The Mechanisms of Labor Market Discrimination: How Sex, Gender Role, and Sexual Orientation Treatments Impact Evaluations of Black Male Job Applicants

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The Mechanisms of Labor Market Discrimination: How Sex, Gender Role, and Sexual Orientation Treatments Impact Evaluations of Black Male Job Applicants

There is strong experimental research demonstrating that racial discrimination against black men persists in the U.S. labor market (Pager et al. 2009; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Pager 2003). And, the discrimination experienced by black men is not limited to the low-skilled labor market. Middle class African Americans also continue to face discrimination (Feagin 1991, Bobo and Suh 2000; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004). Among the mechanisms proposed to explain this persistent discrimination are the strong stereotypes held by employers that characterize black men as hyper-masculine, violent, and criminal (Moss and Tilly 2001; Waldinger and Lichter 2003; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991). However, extant research has not explicitly tested the degree to which these stereotypes impact hiring decisions. This research proposal – in conjunction with a field experiment that I am conducting to test similar hypotheses – is an attempt to begin to fill this important gap in the sociological, social psychological, and labor economics literature.

This survey experiment will explore what happens when evaluators of job applicants are provided with information that counters the negative stereotypes about black male hyper-masculinity and the related stereotypes of violence and criminality. Three counter-stereotypical treatments will be experimentally manipulated in this research design: the sex of the applicant, the gender role occupied by the applicant, and the sexual orientation of the applicant. The design of the study will allow for an analysis of how these three counter-stereotypical treatments impact survey respondents’ evaluations of white and black job applicants across a set of indicators, holding all other variables constant. Do individuals in stigmatized groups, in this case black men, receive more favorable evaluations when they present reviewers with information counter to the stereotypes about their group? Or, are individuals who are part of stigmatized groups penalized when they present counter-normative, counter-stereotypical information to job evaluators?

Research Design

Respondents will be told that a friend who runs a large retail store has asked them to assist in evaluating applicants for an open assistant manager position. The respondent will then be presented with
one resume to review. The resumes will vary along two axes. First, the race of the applicant will be manipulated. Second, the sex of the applicant, gender role occupied by the applicant, or the sexual orientation of the applicant will be altered, resulting in the 2X6 experimental design presented below. The race of the applicant will be manipulated using racialized names. This method of experimentally manipulating race has been used in previous research and has been demonstrated not to confound issues of race and social class when certain names are used (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; see also O’Leary et al. 2009).

The sex of the applicant will be manipulated by changing the name of the applicant from a man’s name to a woman’s name, while holding everything else about the applicant constant. The remaining conditions will present respondents with only male applicants. The gender role occupied by the applicant – moving the male applicant from the masculine towards the feminine pole of the gender spectrum – will be signaled through participation in college sports clubs. The “masculine” treatment will be signaled through participating in the Rugby Club and the “feminine” treatment will be signaled through participation in the Ballet Club. The role performed by the applicant in both sports clubs is identical. Both served as Treasurer.

The sexual orientation treatment will also be signaled through participation in a college organization. Here, the “gay” sexual orientation signal indicates that the student was the President of the Gay Student Advisory Council. The control signal is that the applicant served as President of the Student Advisory Council. Here, the treatment condition clearly signals that the applicant is gay, but the organizational affiliation is not with a gay organization that appears overtly political. Each resume in the experiment includes two student organization affiliations – one advisory council position and one sports club – to assist in the comparability across conditions. The control sports club for all conditions is the Track Club and the control advisory board for all conditions is the Student Advisory Council. Thus, the

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1 The resumes that will be used in this experiment are provided in the Appendix. Respondents in this study are only shown one resume, rather than multiple resumes, to reduce the likelihood that they will be able to identify the axes of variation in the experiment. The result is a between-subjects experimental design.

2 While there may be some concern that participation in the Ballet Club could also signal that the applicant is gay, pre-testing of this experimental manipulation indicates that this is not the case.
control and treatment conditions manipulate the race, sex, gender role, and sexual orientation of the applicant while attempting to keep all other axes of variation constant.

**Experimental Design**

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<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Gender Role</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brad X</td>
<td>Brad X Rugby Club</td>
<td>Brad X Gay Student Advisory Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Advisory Council</td>
<td>Student Advisory Council</td>
<td>Advisory Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Darnell X</td>
<td>Darnell X Ballet Club</td>
<td>Darnell X Gay Student Advisory Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Advisory Council</td>
<td>Student Advisory Council</td>
<td>Advisory Council</td>
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After being presented with the resume for the experimental group to which they are assigned, the respondent will be asked to rate the applicant on different traits: reliability, work-ethic, responsiveness to feedback, effectiveness interacting with customers, aggressiveness, intelligence, and warmth. The respondents will also be asked about their perception of the applicant’s gender (masculinity vs. femininity) and whether they would recommend hiring the applicant to their friend. The questions used here are similar to those used in previous experimental literature in the area of employment discrimination (Correll et al. 2007) and provide important axes along which to evaluate applicants, including the two major axes of the stereotype content model (Fiske et al. 2002). In preliminary work, where I have tested similar experimental manipulations on a small, non-random sample of respondents from Amazon.com’s MTurk, statistically significant effects were found on different axes of evaluation. For example, in a two-by-two research design where the race and sexual orientation of the potential job applicant were manipulated, I found a statistically significant negative coefficient on the interaction term of black and gay for the applicant’s reliability, responsiveness to feedback, and the odds of being recommended for hire.

Pilot testing on MTurk indicates that the effect sizes for this experimental design will be small to moderate (“cohen’s $f$” between 0.12 and 0.30). Using G*Power, I calculated the necessary sample size to detect an effect size equal to 0.15, with an alpha of 0.05, and a power of 0.85. With this set of assumptions,
each 2X2 experimental design for this project will require 551 respondents. Thus, the overall sample size needed for this experiment is 1,378 (2.5 x 551).³

Hypotheses

Following the literature on racial discrimination in hiring (Pager et al. 2009; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004), I expect to find a negative main effect for the black applications. Below, I present hypotheses for the other experimental manipulations in the survey: sex, gender role, and sexual orientation.

**Hypothesis 1 (Sex):** There will generally be a negative main effect of being female. However, there will be a positive interaction between being black and being female. Qualitative research indicates that employers’ racial and ethnic preferences are moderated by the sex of the applicant. For example, Moss and Tilly (2001) find that in 13.2 percent of the inner-city firms that they interviewed at least one manager said that black women were better employees than black men. In only 1.5 percent of the firms, however, did a manager say that black men were better employees than black women (Moss and Tilly 2001). To test for the hypothesized differential effect of the female treatment for blacks and whites, I will examine the interaction terms between black and female across the outcome variables in the survey.

**Hypothesis 2 (Gender Role):** While there will not be a main effect of the feminization treatment, it will have different consequences for white and black male applicants. There will be no effect of the feminization treatment for white male applicants, but there will be a significant positive effect of the feminization treatment for black male applicants. If employers’ negative stereotypes about black men as being hyper-masculine, violent, and criminal impact their decisions about hiring black male job applicants (Moss and Tilly 2001), then providing evaluators of job applicants with information that runs counter to those stereotypes will likely improve the labor market outcomes of black men. Therefore, I expect to find a positive and statistically significant coefficient on the interaction term for the black and feminized applicant across the set of outcomes explored in this analysis. Since employers do not hold similar stereotypes about white men, however, there will be no effect of the feminization treatment for white men.

³ I multiple 551 by 2.5, rather than 3, because there are only 10 cells for this research design, not 12.
**Hypothesis 3 (Sexual Orientation):** The sexual orientation treatment will generally have negative consequences for both white and black male applicants. However, the negative consequences will be greater for black applicants than for white applicants. In addition to employers’ negative stereotypes about black men, empirical research indicates that gays and lesbians may face discrimination in the world of work (Weichselbaumer 2003; Badgett 1995; Hebl et al. 2002). It could be argued that some of the negative stereotypes about gay men – being sensitive, emotional, and feminine – would serve to counteract the negative stereotypes that employers have about black men in a similar way to a “feminization” treatment. However, in an experimental design where survey respondents were only told about a job applicant’s sex, race, and sexuality (no information was provided about the applicants’ human capital characteristics), Crow et al. (1998) found that black gay men fared the worst of all combinations of demographic features. Drawing on these findings, I posit that the negative stereotypes about blacks will amplify the negative stereotypes about gay men, and vice versa. Being gay will serve as a double disadvantage for black men. Therefore, I predict that I will find negative and statistically significant coefficients on the interaction terms for gay and black in this analysis.

**The Broader Research Project**

The survey design proposed here will serve as a valuable complement to a field experiment that I am designing to test similar experimental manipulations. I am currently preparing the field component, which will be a correspondence study where I send applications to real job postings and experimentally manipulate the race, sex, gender role, and sexual orientation of the applicants. While the field experiment will provide valuable insight into how real employers make decisions about who to hire, it is a crude measure of discrimination because I can only capture the binary outcome of whether or not the applicant receives an interview. One of the key additional contributions of the survey experiment proposed here is that it will provide insight into respondents’ reactions to the experimental treatments along multiple axes. Exploring multiple outcome measures provides a more nuanced and detailed picture of the consequences of experimentally manipulating the sex, gender role, and sexual orientation of white and black job applicants. Together, the survey and field experiments will generate compelling data about the mechanisms

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underlying discrimination against black men in the labor market and contribute to the research literature in sociology, social psychology, and economics.
APPENDIX

Units in Survey: 15 (2 for the experimental prompt plus 1 for each of the 13 questions)

Survey Note: There are 12 cells in this 2X6 experimental design. However, because the “male” and “heterosexual” experimental manipulations are the same, the experiment only has 10 resume manipulations. The resumes for each of the 10 conditions are below. Any text that should not be shown to respondents is put in brackets, such as these [ ]. The experimental manipulation for the applicant’s race is italicized. The experimental manipulations for the sex, gender role, and sexual orientation treatments are underlined.

[I. Experiment Manipulation]

1. [Prompt:] We are interested in how people form first impressions, making important decisions from little information. 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 applications he received for the position. We would like you to examine the following resume for the assistant manager position and respond to the questions that follow with your first, uncensored impressions.

[Race X Sex Manipulation]

Brad/Darnell/Allison/Ebony Thomas
784 Golden Avenue, Apt. #4
Secaucus, NJ 07094
brad/darnell/allison/ebony.thomas@gmail.com
201-330-3211

Education
The Pennsylvania State University (University Park, 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
Student Advisory Council
President

- Served as member and then president of the 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.

[Race X Gender Role Manipulation]

Brad/Darnell Thomas
784 Golden Avenue, Apt. #4
Secaucus, NJ 07094
brad/darnell.thomas@gmail.com
201-330-3211

Education

The Pennsylvania State University (University Park, 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

Student Advisory Council
President

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

Rugby Club of Penn State [or] Ballet Club of Penn State
Treasurer

- Served as member and treasurer of the Rugby [or] Ballet Club of Penn State.
- Managed organizational budget and participated in competitions.
[Race X Sexual Orientation Manipulation]

Brad/Darnell Thomas
784 Golden Avenue, Apt. #4
Secaucus, NJ 07094
brad/darnell.thomas@gmail.com
201-330-3211

Education
The Pennsylvania State University (University Park, 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.
[II. Applicant Evaluation Questions]

Please answer the following questions about Brad's/Darnell's/Allison's/Ebony's application for the assistant manager position.

1. Would you recommend hiring this candidate for the position? (Yes, No)

When rating the applicant on the following questions, a score of one (“1”) on a particular trait means that the candidate is very low on that trait and a score of seven (“7”) on a particular trait means that the candidate is very high on that trait.

[Note: The responses to the following questions (2 through 8) should be horizontal “sliders” with seven response categories labeled at the bottom, middle, and top levels. For example, for Question 2, the labels should read “Not Very Reliable,” “Somewhat Reliable,” and “Very Reliable.”]

2. How reliable do you consider this applicant?
3. How hard-working do you consider this applicant?
4. How responsive to feedback and supervision do you consider this applicant?
5. How effective at interacting with customers do you consider this applicant?
6. How aggressive do you consider this applicant?
7. How warm do you consider this applicant?
8. How intelligent do you consider this applicant?

[III. Experimental Manipulation Check (Note: These should appear on a separate screen from the previous questions.)]

9. On a scale from one to seven, with 1 being completely masculine and 7 being completely feminine, how would you describe the gender of this applicant? [Note: This scale should be similar to the sliding scales presented for the questions above. It should be a sliding scale from 1 to 7, where 1 should be labeled “Completely Feminine,” the mid-point should be labeled “Neither Masculine nor Feminine,” and 7 should be labeled “Completely Masculine.”]
10. What is the race of this applicant? (White/Caucasian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Other Race)
11. What is the sex of this applicant? (Male, Female)
12. In which of the following clubs did this applicant participate in college? (Ballet Club, Track Club, Tennis Club, Rugby Club, Swimming Club)
13. What is the sexual orientation of this applicant? (Straight, Gay)
REFERENCES


