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# The Positive Consequences of Negative Stereotypes: Race, Sexual Orientation, and the Job Application Process

David S. Pedulla<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*How do marginalized social categories, such as being black and gay, combine with one another in the production of discrimination? While much extant research assumes that combining marginalized social categories results in a “double disadvantage,” I argue that in the case of race and sexual orientation the opposite may be true. This article posits that stereotypes about gay men as effeminate and weak will counteract common negative stereotypes held by whites that black men are threatening and criminal. Thus, I argue that being gay will have negative consequences for white men in the job application process, but that being gay will actually have positive consequences for black men in this realm. This hypothesis is tested using data from a survey experiment in which respondents were asked to evaluate resumes for a job opening where the race and sexual orientation of the applicants were experimentally manipulated. The findings contribute to important theoretical debates about stereotypes, discrimination, and intersecting social identities.*

## Keywords

stereotypes, discrimination, race, sexual orientation

Researchers have linked negative stereotypes about African Americans, gay men, and other marginalized social groups to unequal outcomes across institutional contexts, including employment (Moss and Tilly 2001; Tilcsik 2011), education (Steele and Aronson 1995), criminal justice (Sweeney and Haney 2006), and housing (Farley et al. 1994; Lauster and Easterbrook 2011). But how do stereotypes about different stigmatized social categories interact with one another? Do they join together in additive ways, producing a “double disadvantage” for

individuals belonging to multiple marginalized groups? Or can disadvantaged categories combine in complex ways whereby belonging to multiple marginalized groups may result in less

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disadvantage than belonging to only one marginalized group?

This article examines a specific case of how stereotypes about two stigmatized social groups—black men and gay men—combine with one another to shape employment outcomes. While one line of research argues that combining multiple marginalized social identities produces greater disadvantage than belonging to only one stigmatized group (Beale 1970; King 1988; Ransford 1980), I argue that this is not necessarily the case. Drawing on insights from Fiske et al.'s (2002) stereotype content model (SCM), sociological theories about the “intersectionality” of social categories (Collins [1990] 2000), and research on counterstereotypical information (Blair 2002; Dasgupta and Greenwald 2001), I posit that stereotypes about black men will interact with stereotypes about gay men in a nonadditive and complex manner. Specifically, I argue that stereotypes about gay men as feminine, weak, and sensitive (Haddock, Zanna, and Esses 1993; Madon 1997) will counteract negative stereotypes often held by whites that black men are threatening, violent, and criminal (Moss and Tilly 2001; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Pager and Karafin 2009). Therefore, I posit that gay black men will face less discrimination than straight black men and that this will be the case because gay black men will be perceived as less threatening than their straight counterparts.

To empirically test this theory, I draw on data from an Internet-based survey experiment conducted on a national probability sample of respondents. Respondents were randomly assigned to review and evaluate one of four different resumes where the race (white vs. black) of the job applicant was experimentally manipulated along one axis and the sexual orientation (straight vs. gay) of the applicant was experimentally manipulated along the other axis. After reviewing

the resume, each respondent was asked to provide a starting salary recommendation for the job applicant they had reviewed. The difference in the average salary recommendations between groups is used as a measure of discrimination. The findings indicate that race and sexual orientation combine in complex, nonadditive ways in the context of evaluating job applicants. This article contributes to important theoretical debates about how stereotypes combine with one another in the production of discrimination as well as scholarship on the “intersectionality” of social categories.

Below, I first discuss how stereotypical beliefs may translate into discriminatory behavior and then address how stereotypes about black men and gay men likely produce discrimination against these groups. Next, I build on insights from the SCM, the “intersectionality” literature, and research on counterstereotypical information to generate hypotheses about how stereotypes about gay men and black men will interact in the labor market context. I then describe the research design and present the findings. Finally, I discuss the implications of the results for theories of stereotypes and discrimination as well as the sociological literature on intersecting social categories.

### **STEREOTYPICAL BELIEFS AND DISCRIMINATORY BEHAVIORS**

There are multiple theoretical perspectives that offer potential reasons for discriminatory behavior: “tastes” for discrimination (Becker 1957), statistical discrimination (Phelps 1972), status-based theories of discrimination (Correll and Benard 2006), and concerns about group competition (Blalock 1967). In this analysis, I draw on a social psychological theory of discriminatory behavior built from Fiske et al.'s (2002) stereotype content model (SCM).

The SCM, developed by Fiske et al. (2002), identifies two central dimensions of social perception: warmth and competence. Whereas perceptions of warmth stem from whether one views a group as having the *intent* of causing harm or providing support, perceptions of competence derive from whether a group is viewed as having the *ability* to carry out their intentions (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2007). Group attributes that capture perceptions of warmth include being tolerant, good natured, and sincere. Perceptions of competence are captured by group attributes such as confidence, independence, competitiveness, and intelligence (Fiske et al. 2002).

Cuddy et al. (2007) build on the SCM to generate a framework for linking perceptions of social groups as warm and competent to individuals' behaviors toward that group. The resulting theoretical model is the "behavior from intergroup affect and stereotype" (BIAS) map. The most relevant aspect of the BIAS map for the case examined in this article is that groups perceived as being low on the warmth dimension of the SCM will be likely to face "active harm" behaviors, such as discrimination. Conversely, groups that are perceived as being high on the warmth dimension will be likely to receive "active facilitation" behaviors, such as being defended or supported.<sup>1</sup> As Cuddy et al. (2007:634) argue: "warmth information creates a relatively urgent need to react, leading to active behavioral tendencies that act for (i.e., active facilitation) or against (i.e., active harm) the other." In the case of evaluating job applications, the BIAS map generates the hypothesis

that perceptions of a job applicant as being low in terms of warmth are likely to result in discriminatory behaviors against the applicant, such as recommending a relatively lower salary recommendation. By contrast, perceptions of a job applicant as being high in terms of warmth are likely to drive supportive behaviors, such as recommending relatively higher salaries for the applicant. In the following, I link the predictions of the BIAS map to discrimination against black men and gay men in the U.S. labor market.

### STEREOTYPES ABOUT AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST BLACK MEN AND GAY MEN

There is strong evidence that black men and gay men face discrimination in the U.S. labor market (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Pager, Western, and Bonikowski 2009; Tilcsik 2011). But, how might stereotypes about these groups be related to the discrimination that they face? In the United States, widespread stereotypes exist among whites that black men are threatening, violent, and criminal (Collins 2004). Qualitative research indicates that these stereotypes about black men are particularly salient in the employment context (Moss and Tilly 2001; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Pager and Karafin 2009; Shih 2002). Drawing on interviews with 180 Chicago employers, Neckerman and Kirschenman (1991:442) argue: "some respondents said more generally that inner-city blacks, especially men, did not know how to interview . . . they were belligerent or had 'a chip on their shoulder.'" Pager and Karafin (2009:82) present similar data from interviews with over 50 employers in New York City; one employer from a garment factory reported: "I find that the great majority of this minority group that you

<sup>1</sup>The competence dimension of the stereotype content model (SCM) is connected to passive behaviors in the behavior from intergroup affect and stereotype (BIAS) map, which I am not able to detect in the survey. Also, since my interest is in the active behavior of discrimination, I focus on the warmth dimension of the SCM.

are talking about [black men] either doesn't qualify for certain jobs because they look a bit more, they come on as if, well, they are threatening." Given the empirical literature on the stereotypes about black men in the labor market, I argue that black men will be perceived as more threatening than white men. Or, in the language of the stereotype content model, black men will be perceived as less warm than white men. The BIAS map provides the clear theoretical prediction that lower levels of perceived warmth will be linked to discriminatory behavior. Thus:

*Hypothesis 1a:* Straight black men will face discrimination compared to straight white men.

Research on racial stereotypes and discrimination in the labor market has not explicitly included sexual orientation in its theorizing or empirical analyses, leading to default assumptions of heterosexuality. Thus, I limit the first hypothesis to straight men. In the following, I will address the intersection between race and sexual orientation.

There is also significant evidence that gay men face discrimination in the labor market (Drydakis 2009; Hebl et al. 2002; Tilcsik 2011). In direct opposition to the stereotypical characteristics associated with black men, researchers have found that gay men are often stereotyped as effeminate, weak, passive, and not being tough (Gurwitz and Marcus 1978; Haddock et al. 1993; Herek 1984; Jackson and Sullivan 1989; Madon 1997). A recent audit study of job openings in the U.S. labor market provides empirical support for the argument that gay men face discrimination in part because of the stereotypes held about them. Tilcsik (2011) submitted pairs of applications for 1,769 job openings in seven different labor markets in the United States and experimentally

manipulated the sexual orientation of the applicants on their resumes through college club participation (i.e., participation in the "Gay and Lesbian Alliance"). While the gay applicant received a lower overall callback rate for jobs than the straight applicant, the gay applicant was additionally penalized in cases where the job posting explicitly mentioned desiring stereotypically masculine attributes (Tilcsik 2011). These findings, therefore, provide clear empirical evidence of discrimination against gay men in the U.S. labor market and also indicate that this discrimination is driven, in part, by stereotypes of gay men as effeminate.

Stereotypes about gay men as effeminate and weak could lead one to posit that gay men would be perceived as warmer than straight men and, thus, should face less discrimination than straight men. However, other evidence suggests that this is unlikely to be the case. Stereotypes about gay men as effeminate violate prescriptive gender stereotypes about what men are "supposed to be," such as tough and macho (see Horvath and Ryan 2003). A significant body of social psychological research has found that individuals who violate prescriptive stereotypes are likely to face social and economic sanctions, which are often referred to as "backlash" effects (Phelan and Rudman 2010; Schimmel et al. 1999). Given this line of research, I argue that gay men's perceived violation of gender stereotypes is likely to produce feelings of disgust or resentment, resulting in gay men being perceived as less warm than straight men. Challenging stereotypical notions of straight male masculinity may also result in gay men being perceived as threatening (i.e., challenging deeply held beliefs, norms, and expectations about gender). Combining this notion with the insights of the BIAS map, the next hypothesis is:

*Hypothesis 1b:* White gay men will face discrimination compared to white straight men.

This hypothesis focuses on white men because the research on stereotypes and discrimination against gay men has largely left race unexamined, resulting in the default assumption of whiteness. The intersection of stereotypes about race and sexual orientation are discussed in the following.

### THE INTERSECTION OF RACE AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

In the previous section, I drew on the predictions put forward by the BIAS map to argue that common stereotypes about black men and gay men are likely connected to discrimination against these groups in the labor market. Here I address how stereotypes about black men and gay men may interact with one another. On the one hand, the significant body of literature on how combining multiple marginalized identities produces a “double disadvantage” leads to the clear hypothesis that black gay job applicants will face more discrimination than straight black or gay white job applicants (Beale 1970; King 1988; Ransford 1980). However, I argue that the opposite is likely to be the case. To develop this argument, I connect two lines of thought—research on intersecting social identities and research on prejudice-reducing counterstereotypical information—with the theoretical predictions of the BIAS map.

#### *Intersecting Social Identities*

An underlying assumption in much of the literature on intersecting social identities, which tends to focus on the intersection of race and gender, is that combining multiple marginalized social categories (e.g., being black *and* female or black *and* gay) produces a “double disadvantage”

for the individuals who occupy both of those social positions. Each additional marginalized social category is argued to produce further disadvantage for the individual. And, there is evidence to support this claim in particular institutional domains. In the legal context, for example, Best et al. (2011:993) cite nearly a dozen pieces of research showing that “plaintiffs who face multiple disadvantages fare less well in civil rights litigation than do plaintiffs who suffer a single form of social disadvantage” (see also Crenshaw 1989).

However, theories of “intersectionality” do not necessitate that disadvantaged social categories will combine in this additive, negative manner. One of the insights of “intersectionality” theory is that social categories may combine in complex, non-additive ways (Collins [1990] 2000). In other words, the combination of social categories is more complex than the sum of its parts (Nash 2008). A growing body of empirical research has attempted to address the nonadditive ways that race and gender intersect. For example, recent research by Greenman and Xie (2008) finds nonadditive effects of race and gender on earnings (for a summary of literature on race and gender interactions in the labor market, see Browne and Misra 2003). While focused mainly on race and gender, these insights from theories of “intersectionality” open the possibility that stereotypes about black men and gay men will combine in a nonadditive manner.

Some preliminary empirical evidence in social psychology shows that the social categories of black male and gay male may combine in a nonadditive fashion. In a laboratory experiment, Remedios et al. (2011) showed participants 104 headshots of self-identified straight white men, straight black men, gay white men, and gay black men. Respondents were then asked to rate each applicant on



a likeability scale. First, the researchers found that both gay white photographs and straight black photographs received *lower* ratings on likeability than the straight white photographs. The gay black photographs, however, received *higher* ratings on likeability than the straight black photographs. In terms of likability, this evidence suggests that race and sexual orientation combine in a complex, nonadditive manner. Yet in contrast to the study presented here, Remedios et al.'s (2011) research employed a laboratory setting involving a nonrepresentative sample of respondents and did not focus on a particular institutional context such as the labor market, the mechanisms underlying the empirical findings, or the link between evaluations and discriminatory behavior such as making salary recommendations. The analysis presented below thus extends the work of Remedios et al. (2011) in important ways.

### **Counterstereotypical Information**

Research on prejudice-reducing counterstereotypical information provides a basis for developing hypotheses on how stereotypes about black men and gay men may intersect with one another. Because the BIAS map theorizes that stereotypes about the warmth of social groups play an important role in producing discriminatory behavior, constraining or altering the activation of warmth stereotypes has the potential to shape discriminatory behavior. Social psychological research on counterstereotypical information has offered compelling evidence that providing information or evidence that counters stereotypical beliefs can reduce prejudice and discrimination against negatively stereotyped groups, including African Americans and gay men (Blair 2002; Blair, Ma, and Lenton 2001; Dasgupta and Greenwald 2001; Power, Murphy,

and Coover 1996).<sup>2</sup> For example, in a large-scale survey experiment with 1,841 white respondents, Peffley, Hurwitz, and Sniderman (1997) find that positive counterstereotypical information—being hard-working or being well behaved—dramatically improved prejudiced respondents' attitudes toward African Americans in the realms of welfare and criminal justice, respectively. Cohen, Hall, and Tuttle (2009) examine the role of counterstereotypical information in evaluations of gay men in a laboratory experiment. They presented respondents with descriptions of gay men who were either more masculine (counterstereotypical) or more feminine (stereotype consistent) and found that gay men who were presented as masculine, challenging the feminine stereotype of gay men, were deemed more likable by straight male respondents than the feminine gay men (Cohen et al. 2009). While Peffley et al. (1997) and Cohen et al. (2009) investigate how counterstereotypical information can reduce prejudicial attitudes toward African Americans and gay men, research also suggests that counterstereotypical information can reduce discriminatory behaviors (see Kaas and Manger 2011).

While useful in identifying the potential of counterstereotypical information to reduce prejudice and discrimination, the aforementioned research focuses on intervening with *positive* information—such as being hard-working or personable (Kaas and Manger 2011; Peffley et al.

<sup>2</sup>There has been some important work in social psychology on how individuals process counterstereotypical information. While some researchers have argued that individuals “up-weight” counterstereotypical information, giving it additional value, others argue that counterstereotypical information is discounted (see Allen et al. 2009; Sherman et al. 2005). Given that there is opposing evidence on this issue, I remain agnostic about how individuals' processing of counterstereotypical information will influence the findings.

1997). In the case of race and sexual orientation, the counterstereotypical information of interest—the stereotypes of effeminacy and weakness associated with being gay—generally has *negative* consequences, at least for white men (Tilcsik 2011). Recent work by Livingston and Pearce (2009), however, argues that *negatively* stereotyped counterstereotypical information can actually have positive consequences. Livingston and Pearce (2009) explore the relationship between having a “baby face” and the success of black male CEOs. Previous research indicates that having a baby face is negatively related to the success of white male leaders (see Zebrowitz and Montepare 2005). Livingston and Pearce (2009), however, argue that having a baby face plays the opposite role for black men by increasing perceptions of black men as warm and deferent while reducing stereotypes of black men as being threatening. Thus, they argue that having a baby face is a “disarming mechanism” for black men, which will reduce discrimination against black men and lead to positive outcomes. In their laboratory experiment, they showed respondents faces of 40 real black and white CEOs from *Fortune* 500 companies, with differing scores on a “baby face scale,” and had the respondents guess the salary for each of the CEOs. Among their key findings in support of baby-facedness serving as a “disarming mechanism” is that respondents perceived baby-faced black male CEOs as earning higher salaries than mature-faced black male CEOs (Livingston and Pearce 2009).

Livingston and Pearce (2009:1229) define disarming mechanisms as: “physical, psychological, or behavioral traits that attenuate perceptions of threat by the dominant group.” Stereotypical beliefs about an individual’s categorical group membership, such as being gay,

do not fit neatly into the definition of a disarming mechanism articulated by Livingston and Pearce (2009). Yet, a similar underlying process may be at work when the stereotypes about gay men interact with the stereotypes about black men. Specifically, I argue that the stereotypes of femininity associated with being gay will reduce perceptions of black men as threatening, thereby increasing perceptions of warmth and leading to a reduction in discrimination. Combining this notion with the theoretical predictions offered by the BIAS map, I generate three hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 2:* Gay black men will face less discrimination than straight black men.

*Hypothesis 3:* Gay black men will be perceived as less threatening than straight black men.

*Hypothesis 4:* The reduced discrimination associated with being a gay black man, compared to a straight black man, will be explained by perceptions of gay black men as less threatening than straight black men.

## DATA AND METHODS

To empirically test the hypotheses articulated previously, I draw on original data gathered through an Internet-based survey experiment. The survey experiment was conducted on a national probability sample of 418 respondents—selected through a combination of random-digit dialing and address-based sampling methods—from a panel maintained by Knowledge Networks, a survey research organization. While the survey was conducted online, the sample is not limited to current Internet users or computer owners. Knowledge Networks provides the members of their panel with Internet



access and/or computer access, if necessary. Respondents were contacted via e-mail in September of 2011 and asked to participate in the survey. The fielding of the survey lasted approximately two weeks and the completion rate was 65.6 percent.

Each survey respondent was randomly assigned to one of four conditions in the survey experiment, where each condition presented the respondent with a different resume. The resumes that were shown to respondents were experimentally manipulated along two axes. Along one axis the experiment manipulated the race of the applicant (white vs. black) and along the other axis the experiment manipulated the sexual orientation (straight vs. gay) of the applicant. Respondents in this study were only shown one resume, rather than multiple resumes, to reduce the likelihood that they would be able to identify the experimental manipulations. By only showing one resume to each respondent, the role of social desirability bias was reduced in the analysis by avoiding comparisons that might trigger socially desirable responses from respondents (see Schuman et al. 1997). The result is a  $2 \times 2$  between-subjects experimental design. Therefore, the analyses are not able to estimate the racial or sexual orientation discrimination of a given individual respondent in the sample. However, the random assignment of respondents to each experimental condition enables reliable estimation of discrimination within the sample by comparing the mean salary recommendations in each experimental condition.

### **Experimental Manipulations**

Drawing on existing research (see Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007), the race of the applicant was manipulated through the use of white-sounding and black-sounding names: Brad Miller and Darnell Jackson,

respectively.<sup>3</sup> And, similar to Tilcsik's (2011) field-experimental work, the sexual orientation treatment was signaled through the applicant's participation in a college student organization. The "gay" sexual orientation signal was that the student was the president of the "Gay Student Advisory Council." The control signal was that the applicant served as president of the "Student Advisory Council." The treatment condition clearly signals that the applicant is gay, but the organizational affiliation is not with an overtly political gay organization, which keeps the treatment and control conditions closely aligned. (The resumes used in the experiment can be found in the Appendix A).

Other than the experimental treatments listed previously, the resumes were identical. All of the applicants had the same address, same phone number, and an e-mail address that was in a consistent format. They all attended Pennsylvania State University, received a degree in business administration, and had a strong GPA of 3.71 out of 4.00. The "Professional Experience" section on the resumes was identical. All applicants had experience as an assistant manager at a Target in North Bergen, New Jersey, where they had also worked during their summers in college.

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<sup>3</sup>One concern about using names to signal race is that racialized names may also signal a class cue and thus confound the effects of race and class. I address this issue in three ways. First, I use a first name (Darnell) that has been utilized in previous research and shown not to have a class-signaling effect (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004). Second, the resumes all indicate that the applicant completed college, signaling a certain level of social class attainment. Finally, I empirically examined whether the black-sounding name I used signaled both race and class by exploring respondents' answers to a survey item asking them to rate the job applicant's social class. I do not find evidence that the black-sounding name also signaled social class.

In each of the experimental conditions, respondents received the same set of instructions for the survey:

Please imagine that your friend, who runs a large retail store, is in the process of hiring someone for an assistant manager position. He has asked you to help him with the hiring process by reviewing one of the resumes he received for the position. . . . After you have thoroughly reviewed this resume, please move to the next screen and respond to the questions that follow with your first, uncensored impressions.

I chose to have respondents review an application for an assistant manager position at a retail store for two primary reasons. First, it is a job with which most people will have a certain level of familiarity and be able to realistically evaluate an applicant's ability to perform the tasks associated with the job. Second, employment at a retail store necessitates interacting with customers and coworkers on a regular basis, which will likely make salient the stereotypes of black men as threatening. The prompt also indicates that the respondent is being asked to review the application to assist their friend with the hiring process. I include this information in order to heighten the respondent's "comprehension goals" and "self-enhancement goals," which are linked to stereotype activation and application (Kunda and Spencer 2003). Thus, the experimental design provides a context where stereotypes about black men are likely to be activated and applied by respondents.

### ***The Analytic Sample***

The analytic sample is limited in two ways. First, the analyses exclude respondents who did not accurately receive the race and sexual orientation signals (for other studies that restrict their analytic sample in a similar way,

see Hosoda, Stone, and Stone-Romero 2003; Stevenson and Bottoms 2009). In the section on robustness checks, however, I investigate the consequences of limiting the analytic sample in this way. I was able to determine whether respondents accurately received the race and sexual orientation signals through manipulation checks at the end of the survey that explicitly asked them to report the race and sexual orientation of the applicant they reviewed. In terms of the sexual orientation signal, 86 percent of respondents in the "gay" condition described the applicant they reviewed as gay. And, fully 98 percent of respondents in the "straight" condition reported that the applicant they reviewed was straight. In terms of the race signal, respondents in the "white" condition described the applicant that they reviewed as white 85 percent of the time. Respondents, however, accurately recalled the race of the "black" applicant at a lower rate. Darnell Jackson, the name used for the black male applicant, was described as being black by 40 percent of respondents.

The final analytic sample is also limited to respondents who self-identify as non-Hispanic white, removing respondents who reported being non-Hispanic black, Hispanic, Asian, or of mixed racial ancestry.<sup>4</sup> The theoretical argument presented previously centers on the stereotypes that whites hold about black men as being threatening and criminal. While some nonwhite respondents may hold similar stereotypes about black men, many nonwhites do not hold those stereotypes. In research that focuses on stereotypes, attitudes, and discrimination toward blacks, it is common to limit the analysis to white respondents (see e.g., Johnson and Jacobson 2005).

<sup>4</sup>When nonwhite respondents are included in the analysis, similar empirical patterns emerge. In some cases, however, the coefficients attenuate and are no longer statistically significant.

**Table 1.** Means and Standard Deviations for Dependent and Mediating Variables by Experimental Condition

	Experimental Condition			
	Straight White	Gay White	Straight Black	Gay Black
Salary recommendation	\$38,729 (\$12,833)	\$33,289 (\$10,642)	\$35,524 (\$8,376)	\$41,704 (\$17,367)
Threatening factor	0.00 (1.03)	0.02 (1.02)	0.16 (0.90)	-0.31 (0.99)
Perceived femininity	3.24 (1.29)	4.05 (1.13)	2.91 (1.24)	4.29 (1.44)
<i>n</i>	72	71	42	27

Note: Standard deviations in parentheses.

After removing nonwhite respondents and the respondents who did not accurately recall the race and sexual orientation signals, the analytic sample contained 231 respondents. In terms of gender (52 percent male), education (36 percent with a high school degree or less), and the age distribution, the sample generally resembles the white population in the United States. The median household income of the sample (\$67,500), however, is higher than the median household income of whites in the United States (\$53,444).<sup>5</sup>

### Key Variables

The primary outcome variable for this analysis is the starting salary recommendation respondents assigned to the applicant that they reviewed. Since the only components that vary between the resumes are the race and sexual orientation of the applicant, I use mean differences in the salary recommendations between experimental conditions as the measure of discrimination.<sup>6</sup> The item asking respondents for their salary

recommendations was an open text item, resulting in some salary recommendations that were extremely high or low. For the analysis, I only keep annual salary recommendations greater than or equal to \$10,000 and less than or equal to \$80,000.<sup>7</sup> Robustness checks, discussed in the following, demonstrate that the primary findings are not driven by the cut-off points that were selected. In Table 1, I present the means and standard deviations for the salary recommendations given in each experimental condition as well as the descriptive statistics for the additional variables discussed below. For the descriptive statistics, the sample is limited to respondents who accurately received the race and sexual orientation signals and listwise deletion is used to deal with missing data.

A key component of the argument is that perceptions of the applicant as threatening and criminal (i.e., being lower on the perceived warmth dimension of the SCM) will mediate the discrimination-reducing consequences of being gay for black men. To measure how

<sup>5</sup>Median household income for whites was obtained from the 2011 American Community Survey (one-year estimates) through American FactFinder.

<sup>6</sup>ANOVA results indicate that there is significant variation in salary recommendations across experimental conditions,  $F(3, 211) = 4.24, p < .01$ .

<sup>7</sup>In the final sample, only two respondents (0.9 percent) did not provide any salary recommendation. Of the respondents who listed salary recommendations, approximately 6 percent provided salary recommendations below \$10,000 and less than 2 percent provided salary recommendations above \$80,000.

threatening respondents perceived the applicants to be, I combine three survey items using factor analysis. After reviewing the resume to which they were randomly assigned, respondents were asked, on a seven-point scale, ranging from “not at all accurate” to “extremely accurate,” how accurately different attributes described the applicant that they reviewed. The three attributes that I combine to generate a measure of how threatening the applicant is perceived to be are: “The applicant is likely to break workplace rules,” “The applicant makes female co-workers feel uncomfortable,” and “The applicant is likely to steal from the workplace” (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.83). Using principal components factor analysis, these items load on to one factor with an eigenvalue of 2.28 that explains 76 percent of the variation. The final “threatening perception” scale has a standard normal distribution ( $M = 0$ ,  $SD = 1$ ,  $Min. = -1.18$ ,  $Max. = 2.47$ ) and, thus, average differences between groups on the scale can be interpreted as differences in standard deviations.

The argument that being gay will reduce perceptions of black men as threatening draws on evidence in the existing literature that gay men are stereotyped as being more feminine than straight men. Thus, I also measured respondents’ perceptions of how masculine or feminine the applicant they reviewed was through the following question: “On a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 being completely masculine and 7 being completely feminine, how would you describe this applicant?” While not a central part of the empirical analysis in the following, the gay male applicants were rated as being more feminine ( $M = 4.11$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) than the straight male applicants ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ;  $t$ -test for difference in means:  $t = 6.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These “femininity” ratings did not vary by the race of the applicant (results available upon request).

### **Covariate Balance**

Finally, before presenting the findings, I address whether the demographic covariates of the survey respondents were balanced across experimental conditions. I used multinomial logistic regression to test for the covariate balance of the  $2 \times 2$  research design. I ran a multinomial logit model where the experimental condition to which the respondent was assigned was the primary dependent variable and where the predictor variables were the sex, age, education, income (logged), region, and marital status of the respondents. The  $p$ -values for all of the explanatory variables in the model were above .10, suggesting that the key respondent characteristics were balanced across conditions.<sup>8</sup> Although it does not appear that any of the covariates are unbalanced across conditions, I include controls for three theoretically relevant covariates in the regression models: respondents’ sex and income (logged) as well as whether the respondent was a resident of the south. The regression results are also robust to the inclusion of controls for age, education, and marital status.

## **RESULTS**

The analysis proceeds in two parts. First, I examine the consequences of race and sexual orientation for salary

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<sup>8</sup>I also ran chi-square tests for independence between the experimental condition to which a respondent was assigned and their sex, age, education, region, and marital status, where age and education were broken into broad categories. I was unable to reject the null hypothesis of independence in any analysis, providing additional evidence that the demographic covariates are balanced. Additionally, I regressed the respondent income variable (logged) on dummy variables for each experimental condition. The  $p$ -value for the  $F$ -test of the model was .35, again providing further evidence that respondents’ incomes were not associated systematically with their assignment to different experimental conditions.

**Table 2.** Linear Regression Model of Differences in Salary Recommendations for Black and Gay Male Job Applicants

	Salary Recommendation Model 1
Black applicant	-4,214* (2,007)
Gay applicant	-6,014** (1,973)
Black × gay applicant	13,158** (3,908)
Respondent characteristics	
Male	496 (1,622)
Income (logged)	4,009*** (1,099)
Southern resident	3,007 (1,716)
Constant	-6,342 (12,159)
R-squared	0.1262
<i>n</i>	212

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Listwise deletion used to deal with missing data. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed tests).

recommendations and determine whether the effect of being gay differs for black and white applicants. Second, I hone in exclusively on the evaluations of black male applicants to explore the consequences of being gay for these applicants and to identify the mechanisms through which the consequences of being gay operate for black men.

I begin the empirical analysis by examining whether black male and gay male applicants face discrimination compared to white male and straight male applicants, respectively (Hypothesis 1a and Hypothesis 1b). In Table 2, Model 1 is a linear regression model where I regress the salary recommendation variable on whether the applicant had the black signal, whether the applicant had the gay

signal, an interaction between the black and gay signals, and the set of controls for the respondents' characteristics. I include the interaction between the black signal and gay signal because I hypothesized that the effect of being gay would differ by race. Model 1 and the rest of regression models presented in the following include standard errors that are robust to heteroskedasticity.

Model 1 indicates that straight black men, on average, received salary recommendations that were approximately \$4,200 lower than straight white men, net of the controls in the model. This difference is statistically significant at the .05 level, which provides support for Hypothesis 1a. Model 1 also demonstrates that white gay men, on average, received salary recommendations that were \$6,014 lower than white straight men. The coefficient for the white gay male applicant is significant at the .01 level, which provides strong support for Hypothesis 1b. The coefficient for the interaction between the black and gay applicants is large, positive, and statistically significant. This provides compelling evidence that the effects of being gay differ for black and white men. However, the coefficient for the interaction term is *not* a test of the second hypothesis, which posited that for black men being gay would actually be associated with *higher* salary recommendations.

To formally test the second hypothesis, I move on to the second set of analyses that limit the sample to the respondents who reviewed resumes for black male applicants. On this subset of the data, I first examine the difference in average salary recommendations for the gay and straight black applicants. Model 2 in Table 3 presents the results from this analysis. Net of respondents' gender, income, and region of residence, gay black male job applicants received salary recommendations that were more than



**Table 3.** The Role of Perceived Threat in Mediating the Salary Recommendation Effect of Being Gay for Black Male Job Applicants

	Salary Recommendation Model 2	Threatening Factor Model 3	Salary Recommendation Model 4
Gay applicant	7,224* (3,350)	-0.548* (0.260)	4,430 (3,306)
Threatening factor	— —	— —	-3,790* (1,637)
Respondent characteristics			
Male	-119 (2,872)	0.048 (0.254)	98 (2,830)
Income (logged)	5,826** (1,950)	-0.032 (0.134)	5,920** (1,811)
Southern resident	5,739 (3,315)	0.285 (0.278)	5,979 (3,167)
Constant	-31,298 (21,751)	0.420 (1.497)	-31,533 (20,197)
R-squared	0.2028	0.0897	0.2732
<i>n</i>	69	66	66

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Listwise deletion used to deal with missing data. Respondents with missing salary recommendations are excluded from Model 3 (findings hold when respondents with missing salary recommendations are included).

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed tests).

\$7,000 higher than straight black male job applicants. This finding is statistically significant at the .05 level and provides strong support for Hypothesis 2. Thus, the data suggest that among black male job applicants, being gay actually has *positive* consequences. This is the exact opposite consequence of being gay for white applicants as presented in Model 1.<sup>9</sup> While not one of the formal hypotheses, in a supplementary analysis I examined whether there were differences between the salary recommendations for gay black men and straight white men. I do not find any evidence that the mean salary recommendations for straight white and gay

black job applicants were different from one another.<sup>10</sup>

The next analysis explores whether gay black men are perceived as being less threatening than straight black men (Hypothesis 3). In Model 3 in Table 3, the outcome variable is the threatening factor score that I developed from three different survey items. The negative and statically significant ( $p < .05$ ) coefficient for the gay applicants indicates that gay black male applicants are perceived as being less threatening than straight black male applicants. The size of the coefficient suggests that gay black men are perceived as being approximately one half of a standard deviation less threatening than

<sup>9</sup>I also explored whether the consequences of being gay for black male job applicants differed for male and female respondents by introducing an interaction term between reviewing the resume from the gay applicant and being a male respondent into Model 2. The interaction term was not statistically significant.

<sup>10</sup>This analysis was conducted using a regression model with the same controls as are presented throughout the article. Using the same approach, I do not find a statistically significant difference between the mean salary recommendations for gay white men and straight black men.

straight black men, on average. Thus, the data provide support for Hypothesis 3.

The final hypothesis is that the perception of gay black men as less threatening than straight black men will account for the higher salary recommendations that gay black men receive compared to straight black men. Model 4 in Table 3 tests whether the perceptions of the threatening nature of the applicant mediate the higher salary recommendations that gay black men receive. If the hypothesis is correct, then including the variable for the perceived threatening nature of the applicant in the model predicting salary recommendations for black men will reduce the size and statistical significance of the coefficient for being gay (Baron and Kenny 1986). As Model 4 indicates, this is precisely what happens. The coefficient for the gay applicant is reduced from \$7,224 (see Model 2) to \$4,430 and is no longer statistically significant. And, the coefficient on the threatening factor is negative and statistically significant at the .05 level. Additionally, I used the causal mediation analysis framework proposed by Imai, Keele, and Tingley (2010) to test for the mediating role of perceived threat. Using this method, I find that the average causal mediation effect (ACME) of perceptions of threat is \$2,230. And, the 95 percent confidence interval for the ACME does not include zero, providing additional support for the mediating role of perceived threat in the salary recommendation differences between gay and straight black men (Hypothesis 4).

#### **ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESES AND ROBUSTNESS CHECKS**

The empirical findings presented previously provide strong support for the set of hypotheses put forward earlier in the article. In this section, I test for a potential alternative hypothesis and then explore the robustness of the findings to various

analytic decisions that I made. First, an alternative hypothesis is that the gay signal merely provides individuating information about the black applicant, which in turn leads to higher salary recommendations (see Peffley et al. 1997). Thus, it may be the individuating nature of the gay signal, rather than its role in reducing the perceived threatening nature of the applicant, that leads gay black men to receive higher salary recommendations than straight black men. I empirically test this alternative hypothesis by examining a separate survey item where respondents were asked, on a seven-point scale, how accurately the following description fit the applicant: "The applicant has many unique characteristics." I examine whether this measure of perceived uniqueness serves as a mediating variable between the gay signal and receiving higher salary recommendations for black male applicants. I do not find evidence that the uniqueness measure serves as a mediator, suggesting that it is not the individuating nature of the gay signal that produces positive consequences for the gay black male applicants.

Next, I test the robustness of the findings to the decisions I made about dropping outlying salary recommendations. To identify the outlying salary recommendations, I looked at the distribution of salary recommendations for the full sample, including respondents who did not accurately answer the manipulation checks. At the bottom end of the distribution, dropping salary recommendations below \$10,000 was a clear cut-off point. The first salary recommendation that was even close to plausible for an annual salary recommendation was \$10,000. The next closest salary recommendation was \$3,600. At the top end of the distribution, I chose \$80,000 as the top value to include in the analysis because it was the highest salary recommendation that had more than one respondent recommending it. While there

were five respondents who recommended salaries above \$80,000, for each value above \$80,000 there was only one respondent. However, I wanted to make sure that the findings were not sensitive to the salary recommendation cut-offs. Thus, I ran Model 1 from Table 1 using different sets of both bottom (\$5,000, \$10,000, \$15,000, \$20,000, and \$25,000) and top (\$70,000, \$75,000, \$80,000, \$85,000, and \$90,000) salary recommendation cut-offs. When I changed the bottom cut-off, I held the top cut-off at \$80,000. When I changed the top cut-off, I held the bottom cut-off at \$10,000. The positive interaction term between being a black applicant and being a gay applicant remained positive and statistically significant at the .05 level for all of the cut-offs.

Finally, I conducted three supplemental analyses to examine whether removing respondents who failed the manipulation checks may have biased the findings. First, I empirically investigated whether the respondents who failed the manipulation checks were different in terms of gender, age, education, income, region, and marital status from those respondents who accurately answered the manipulation checks. I do not find any evidence of differences in accurately answering the manipulation checks between these groups, reducing concern about the analytic sample being biased. Second, I conducted the regression analyses from the article on the full sample of respondents, including those who did *not* accurately answer the manipulations checks. The main findings are very similar when the full sample is analyzed (see Appendix B, available on the *Social Psychology Quarterly* website). However, it is important to note that the mediation analysis does not produce the same results when analyzing the full sample. Specifically, I do not find that the gay signal for black applicants produces a reduction in the

perceived threatening nature of the applicant. Finally, I used random assignment to the “gay” condition as an instrumental variable for accurately reporting that the applicant was gay in regression analyses examining the consequences of being gay for the salary recommendations received by white and black job applicants, separately (Gerber and Green 2012). The instrumental variables approach produced results that were consistent, both in terms of sign and significance, with the findings presented previously. Together, these analyses provide reassurance that limiting the sample to respondents who accurately received the race and sexual orientation treatments did not severely bias the findings.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While extant research has explored in significant depth the ways that black men and gay men face discrimination in the labor market, less is known about how these marginalized social categories combine with one another. Building on insights from the SCM and the BIAS map, “intersectionality” research, and the literature on counterstereotypical information, I argue that the stereotypes associated with gay men (i.e., being effeminate) can counteract the negative stereotypes that whites often have about black men as being threatening, criminal, and violent. In turn, I expect that gay black men will fare better than straight black men when they are evaluated by whites in the job application process. The empirical findings provide support for this claim. While I find evidence of discrimination against gay white men, compared to straight white men, the effects of being gay differ by race. When I examine the evaluations of the black male applicants in the experiment, I find evidence that the gay black applicants receive higher salary recommendations than the

straight black applicants. I also find support for the claim that variation in the perceived threatening nature of the gay and straight black applicants assists in accounting for this difference.

The theoretical development and empirical findings in this article make three primary contributions to the literature in sociology and social psychology. First, I have identified a new context in which negatively stereotyped counterstereotypical information can actually have positive consequences. Consistent with previous research (Tilcsik 2011), I find that (white) gay men face discrimination in job applicant evaluations. The negative consequences experienced by gay white men, however, do not exist for gay black men in this experimental context. While significant research shows how positive counterstereotypical information can reduce prejudice and discrimination, limited research has documented the role of *negative* counterstereotypical information in reducing discrimination. Second, I empirically examine whether the positive consequence of being gay for black men actually operates through its effect on the perceived threatening nature of black men. Extant research in this area has generally not empirically examined the hypothesized mechanisms (Livingston and Pearce 2009; Remedios et al. 2011). Finally, these results contribute to “intersectionality” theories by identifying a particular case where two negatively stereotyped social categories combine in a nonadditive manner. Being black and gay is not simply the sum of its parts, but rather results in a complex combination of interacting stereotypes.

The aforementioned analysis explores how stereotypes about gay men counteract negative stereotypes about black men. But, in what other cases might one see similar effects? In the U.S. context, for example, stereotypes about Muslim men as violent and threatening (Sides

and Gross Forthcoming) may intersect with gay stereotypes in a similar way to how stereotypes about African American men intersect with stereotypes of gay men. Additionally, stereotypes that individuals with physical disabilities are weak (Nario-Redmond 2010) may counteract stereotypes about black men as threatening and violent. Future empirical research exploring how these, and other, social categories interact with one another across a range of contexts—for example, housing and credit markets—would assist in further understanding how negatively stereotyped information may combine in nonadditive ways.

While these findings make important contributions to theories of stereotyping and discrimination as well as the literature on intersecting social identities, the study is not without limitations. Importantly, this research design does not test how stereotypes and discrimination operate in an actual labor market. The survey respondents are not employers and they are not making actual salary recommendations. Thus, an audit study of actual job openings where race and sexual orientation are experimentally manipulated could be useful in furthering this line of research. While an audit study method would contribute to this line of research, there are benefits to the survey-experimental method employed here. Audit studies provide a crude measure of discrimination because they can only capture the binary outcome of whether or not the applicant receives an interview or some other form of positive feedback from the employer. The survey-experimental design, however, provides insight into respondents’ reactions to the experimental treatments along multiple axes, enabling for a test of the mediating role of perceived threat.

Another potential limitation of this study is that only 40 percent of respondents in the “black” applicant condition

accurately received the signal that the job applicant was black. In future research in this area, identifying ways to increase respondents' reception of the "black" signal could be useful. Respondents also only evaluated resumes for a single job type—an assistant manager at a retail store—which may limit the generalizability of the findings. In future research, it would be valuable to expand evaluations beyond a single occupational category. Finally, the analysis in this article is limited to white respondents. The characteristics of the perceiver, such as race or ethnicity, however, likely influence the content of the stereotypes they hold. Thus, the pattern of findings presented here may vary across racial and ethnic groups, which could provide a fruitful avenue for future research.

Additionally, the findings should not be taken as an indication that the lived experience of being a black gay male in the United States is free from discrimination, prejudice, or hardship. This is certainly not the case, nor is it the aim of this article to make that claim. This article focuses on white respondents' reactions to the intersection of race and sexual orientation in one particular context where everything else—education, employment history, and leadership experience—is held constant. However, these, and other, factors are often different for racial and sexual minorities.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this article provides new insights and evidence about how stereotypes about race and sexual orientation combine in the production of discrimination. The empirical results support the notion that stereotypes with negative consequences in one context can have positive consequences in another. Furthermore, I find that rather than serving as a "double disadvantage," marginalized social categories can combine in non-additive, complex ways. Ultimately, these

findings contribute to the sociological understanding of the mechanisms underlying discrimination and the complexities of intersecting social identities.

## APPENDIX A

### *Resumes Used in Survey Experiment*

**Brad Miller/Darnell Jackson**

784 Golden Avenue, Apt. #4  
Secaucus, NJ 07094

brad.miller/darnell.jackson@gmail.com  
201-330-3211

#### Education

**The Pennsylvania State University (State College, PA)**

May 2009

Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration  
GPA: 3.71/4.00

#### Professional Experience

**Target (North Bergen, NJ) 2009 – Present**  
Assistant Manager

- Assist in managing all aspects of Target, a large retail store, in North Bergen, New Jersey.
- Resolve customer service problems, manage personnel, and schedule employee hours.
- Served as cashier and department manager, during college summers, before being promoted to assistant manager.

#### Leadership Experience

**[Gay] Student Advisory Council**

President

- Served as member and then president of the [Gay] Student Advisory Council.
- Planned and ran meetings, wrote meeting agendas, and conducted meeting follow-up.

#### Track Club of Penn State

Treasurer

- Served as member and treasurer of the Track Club of Penn State.
- Managed organizational budget and participated in competitions.



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