resilience despite their experiences of overt discrimination and microaggressions (Teti et al., 2012). Our hypothesis that more positive feelings about being Black men would be associated with higher resilience and lower depression was also supported.

On the contrary, our hypotheses regarding incremental validity were not supported. Results from the hierarchical regressions indicated that BMES subscales did not account for unique variance in depression above and beyond what was accounted for by measures of racial discrimination (for *Overt Discrimination* and *Microaggressions*) and resilience (for *Positives: Black Men*). Thus, further validation studies for the BMES, such as those that include other outcome variables such as stress or health risk behaviors (e.g., substance use), are needed to test incremental validity.

Our hypotheses regarding the association between the BMES and social class (both at the individual and neighborhood level) were partially supported. As predicted, participants' reports of more neighborhood stress (e.g., more violence, drug dealing) were significantly and positively correlated with the *Overt Discrimination* and *Microaggressions* subscales. Contrary to our hypothesis, the *Positives: Black Men* subscale was unrelated to

neighborhood stress. In addition, the associations between the BMES subscales and the individual-level indicators of social class were all non-significant.

It is likely that Black men's social status may have less of an impact on their health or psychosocial outcomes compared with other factors such as racial discrimination (Adler et al., 2008). Our study's finding that higher *Overt Discrimination* scores were associated with higher reports of everyday discrimination and depression supports this suggestion, and echoes the results from other research that found that compared with White and Black women and White men, Black men's lower subjective social status scores were unrelated to hypertension, and were weakly associated with depression (Adler et al., 2008). Our findings underscore how intersectionality-informed analyses relevant to race, gender, and class provide a more in-depth understanding of Black men's lives than analyses focused on a single social identity (i.e., race, gender *or* class).

The *Positives: Black Men* subscale — the limitations that we highlight below notwithstanding — is one of the most novel and substantive contributions of the BMES. With its emphasis on Black men's positive experiences despite overt discrimination and microaggressions, the *Positives: Black Men* subscale enhances understanding about an understudied aspect of Black men's lives. It is also worth noting that the *Positives: Black Men* subscale is the only BMES subscale to explicitly reference being a Black man in the wording of its items. As such, it best illustrates how Black men conceptualize their social identities intersectionally.

The *Positives: Black Men* subscale is also well-aligned with scholarship on positive psychology and multiculturalism. Central to that work is the assertion that because concepts such as optimal human functioning and subjective well being are culturally bound, the strengths of racial and ethnic minority populations should be considered within their own cultural contexts (Constantine & Sue, 2006; Lopez et al., 2002). This is also a core tenet of intersectionality — people from historically marginalized groups should be examined from their own vantage points and contexts, not in terms of how they deviate from White middle-class norms (Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003). Our study highlights the utility of measuring positive experiences in conjunction with negative ones in research with Black men, and has implications for doing so with other minority groups (e.g., other racial and ethnic minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people). Doing so would facilitate a more multi-faceted and culturally-rooted understanding of minority people's strengths and assets within the context of oppressive stressors and challenges. This knowledge in turn, could be infused into media campaigns and mental health promotion programs to highlight “as exemplars (individuals or subgroups) who function within positive psychological frameworks, and to clarify what works in the lives of people” (Lopez et al., 2002, p. 700) despite omnipresent stressors such as overt discrimination and microaggressions.

Another noteworthy strength of the BMES is that the measure is grounded in the narratives of Black men. The BMES emerged from the preliminary qualitative phase of a larger HIV prevention study. Consistent with our interest in the effects of social-structural factors on Black men's sexual risk behaviors, we had initially planned to use the Everyday Racial Discrimination Scale (Williams et al., 2008; Williams et al., 1997) as the study's sole

measure of racial discrimination. However, analyses of the study's qualitative data revealed numerous narratives in which respondents discussed their experiences with discrimination in terms of the intersection of their race and gender, and to a lesser extent, class; these were experiences that the everyday unfair treatment measure did not assess. Accordingly, we developed the BMES to reflect the intersectional nature of overt discrimination and microaggressions that participants articulated in the study's focus groups and interviews. Although, as expected, both the *Overt Discrimination* and *Microaggressions* subscales were associated with everyday racial discrimination, our results suggest that these subscales likely measure Black men's experiences in ways that differ from and are independent of the primarily race-related discrimination experiences that the Everyday Racial Discrimination Scale measures.

An important caveat for the use of the BMES is warranted: it should be used as three separate subscales, rather than as a composite measure. This is because a sum score would obscure the individual variances of the subscales and necessitate the reverse scoring of the *Positives: Black Men* subscale. Doing so would also require that subscale to be added to the *Overt Discrimination* and *Microaggressions* subscales. This, in turn would violate the conceptual integrity of the *Positives: Black Men* subscale by concealing how it functions to assess Black men's positive feelings about being Black men despite their endorsement of the *Overt Discrimination* and *Microaggressions* subscales. Moreover, we do not interpret respondents' lack of endorsement of positive feelings as representing more overt discrimination or microaggressions, an interpretation that reverse-scoring the *Positives: Black Men* subscale might prompt.

Our findings should be considered within the context of at least six limitations. First, although the introduction to the BMES asked respondents about experiences that they may have had as a Black man, only the items on the *Positives: Black Men subscale* BMES items specifically mentioned both race and gender. Moreover, none of the BMES items explicitly ask about social class. This raises important questions about the necessity of explicitly articulating each social identity of interest in intersectionality-informed research, and subjects the BMES to the same criticism that we have directed at work that does not specifically mention intersections of race *and* gender *and* class. One inadvertent consequence of not including race and gender in all of the BMES's items is that respondents may have focused on their race solely when answering questions. Our concerns about this are diminished by other intersectionality-related research that we have conducted with Black gay and bisexual men (Bowleg, 2013) that shows that respondents rarely explicitly mentioned their gender even when they articulated experiences that were clearly intersectional such as being harassed by police who suspected them of criminal activity or having White people lock their car doors when Black men passed. Future research is needed to identify the most effective way to ask quantitative questions about the intersection of multiple social identities without resorting to asking about social identities independently (Bowleg, 2008). Research is also needed to investigate whether — given the sensitivity of self-identifying one's social class — and how best to integrate questions about social class identity in intersectionality-informed measures.

A second limitation of the research is that the BMES's subscales are skewed in the direction of negative experiences relevant to overt racial discrimination and microaggressions, rather than a balance of positive and negative experiences. This likely represents the fact that most study participants were predominantly low-income unemployed Black men with histories of incarceration and that the qualitative narratives on which we based the BMES better reflected their travails than their positive experiences or feelings about being Black men. This reality notwithstanding, our study's result that more respondents reported positive feelings about being Black men than reported experiences of overt discrimination and microaggressions bolsters the need for more positively-oriented research on Black men's experiences despite discrimination. To avoid biasing responses about the experience of being a Black man either negatively or positively, we asked neutral open-ended questions (e.g., "How would you describe what it's like for you as a Black man?"). The inclusion of more specific questions about positive experiences such as "What are some of the positive things about being a Black man?" or "Tell me about a positive experience that you have had as a result of being a Black man?," however, would have provided a more in-depth understanding of the positives and facilitated the development of more BMES items to assess positive feelings and experiences.

Related to this is the mismatch between the wording of the negative and positive experience items on the BMES; a third limitation. The majority of the items on the BMES subscales reflect specific negative experiences (e.g., having White people lock their car doors when Black men pass). By contrast, the items on the *Positives: Black Men* subscale do not reflect specific positive experiences but rather a more global assessment of being a Black man. The study also raises questions about the benefits of including the *Positives: Black Men* subscale in light of the aforementioned mismatched wording between the positive and negative items, and its relatively low reliability; the subscale had the lowest reliability estimate of all of the subscales. It is possible that the low alpha may be partially due to the small number of items on that subscale. This underscores a need for future research to develop more items to assess Black men's positive experiences. Despite these limitations, we recommend that the *Positives: Black Men* subscale be included, at the very least, to reduce acquiescence bias, the tendency for respondents to respond consistently in a single direction to survey items (Schaeffer & Presser, 2003). Thus, even if the *Positives: Black Men* items are excluded from analyses, they can serve to counterbalance the more negative items of the BMES.

A fourth limitation of our study is that we used a non-validated measure of resilience developed from the same sample to assess validity. Future validity tests should use a validated measure of resilience. Fifth, we combined two response options at the analysis phase (i.e., "Very Often/Always") that were not combined when we administered the BMES. We recommend that future research with the BMES use a 5-point scale by collapsing the *Very often* and *Always* responses into a single category (5 = *Very often/Always*). Finally, the BMES may not be generalizable to higher SES, rural, or gay or bisexual Black men.

These limitations notwithstanding, the BMES advances empirical knowledge about Black men's positive and negative experiences at the intersection of race and gender. As such, our study has several theoretical and applied implications. One theoretical implication is the need to expand theory on discrimination at the intersection of race, gender and class to

include men's experiences. So synonymous is the word *gender* with girls and women that much of the literature on gender-specific racism focuses primarily or exclusively on women's experiences (see for e.g. Krieger et al., 1993) — Black girls' and women's experiences with police brutality are a notable exception to this rule (Crenshaw & Ritchie, 2015). Our work highlights a need for more intersectionality theory and research with Black men. An applied implication of our work is the need for more systematic research to inform micro and macro level interventions for Black men. For example, BMES findings could inform the development and evaluation of campaigns that challenge and break the link between negative media portrayals of Black men and boys, resultant negative public attitudes, and lowered educational, employment, and overall quality of life opportunities for Black men and boys (e.g., The Opportunity Agenda, 2011). This research could also bolster the work of programs such as the My Brother's Keeper's Initiative — a White House initiative designed to increase opportunities for boys and men of color (The White House, 2014) — that address structural barriers due to education, juvenile and criminal justice, and employment disparities (Executive Office of the President of the United States, 2015). For example, the BMES could be used to assess Black men's reported psychosocial strengths and challenges at the intersection of their race and gender. This information in turn could be used to ensure that program participants are matched to culturally and gender-tailored social support, coping and resilience-boosting services. Research supports the efficacy of support groups that help Black men cope with the deleterious effects of overt discrimination and microaggressions (Elligan & Utsey, 1999). Findings from the BMES could also be used to empirically support the need for campaigns that reduce and enforce bans on the racial and gender profiling of Black men in public spaces (e.g., stores, restaurants, taxis) and in local and federal government policing practices such as stop-and-frisk policies.

The BMES could also be useful for future research on Black men's mental and physical health. With the exception of research focused specifically on the mental health effects of social discrimination, research on psychological distress, depression, and trauma rarely highlights or measures the role of contextual factors such as overt discrimination or microaggressions. Thus, the BMES could be used as an adjunct to mental health measures to provide a contextually grounded understanding of how overt discrimination and microaggressions are associated with Black men's mental health. Future research could also benefit from the BMES's focus on the positive aspects of what it means to be a Black man to better understand the correlates of positive mental and physical health despite overt discrimination and microaggressions.

More than five decades after the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Dr. King's dream for an end to racial discrimination remains elusive. Although explicit and overt forms of discrimination such as police brutality and mass incarceration persist, the BMES highlights a distinct difference between Black men's experiences of overt discrimination and microaggressions, and spotlights the importance of concurrently assessing positive feelings about being Black men. Our study provides preliminary evidence that the BMES may be a reliable and valid measure of Black men's experiences.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by a National Institutes of Health, National Institutes of Child Health and Development (Grant 1 R01 HD054319-01) award to Lisa Bowleg, Ph.D. We are grateful to the study's participants and to the late Shawn L. White, MHS, Ph.D., who recruited and conducted many of the study's focus groups and individual interviews.

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Table 1
 Factor Loadings, Means and Standard Deviations for Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA)

BMES Item	Mean (SD)	EFA Factor Loadings ^d			CFA Factor Loadings ^b		
		Overt Discrimination	Positives: Black men	Microaggressions	Overt Discrimination	Positives: Black men	Microaggressions
How often have you been fired from a job because you are Black?	1.49 (1.00)	.79	-.09	.09	.60		
How often have you not been hired for a job because you are Black?	2.06 (1.31)	.78	.01	.01	.64		
How often has a landlord or a realtor refused to sell or rent to you because you are Black?	1.69 (1.14)	.72	-.05	-.04	.66		
How often have you been treated unfairly at the place you work because you are Black?	1.85 (1.10)	.69	.08	.01	.66		
How often have you had trouble getting credit, bank loans or a mortgage because you are Black?	2.29 (1.54)	.60	.05	-.01	.61		
How often have you been discouraged by a teacher or advisor from continuing your education because you are Black?	1.71 (1.17)	.56	-.02	-.14	.58		
How often have you felt that it is a blessing to be a Black man?	4.32 (1.15)	-.04	.76	-.01		.60	
How often have you felt that as a Black man, you could be anything you want to be if you just stay focused and positive?	4.47 (1.06)	-.04	.71	.09		.71	
How often have you felt that the challenges you have as a Black man make you stronger than other men?	4.07 (1.37)	.10	.60	-.12		.53	
How often have White people seemed uncomfortable when they pass you on the street?	3.26 (1.20)	-.01	-.01	-.90			.89
How often have you felt that White people avoid eye contact with you?	3.16 (1.32)	-.07	.06	-.76			.75
How often have White people locked their car doors when you pass by because you are Black?	2.96 (1.39)	.17	-.04	-.59			.71

Notes.

^aEFA Factor loadings >.50 are in boldface.

^bp < .001 for all CFA factor loadings.

Table 2

Correlations between BMES Subscales and All Other Variables (N = 289)

	BMES Subscales		
	Overt Discrimination	Positives: Black men	Microaggressions
BMES Subscales			
Overt Discrimination	---	---	---
Positives: Black Men	.09	---	---
Microaggressions	.46***	-.05	---
Racial Discrimination	.57***	-.04	.46***
Depression	.28***	-.22***	.23***
Resilience	-.01	.23***	-.01
Social class			
Education	-.01	.11	-.10
Income	.07	.04	-.05
Employment	.04	-.11	.07
Subjective social status	-.05	.07	-.09
Neighborhood stress	.25***	.04	.24***

Note.

*
p < .05;**
p < .01;***
p < .001

Table 3

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Models Predicting Depression (N = 289)

Measures	Step 1			Step 2		
	R ²	B	SE	R ²	B	SE
Model 1	.13***			.14***		
Racial Discrimination		3.29	0.50		2.75	0.60
BMES Overt Discrimination					1.25	0.78
Model 2	.13***			.14***		
Racial Discrimination		3.29	0.50		2.92	0.56
BMES Microaggressions					0.59	0.39
Model 3	.03**			.04**		
Resilience		-1.57	0.48		-1.30	0.50
Positives: Black men					-1.06	0.56