Racial Battle Fatigue and the MisEducation of Black Men: Racial Microaggressions, Societal Problems, and Environmental Stress

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Black men's lives are racialized contradictions. They are told that contemporary educational and professional institutions—particularly historically White institutions (HWIs)—are places where, through hard work, they can achieve the so-called American dream. However, for far too many Black men, HWIs represent racial climates that are replete with gendered racism, blocked opportunities, and mundane, extreme, environmental stress (MEES). This study examined the experiences of 661 Black men. A structural equation modeling approach was used to analyze the data. Findings indicate that as educational attainment increases toward college completion, both racial microaggressions and societal problems contribute to more than one third of the cause of MEES. Results suggest predominantly White environments are prime contexts for producing racial battle fatigue among Black men.

Black men are the most vulnerable U. S. racial-gender group for almost every health condition that medical researchers monitor. The *American Human Development Report's* (Burd-Sharps, Lewis, & Martins, 2008) life expectancy index displays very graphic figures between eight groups, or eight "different Americas." For example, in 2001, the life expectancy gap between Black males, the lowest group, and Asian females, the highest group, was nearly 21 years (Burd-Sharps, Lewis, & Martins, 2008). These data report a gloomy reality for many African American men (Black and African American are used interchangeably). Conspicuously, this phenomenon has persisted for over a century; even to this day, only little national attention or direct action has been considered. McCord and Freeman (1990) shocked the academic and public community when they reported, in their *New England Journal of Medicine* article, that Black men in Harlem, a neighborhood in the New York City borough of Manhattan, were less likely to reach the age of 65 than men in Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world.

The past four decades of epidemiological research has focused the country's attention on risk factors for diseases at the individual level. It appears that the nation has become more aware and educated by the World Health Organization, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Surgeon General about the effects of risky behaviors such as, but not limited to, smoking, condom use, consuming excessive alcohol, having poor eating habits, and maintaining sedentary lifestyles (Trostle, 2005). The message, in part, has become widespread because of the mass media's role in publicizing important studies and prominent entertainment and sports celebrities who make persuasive public service announcements (Hillier, 2006). However, according to Link and Phelan (1995), a singular focus on risk factors that are moderately proximate "causes" of disease, such as hypertension, high cholesterol, electromagnetic fields, high-density lipoprotein levels, poor eating habits and so forth, can be seen as a major limitation or bias to complete mental and physical health treatment and the rightful trajectory of science for understanding and mediating these causal relationships (Ferguson, 2001).

Social, educational, and professional institutions, such as society at-large, must realize that there is an emotional, physiological, and psychological cost of gendered racism. These experiences shape identities, motivations, dreams, activities, and the psychological and physiological welfare across the personal and professional lifespan of women and men of color (Garibaldi, 1992; Pierce, 1970). In many predominantly and historically White spaces, whether they are schools or white-collar professions, People of Color—who are the underrepresented racial and ethnic members of the U. S.—continue to be viewed as outsiders and treated in stereotypic and racist ways (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2002; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Feagin, 2001, 2010a; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Feagin & Vera, 1995; Pierce, 1995; Smith, 2008a, 2008b; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Feagin (2010b) stated that the aggregation of racial stereotypes, racial narratives, racial images, racial emotions, and "inclinations to discriminatory action" make up a "White Racial Frame" or lens through which Whites view society (pp. 10-11). The resultant racial microaggressive conditions produce emotional, psychological, and physiological distress, or *racial battle fatigue*. For far too many Black men, historically White institutions (HWIs) represent racial climates that are replete with gendered racism, blocked opportunities, and mundane, extreme, environmental stress (MEES). Ironically, it might be the unintended consequences of Black men's academic achievement that exposes them to increased distress within historically White environments (e.g., schools, employment, neighborhoods, or social clubs). As a result, the main purpose of this study is to examine, quantitatively, the role that racial microaggressions, societal problems, and academic achievement have in predicting Black men's MEES.

INDIVIDUALISM OR COLLECTIVISM?

In contemporary U. S. society, the focus on proximate risk factors is seen as important because the main path to effective change is believed to be within an individual's control. Therefore, individualism is not only a good thing; it is a quintessentially American thing (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). This belief is explicated well by Hui (1988) in that individualists believe that the self is the basic unit of analysis and survival (Hui & Trandis, 1986; Hui & Villareal, 1989). The hub of this belief is that individuals are independent from one another. The individualist's concept is that he or she is the master of herself or himself and the environment is to be controlled, as opposed to maintaining an extended sense of self that is understood in relation to a physical and social world with which one seeks harmony (Hui & Villareal, 1989).

Within the United States, there appears to be a bipolar society regarding this belief. European Americans are higher in individualism and lower in collectivistic beliefs than are People of Color (Bowman & Smith, 2002; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). This might be one of the major reasons behind the divergent beliefs of the two groups and prevalence of racism with the associated stressors (Bobo, 1991; Bowman & Smith, 2002; Kinder & Sears, 1981; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Sears, 1988; Sears, Henry, & Kosterman, 2000; Smith, 2004). Individualists who also believe that we are living in a post-racial society will place blame on individuals for their lack of achievements, perceived societal problems, and poor health rather than distal contributions (Bobo, 1996, 2000; Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Bobo, Kluegel, & Smith, 1997; Bowman & Smith, 2002; Kluegel, 1990; Kluegel & Smith, 1983, 1986; Link & Phelan, 1995; Sears, 1988). Possessing an individualistic ideology poses a serious problem for parents, educational administrators, sociologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, epidemiologists, and others whose individualistic values conspire to focus attention on proximate risk factors while being culturally blinded to social conditions or more distal factors as causes of disease, poor mental health, social problems, and race-related stressors (Noguera, 2003). Individualists, or what others call culturalists, mask many cultural and racial realities (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Therefore, among some, individualism becomes a racial code word to excuse White privilege while victimizing Blacks "for causing their own failure" (Hymowitz, 2005; United States, 1965).

Link and Phelan (1995) affirmed that the affinity between individualistic cultural values and the proximal emphasis of contemporary epidemiology unquestionably contributes to the degree of public interest in epidemiological findings, as well as the potential funding priorities. In fact, some have argued that this singular proximate focus (e.g., societal problems or educational attainment) is premature because there is still an ongoing debate among scholars regarding the validity and interpretation of data and the underlying recommendations vis-à-vis race and racism (Becker, 1993). Becker urged caution about the increased tendencies to place the responsibility of health problems on the individual. He argued that,

> an introspective approach to health that fosters victim-blaming and stigmatization, ignores critical social, economic, and environmental issues that have major impacts on health, and further encourages an already unhealthy level in our society of concern for personal, rather than societal, well-being. (Becker, 1993, p. 5)

However, some persistent individualists struggle to understand why Black men, in particular, and many People of Color, in general, believe that the proverbial societal "deck is stacked against them." An old African American proverb suggests that "You've got to work twice as hard to get half as far, as a Black person, in White America." The colorblind or individualistic impulsive retort is often to employ Horace Mann's (1891) well-known proclamation that, "education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is a great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance wheel of the social machinery" or from the1800's "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" argument (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2002; Kunitz & Haycraft, 1936). Not only are there European Americans who hold this type of ideology or "White racial frame" (Feagin, 2010b), but according to Bowman and Smith (2002), Blacks and other People of Color, more often than Whites, hold a "dual racial consciousness" of proximal and distal explanations for social inequities. Du Bois referred to this as a "double consciousness," whereby African Americans find themselves constantly struggling against "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 3). Therefore, Black men and other People of Color will tend to associate individual-blame beliefs (which reflect to some degree their internalized mainstream cultural values) with high system-blame (which reflects their race/ethnic socialization). These competing beliefs sit in the middle of Blacks' high regard for education being "the great emancipator" or "great equalizer." Anderson (1988) and other scholars have reported that Blacks have historically seen education as an important pathway to social, political, religious, and occupational freedoms (Du Bois, 1903; Woodson, 1977). Education was such an important value for Blacks that many would relocate their entire families just for the promise or hope of what education can provide in human and social capital terms. Education has historically paid off for the vast majority of Black men in better jobs and income within an increasingly desegregated workforce. The questions that are beginning to be raised are about the emotional, physiological, and psychological "costs" associated with their participation in historically White environments.

"HAMMER BE THE DEATH OF ME": AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STRESSORS, COPING, & JOHN HENRYISM

Chester Pierce (1988, 1995) has consistently warned researchers that a singular or proximal focus at the individual and group levels regarding the conditions that plague African Americans is highly problematic. Pierce further stated that irrespective of the place or social status that Blacks possess, most suffer special added stressors as a result of threatened, perceived, and actual racism in the workplace or school. This dilemma is additionally complicated by at least three stressful and enduring psychosocial sequelae in historically White spaces: (a) Blacks have to spend mental energy considering whether they are genuinely accepted or just being tolerated; (b) Blacks use mental and emotional energy discerning the difference between individually

supportive Whites and destructive actions by Whites as a collective; and (c) Blacks confront additional and unique race-based stress identifying when, where, and how to resist oppression, versus when, where, and how to accommodate to it (Pierce, 1988). According to Smith, Yosso, and Solórzano (2007) far too many Black women must spend countless hours responding to the racial microaggressions of Black misogyny. Similarly, Black men are victims of the gendered forms of racism that Smith (2010) identified as Black misandry. At minimum, Black men carry the burden of two negative social identities as they move through society, one as a member of the African American race (i.e., anti-Black racism and stereotypes) and the other as a Black male (i.e., Black misandry or anti-Black male ideologies, stereotypes, and oppression). As a result, akin to Black women, Black men are constantly developing unique racial and gendered-race based techniques for applying highly adaptive and active coping strategies (Pierce, 1995; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007).

One approach to understanding active coping and the impact of behavioral stressors on Blacks was in a psychosocial construct, coined "John Henryism," which also addresses ethnic disparity and prevalence in hypertension. (The concept is named after the legendary African American steel driver, John Henry, who died from a blood vessel that burst in his brain after successfully competing against a steam-powered steel driving machine. John Henry is a part of American folklore and for African Americans in particular, he epitomizes the value of hard work and determination even in the face of overwhelming odds.) James and his colleagues (1983) developed a scale to measure the concept of John Henryism among lower-resourced groups (i.e., lesser educated and low income Blacks). The key element in John Henryism is the belief that through a combination of hard work and determination, such stressors can be controlled. Consequentially, a person who is high in John Henryism will be high in physical vigor, tenacity, and hold a strong sense of personal efficacy when confronting behavioral stressors (James, Hartnett, & Kalsbeek, 1983). Unfortunately, most of the early work on actively coping with psychosocial stressors for Blacks focused primarily on

- rural southern populations with limited coping resources (typically defined as low educational attainment and lower income),
- high blood pressure, and
- conditions where John Henryism was high.

More recent research (e.g., Fernander, Durán, Saab, & Schneiderman, 2004) found inconsistencies with the original John Henry hypothesis. Fernander and colleagues established that high-John Henry active coping was related to higher blood pressure levels in Black women who had lower education levels, which is true to the hypothesis. However for Black men, high-John Henry active coping was related to elevated blood pressure levels exclusively among those with higher levels of education, which is inconsistent with the original John Henryism hypothesis. In this study, education did not prove to be a mediating factor, as Mann (1891) hypothesized.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is growing research on the effects of racial microaggressions, discrimination, stereotypes, and prejudice on formally educated African American men (Feagin, 2001, 2006; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Harper, 2006, 2009; Jackson, 2008; Jackson & Moore III, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; McCabe, 2009; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006, 2007; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Now, more than ever, one witnesses a subtle theoretical shift from dominant proximal frameworks to distal frameworks, or a combination of both, to explain societal inequities among Black men. Pierce's (1970, 1974, 1975a, 1988, 1995) concepts of MEES and racial microaggressions are the theoretical frames for these exceptional works. Additionally, racial battle fatigue considers the physiological, psychological, and behavioral strain exacted upon racially marginalized and stigmatized groups. These excessive strains

require additional energy redirected from more positive life fulfilling desires for coping with and fighting against mundane racism. The theoretical frameworks provide researchers with a critical lens to examine the distal relationship between racial microaggressions and race-related stress and overall health for People of Color.

Understanding MEES, Black Misandric Microaggressions, and Racial Battle Fatigue

Pierce (1995) provided a link between racism as a system of control and race-related stress. He maintained that Blacks constantly confront oppressive agents, environments, or situations that limit their space, time, energy, and motion (i.e., STEM). Depending on the social environment, the level of racial rigidity, and its obstinate racial control, Blacks will experience more or less intense racial microaggressions. Furthermore, experiences in historically White spaces can be considered what Pierce (1974, 1975a, 1975b, 1995) and Carroll (1998) report as mundane extreme environmental stress (MEES). Therefore, race-related and societal stress is *mundane* (M) because it is ubiquitous and oftentimes taken for granted; it is *extreme* (E) because it is has an excessive influence on the physiological, psychological, emotional, and cognitive reactions; *environmental* (E) because it is part of the historical and institutionalized ideology that influences the policy practices, behaviors, and the culture, and custom of the dominant environment; and it produces *stress* (S) because the combination of these elements are certainly distressful and consume valuable time and energy that could be used for more creative, educative, professional, and humanitarian goals. The time and energy drain spent navigating hostile environments and dealing with racial microaggressions is a major cost to maintaining a hopeful disposition toward racial relations and social justice. Therefore, racism and racial microaggressions operate as psycho-pollutants in the social environment and add to the overall race-related stress for Black men, Black women, and other racially marginalized groups.

Pierce (1970, 1975, 1995) characterized racism as a public and mental health illness based on the false belief that innate inferiority correlates with dark skin color. He further stated that when examining "the substance of today's racism one must not look for the gross and obvious" but rather, one must identify and measure the impact of what he called the "subtle, cumulative miniassault" of racial microaggressions (Pierce, 1974, p. 516). Scholars situate today's racism as institutionalized in that it permeates the everyday perceptions, rationalizations, and policy decisions made toward African Americans and marginalized racial/ethnic groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2002; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). Ture and Hamilton (1992) noted that *institutional racism*

> relies on the active and pervasive operation of anti-black attitudes and practices. A sense of superior group position prevails: whites are 'better' than blacks; therefore blacks should be subordinated to whites. This is a racist attitude and it permeates the society, on both the individual and institutional level, covertly and overtly. (p. 5)

In adapting Pierce's work, Smith, Yosso, and Solórzano (2006) defined racial microaggressions as:

- subtle verbal and nonverbal insults directed at People of Color, often automatically or unconsciously;
- layered insults based on one's race, race-gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname; and
- cumulative insults that cause unnecessary stress to People of Color.

Racism is omnipresent and therefore all racially subjugated people feel racial microaggressions, whether consciously or in a maladaptive state of denial. Therefore, People of Color in the U. S. confront the withering cumulative effects at both the individual and group

level. More specifically, Black misandric microaggressions are those racial microaggressions that are expressly aimed at and affect Black males. Black misandry, then, is an exaggerated pathological aversion toward Black males that is created and reinforced in societal, institutional, and individual ideologies, practices, and behaviors (Smith, 2010; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith, Yosso, Solórzano, 2007). This misandry includes scholarly ontologies (or how one believes things exist), axiologies (or how one sees herself or himself and her or his values on ethics, aesthetics, religion, and spirituality), and epistemologies (or how one views ways of knowing) that people use. Similarly to Black misogyny, or aversion toward and the oppression of Black women, Black misandry exists to justify and reproduce the subordination and oppression of Black males while concomitantly erecting edifices of racial and gender inequality (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007).

In order to better and more comprehensively explain the racial weight that People of Color experience from the oppressive systemic conditions of racism, Smith (2004, 2008a, 2008b) has provided a theoretical concept called "racial battle fatigue" (RBF, see Figure 1). RBF is an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that considers the increased levels of psychosocial stressors and subsequent psychological (e.g., frustration, shock, anger, disappointment, resentment, hopelessness), physiological (e.g., headache, backache, "butterflies," teeth grinding, high blood pressure, insomnia), and behavioral responses (e.g., stereotype threat, John Henryism, social withdrawal, self-doubt, and a dramatic change in diet) of fighting racial microaggressions in MEES. Black men are routinely confronted with forms of Black misandric discrimination for which many have only limited space, time, energy, or counter-strategies to cope and resist. Therefore, many suffer in numerous ways from depleted personal resources (Dressler, Bindon, & Neggers, 1998; Harper, 2009; Jackson, 2008; James, Hartnett, & Kalsbeek, 1983; James, LaCroix, Kleinbaum, & Strogatz, 1984; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007).
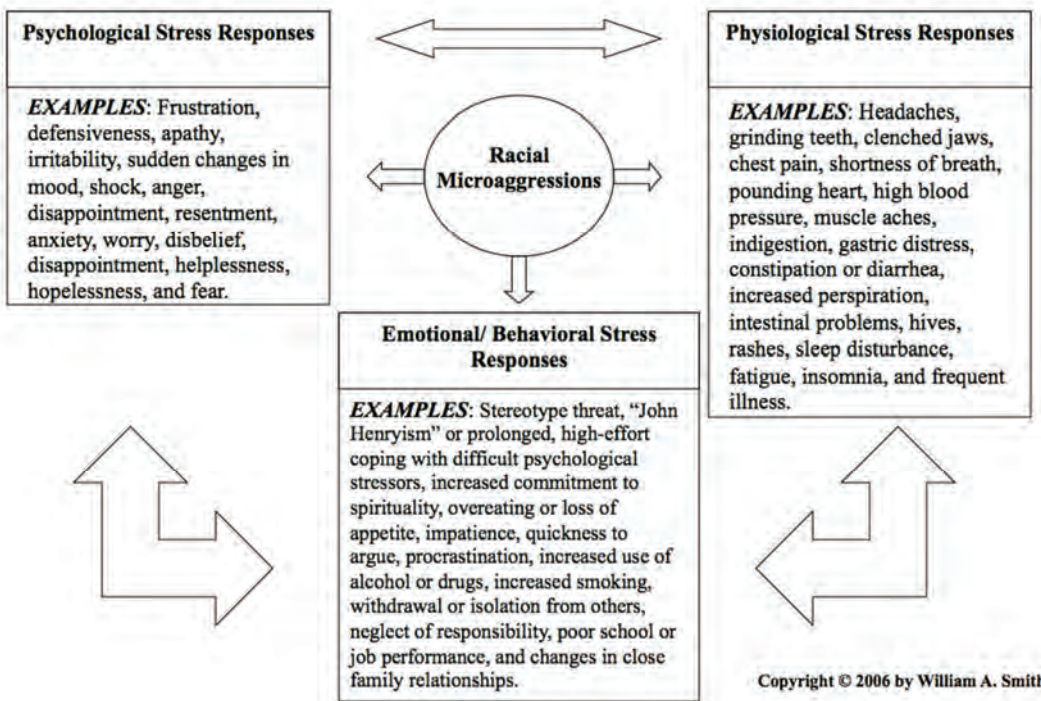

Figure 1. *Cause and stress responses to racial battle fatigue.*

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study asks the following three research questions:

1. Do increasing levels of education negatively impact the effect of societal problems on MEES?
2. Do increasing levels of education negatively impact the effect of racial microaggressions on MEES?
3. Taken together, what is the impact of racial microaggressions and societal problems on MEES as educational attainment increases?

METHODS

Participants

A total of 2,864 adults across the U. S. participated in telephone interviews conducted by the International Communications Research from *African American Men Survey* (2006), conducted in collaboration with *The Washington Post*, Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University. The data were collected during March and April of 2006. Out of the total participants, there were 1,328 Black men, which included an over sample of 400 Black men ages 18 through 29, 507 Black women, and 1,029 participants from other racial groups. In the present study, the analyses were limited to Black males. Since these authors were interested in examining MEES experienced by Black males from different educational backgrounds, respondents who did not report their educational level were excluded from the analyses. The final sample size of Black men was six hundred sixty-one ($N = 661$). In this sample, 89% were born in the U. S.; more than 80% had a high school diploma or above, more than 40% had at least some college experience, and approximately 55% worked full time. See Table 1 for detailed demographic summaries.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics (N = 661)

	n	%
Age		
18 years to 30 years	220	33.3
31 years to 50 years	226	34.2
51 years to 85 years	208	31.5
Not reported	7	1.0
Annual household income		
<$30K	206	31.2
$30-$49K	147	22.2
$50-$74K	110	16.6
$75K+	116	17.5
Not reported	82	12.5
Educational level		
No high school diploma	133	20.1
High school diploma	232	35.1
Some college, but no degree	173	26.2
College graduate	123	18.6
Not reported	0	0

Table 1 *continues*

Table 1 *continued*

Marital status

Married	255	38.6
Living with a partner but not married	53	8.0
Separated	39	5.9
Divorced	63	9.5
Widowed	22	3.3
Never married	225	34.0
Not reported	4	0.7
Employment status		
Full time	365	55.2
Part time	59	8.9
Not employed	236	35.7
Not reported	1	0.2
Country of birth		
U.S.	590	89.3
Foreign	71	10.7
Not reported	0	0
Have children		
Yes	423	64.0
No	237	35.8
Not reported	1	0.2

DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

A structural equation modeling approach was used to analyze data in this study. For the purpose of this study, selected variables from the African American Men Survey (2006) were used for analyzing the hypothesized models. The latent causal variable, racial microaggressions were created using five observed variables: In your day-to-day life, how often do any of the following things happen to you because of your racial background? (a) You are treated with less respect than other people; (b) You receive poorer service than other people at restaurants or stores; (c) People act as if they think you are not smart; (d) People act as if they are afraid of you; and (e) People act as if they think you are dishonest. The resultant racial microaggressions scale developed from these variables is recoded such that 0 = "never", 1 = "once in a while", 2 = "somewhat often", and 3 = "very often." The other latent causal variable, societal problems, was created similarly using the following eight observed variables: Please tell me whether you think it is a big problem, a small problem, or not a problem for Black men today: (a) HIV/AIDS; (b) becoming involved in crime; (c) racial discrimination; (d) poverty; (e) not having good jobs; (f) drug and alcohol abuse; (g) not being responsible fathers; and (h) young Black men not taking their education seriously enough. Again, the scales of these variables had also been recoded such that 0 = "not a problem", 1 = "small problem", and 2 = "big problem." Lastly, the latent outcome variable, MEES, was comprised of seven observed variables: Are you worried about (a) not getting the health care you need? (b) being arrested? (c) you or a family member getting HIV or AIDS? (d) not having enough money to pay your bills? (e) being the victim of a violent crime? (f) being a victim of racial discrimination? and, (g) being unfairly treated by the police? These seven variables were recoded into a four-point scale (0 = "not at all worried", 1 = "not too worried", 2 = "somewhat worried", and 3 = "very worried"). Table 2 provides the latent and observed variables.

Table 2

Analysis of Data Structures using Unstandardized Estimates of Factor Loadings
(Lambda; N = 661)

	Lambda	
Racial microaggressions		
Because of your racial background . . .		
you are treated with less respect than other people	0.845	(0.637)
you receive poorer service than other people at restaurants/stores	0.866	(0.670)
people act as if they think you are not smart	1.000	(0.697)
people act as if they are afraid of you	0.928	(0.639)
people act as if they think you are dishonest	1.002	(0.719)
Societal problem		
HIV/AIDS	1.023	(0.498)
Becoming involved in crime	0.785	(0.511)
Racial discrimination	0.893	(0.369)
Poverty	1.185	(0.526)
Not having good jobs	0.876	(0.487)
Drug and alcohol abuse	0.836	(0.539)
Not being responsible fathers	1.072	(0.540)
Young Black men not taking their education seriously enough	1.000	(0.618)
MEES		
Worried about not getting the health care you need	0.879	(0.649)
Worried about being arrested	1.010	(0.734)
Worried about you or a family member getting HIV or AIDS	0.896	(0.639)
Worried about not having enough money to pay your bills	0.883	(0.675)
Worried about being the victim of violent crime	0.871	(0.680)
Worried about being a victim of racial discrimination	0.891	(0.691)
Worried about being unfairly treated by the police	1.000	(0.735)

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent standardized estimates. All estimates are significant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

RESULTS

This section characterizes the fit of the measurement model and presents the findings from investigating the relationship between racial microaggressions and societal problems in predicting MEES at each level of educational attainment.

Measurement Model

Examination of the Pearson product moment correlations revealed that each of the observed variables correlated reasonably high with the others within their anticipated latent structure providing preliminary support that adequately fit the subscales. These variables were ordered and grouped by their underlying latent constructs to facilitate interpretation (see Table 2). Lambda coefficients represented the loadings of each indicator variable on the underlying construct. Phi coefficients represented the correlations among the latent constructs. Table 3 shows that factor correlations (ranging from 0.168 to 0.323) varied from low to moderate and were all positive. In addition, Table 2 indicates that all loadings were positive and substantially large, further providing support that all of the measurement models fit quite well.

Table 3

Bivariate Correlations of Latent Factors (N = 661)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Racial microaggressions	1.000		
Societal problem	0.168	1.000	
MEES	0.323	0.264	1.000

Since the three measurement models were over-identified ($df \geq 1$), the measure of fit was obtained (see Table 4). All three of the measurement models (racial microaggressions, societal problems, and MEES) showed significant maximum likelihood chi-square values, suggesting poor fit. However, the chi-square goodness of fit is not an accurate measure because of the relatively large sample size. As the sample size increases, power also increases and therefore one is more likely to detect significant but meaningless differences. In contrast, the comparative fit index (CFI) and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) are more representative (Bentler, 1990; Hu & Bentler, 1999). CFI is almost unaffected by sample size and non-normality. SRMR is a stand-alone index that has simple interpretative meaning and does not penalize the model for the lack of parsimony. Therefore we relied on CFI and SRMR to evaluate model fit. Using these measures, all three of the measurement models fit exceptionally well. CFI for all three of the models exceeded 0.90, indicating an extremely good fit. SRMR for all three were less than 0.05, also indicating an excellent fit. Taken together, these results suggest that the measurement models were properly specified, and that it was reasonable to examine the full structural equation models.

Table 4

Fit Indices of the Measurement Models (N = 661)

Measurement Model	$\chi2$ (df)	CFI	SRMR
Racial microaggressions	41.029 (5)	0.959	0.030
Societal problem	57.201 (20)	0.986	0.034
MEES	90.641 (14)	0.962	0.032

Note: $\chi2$= chi-square value; df=degree of freedom; CFI=comparative fit index; SRMR=standardized root mean square residual.

Relationships among Racial Microaggressions, Societal Problems, and MEES

Tables 5 through 8 contain selected unstandardized and standardized coefficients from the structural equation models predicting MEES. The dependent variable in all of the models is MEES. These models measure levels of MEES by racial microaggressions and societal problems after taking into account age and annual household income. Model 1 (baseline model) controls for Black males' age and annual household income. Model 2 uses the same variables as Model 1 but adds racial microaggressions. Similarly, Model 3 uses the same variables as Model 1 but adds societal problems. Model 4 adds both racial microaggressions and societal problems in addition to the two variables in Model 1. In addition, the model results contained in Tables 5 to 8 are disaggregated by Black males' educational level.

No high school diploma. For those Black males who did not have a high school diploma, age ($b = -0.016$, $\beta = -0.32$, $p < 0.01$) is the only factor that significantly influences MEES across all four models (Table 5). As age increases, MEES decreases. The effects of racial microaggressions ($b = 0.121$, $\beta = 0.105$, $p > 0.01$) or societal problems ($b = 0.234$, $\beta = 0.054$, p

> 0.01) are not statistically significant. The variances that are accounted for by either racial microaggressions or societal problems are also quite small (1.3% and 0.3% respectively).

Table 5

Structural Equation Models Predicting MEES in Black Males who Did Not Have a High School Diploma (n = 133)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	-0.016**	-0.016**	-0.016**	-0.016**
	(-0.322)	(-0.319)	(-0.324)	(-0.320)
Annual household income	-0.106	-0.114	-0.108	-0.112
	(-0.186)	(-0.198)	(-0.189)	(-0.195)
Racial microaggressions		0.121		0.114
		(0.105)		(0.098)
Societal problem			0.234	0.169
			(0.054)	(0.039)
R^2	0.127	0.140	0.130	0.139
R^2 change from Model 1		0.013	0.003	0.012

Note. ** $p < 0.01$. All relationships are unstandardized regression coefficients. Numbers in parentheses represent standardized regression coefficients.

High school graduates. For those Black males who had graduated from high school, both racial microaggressions ($b = 0.344$, $\beta = 0.279$, $p < 0.01$) and societal problems ($b = 1.452$, $\beta = 0.370$, $p < 0.01$) strongly predict MEES after controlling for age and annual household income (see Table 6). For every one unit increase of frequency (e.g., from 0 = "never" to 1 = "once in a while") in racial microaggressions, there is a 0.344 unit increase (e.g., from 2 = "somewhat worried" to 2.344, which is about one third of the way between 2 = "somewhat worried" and 3 = "very worried") in the levels of MEES. For each unit increase (e.g., from 0 = "not a problem" to 1 = "small problem") in societal problems, there is 1.452 unit increase (e.g., from 1 = "not too worried" to 2.452, which is somewhat between 2 = "somewhat worried" and 3 = "very worried") in the levels of MEES. Racial microaggressions uniquely accounts for 7.7% of the total variance in MEES and societal problems uniquely accounts for 13.6%.

Table 6

Structural Equation Models Predicting MEES in Black Males who were High School Graduates (n = 232)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	-0.014**	-0.013**	-0.016**	-0.014**
	(-0.250)	(-0.216)	(-0.370)	(-0.248)
Annual household income	-0.042	-0.040	-0.036	-0.035
	(-0.089)	(-0.084)	(-0.076)	(-0.074)
Racial microaggressions		0.344**		0.255*
		(0.279)		(0.206)
Societal problem			1.452**	1.253**
			(0.054)	(0.039)
R^2	0.070	0.147	0.206	0.237
R^2 change from Model 1		0.077	0.136	0.207

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$. All relationships are unstandardized regression coefficients. Numbers in parentheses represent standardized regression coefficients.

Some college. For those Black males who had some college, but never completed a college degree, racial microaggressions and societal problems had an increasing influence on MEES. Racial microaggressions ($b = 0.529$, $\beta = 0.438$, $p < 0.01$) significantly and positively predicted MEES (Table 7). In fact, racial microaggressions accounted for 18.3% of the variance in MEES after controlling for age and annual household income. Societal problems ($b = 1.381$, $\beta = 0.359$, $p < 0.01$) significantly predicted MEES, as well, and accounted for 12.8% of the variance in MEES after controlling for age and annual household income.

Table 7

Structural Equation Models Predicting MEES in Black Males who had Some College, but No Degree (n = 173)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	-0.012*	-0.008	-0.013*	-0.009
	(-0.212)	(-0.140)	(-0.229)	(-0.163)
Annual household income	-0.111*	-0.080	-0.094*	-0.076
	(-0.222)	(-0.160)	(-0.188)	(-0.151)
Racial microaggressions		0.529**		0.434**
		(0.439		(0.358)
Societal problem			1.381**	0.822*
			(0.359)	(0.214)
R^2	0.089	0.272	0.217	0.303
R^2 change from Model 1		0.183	0.128	0.167

Note. $*p < 0.05$; $** p < 0.01$. All relationships are unstandardized regression coefficients. Numbers in parentheses represent standardized regression coefficients.

College graduate. For those Black males who had graduated from college, racial microaggressions ($b = 0.666$, $\beta = 0.565$, $p < 0.01$) overwhelmingly predicted MEES (Table 8). Racial microaggressions accounted for 29.6% of the variation in MEES after controlling for age and annual household income. Societal problems ($b = 1.224$, $\beta = 0.358$, $p < 0.01$) also had a large influence in MEES, accounting for 12.6% of variation in MEES after controlling for age and annual household income. Collectively, age, annual household income, racial microaggressions, and societal problems explained 43.2% of variance in MEES. With everything else being equal, the influence of racial microaggressions on MEES grew stronger as Black males' educational level increased.

Table 8

Structural Equation Models Predicting MEES in Black Males who were College Graduates (n = 123)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	-0.014	-0.005	-0.014*	-0.006
	(-0.221)	(-0.073)	(-0.227)	(-0.088)
Annual household income	-0.043	-0.054	-0.073	-0.078
	(-0.091)	(-0.111)	(-0.152)	(-0.162)
Racial microaggressions		0.666**		0.620**
		(0.565)		(0.525)
Societal problem			1.224*	0.993**
			(0.358)	(0.290)
R^2	0.062	0.358	0.188	0.432
R^2 change from Model 1		0.296	0.126	0.370

Note. $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$. All relationships are unstandardized regression coefficients. Numbers in parentheses represent standardized regression coefficients.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this article was to examine the role that racial microaggressions, societal problems, and educational attainment have in predicating MEES in African American males. To that end, this study considered two effects regarding the study population: (a) that negative racial and societal experiences contribute to increased levels of stress and (b) how social and environmental factors along with increasing levels of education interact and contribute to MEES. These findings demonstrate that racial microaggressions significantly increase MEES for African American males as they move up the educational pipeline.

Among the numerous findings in the study, three significant ones are discussed. The first finding is that as educational attainment increases it is associated with a higher level of MEES resulting from racial microaggressions. A second finding is that societal problems have a large influence in MEES across all educational levels. The third finding is that for college graduates, both racial microaggressions and societal problems contribute approximately 40% of mundane stress. While all of the findings are troubling considering the health and well-being of African American men, the most disconcerting finding is that increased levels of MEES was associated with higher levels of education. This study considered African American men at four different educational attainment levels. The trend in the relationship between MEES and educational attainment is troublesome because society and educational institutions are encouraging African Americans and other historically marginalized or underrepresented groups to strive for higher levels of education. The individual's own motivation, perseverance, competencies, skills, knowledge, and preparation are considered as some of the central ingredients for human capital benefits. However, the academic and professional domains are a reflection of the social domain for People of Color. In these domains, if racial microaggressions are present in MEES-like conditions, then People of Color will continue to work harder and longer for less reward, recognition, or status attainment (Pierce, 1988). It is rather late in the history of the U. S. and "desegregated" schooling and workforces for People of Color to still be facing problems associated with gendered racism. The country must seriously confront these forms of institutionalized racism because for African American males, the associated consequences of institutionalized Black misandry continue to be public health threats. While these authors are not arguing for a decrease in the educational attainment for African American men, there is a need for more research addressing the health-related impact of the current systemic and institutional structure on this group. Concurrently, interventions should be developed in education, community, and work settings that address and combat the increased levels of racial microaggressions and MEES that are associated with racial battle fatigue.

Given the findings, as educational attainment increases, the level of awareness or exposure to racial microaggressions and Black misandry will increase. Moreover, as education increases, Black men are being exposed to more historically and predominantly White communities and institutions where the bedrock of racial microaggressions and faulty racial ideologies are more imbedded and less subtle (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Harper, 2009; Pierce, 1988). This is not to say that African American males with lower levels of education do not recognize racial microaggressions because we continue to live in a highly racially segregated society. In predominantly White communities, African Americans have fewer opportunities to maintain the relative comfort of community social support found in predominantly Black communities and its social and religious organizations. In a sense, Black misandric microaggressions work as a repellent for Black males entering, living, or working in historically and predominantly White spaces.

Due to *de facto* residential segregation, African Americans often live in close proximity of other African Americans where overt and hostile racial microaggressions are less likely to occur. African American men who have lower educational attainment and who do not attend historically White colleges and universities may not encounter what is perceived as a collective White ideology about racial matters. In this belief and response system is a sense of community

control and policing regarding the presence of Black males (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Therefore, many Black males live within the relative "racial safety" of Black communities from overt forms of racism. As a result, less time and energy is spent discerning the difference between individually supportive Whites and the destructive actions by Whites as a collective within historically and predominantly White communities and institutions. More importantly, African Americans who reside in Black communities might benefit from community social support in many ways that are taken for granted and less researched.

Alford A. Young Jr. (2004) found that African American males from a west-side neighborhood of Chicago, who were less socially isolated from non-Blacks and college-educated individuals, had to contend with considerably more negative cross-racial incidents. African American males cited friendships and greater employment opportunities as reasons for their contact outside of their west-side community. The same Black males were able to identify their societal stratification in terms of race and class as opposed to African American males who did not have contact with individuals outside of their community. Similar to this study, Young demonstrated the conundrum African American males may face as a result of institutionally endorsed and sustained racism and discrimination. On a college campus as in the workplace, Blacks have increased opportunities to come into contact with or exposure to opinions and actions that represent a dominant, White racial ideology. Therefore, racial microaggressions and MEES are more prominent in the workforce, public venues, professional and social organizations, and higher education settings that are overwhelmingly White. These institutions and environments are slow to change, and oftentimes are catalysts that enable racial microaggressions that produces racial battle fatigue.

Fernander and associates (2004) offered a gender-specific explanation from their study that was not tested here but is worth considering. They suggested that the social realities of discrimination, negative representation in the media, and racism appear to impact Black males more than Black females and this might be a significant factor for explaining negative health outcomes. Additionally, their secondary explanation supported the assumption that as a Black male's social status increases, the more of a perceived threat he presents to those within the majority. Lastly, agreeing with previously cited research, the higher a Black man's education level, the more detrimental the psychological or physical health consequences are as a result of how active coping strategies, adaptive or maladaptive, are used to respond to racial microaggressions. There is still another unmeasured and interesting question that remains unanswered regarding this population: How does "hope," time, and energy associated with dealing with racism or racial change correlates with stress?

The second finding was African American men believed that societal problems have a large impact on their MEES irrespective of their educational levels. Societal problems (e.g., being involved in a crime, being racially discriminated, and not having a good job) are likely to have an immediate, physical, and emotional impact on the individual and their family members. The racial microaggressions in MEES conditions creates racial battle fatigue, which can become communicable when racial group members display the same level of anxiety when hearing, sympathizing, or responding to a common racial threat. However, these authors maintain that the disproportionate occurrences toward Black men in these historically White environments are suspect. At last, implicit in the common notion of societal problems are that they are at the societal (distal) and not individual level (proximal).

Finally, it was found that for college graduates, both racial microaggressions and societal problems contribute to approximately 40% of the cause of mundane, extreme, environmental stress. The combinations of these two social phenomena are specifically important to the population that was sampled. These social phenomena, together, represent the everyday lived experiences of highly educated African American men who live in communities and attend universities that are historically and predominantly White. As we know, African Americans and other historically marginalized racial/ethnic groups are subject to mundane racial microaggressions that impact their psychological, physiological, and emotional well-being. On top of racial microaggressions, historically underrepresented students face societal problems

such as being stopped by campus police for being "out of place," "fitting the description," or being tracked into less than challenging but more "welcoming" academic programs (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). These stacked conditions present a challenge and barrier for African American men that contribute to their MEES, which is not acknowledged by most Whites, recognized by student support services, human resources, or health providers. The racial battle fatigue framework demonstrates that Black men experience mundane racial microaggressions that build up over time and are detrimental to their health and overall quality of life.

Whites do not experience these conditions at the personal or group level and many have little awareness about those who do. This belief is oftentimes reflected in their individualist responses in many qualitative or quantitative research studies. Additionally, this is consistent with their tendency to be more individualistic in their explanations. The pervasiveness of a White racial ideology is not exclusive to Whites. Lynn and co-authors (2010) found many African American female teachers in a predominately Black school district who exhibited a deficit-oriented conceptualization of African American males by expressing that students were lacking motivation, identifying parents as the problem, and referencing a cultural inconsistency between school and community values. These stereotypic views of African American males occur not only in K-12 institutions, but also in college settings (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Further troubling are the injections of individualistic, White dominant values in which teachers feel their beliefs occur in a vacuum, disjointed from their teaching and student perceptions. Certainly, proximal assessments are important but not at the expense of how distal analyses and interpretation might help answer social and racial questions.

IMPLICATIONS

Eckholm (2006) wrote a *New York Times* article titled, "Plight Deepens for Black Men, Studies Warn." In the article, Ronald B. Mincy, author of *Black Males Left Behind*, was quoted saying, "There's something very different happening with young Black men, and it's something we can no longer ignore" (p. 1). While the article highlighted the educational and unemployment disparities of African American men, which have gotten worse since the economic downturn of 2008, the article did not consider what is happening among more formally educated African American males. Despite the number of African Americans who are attending college more than ever before, researchers have revisited the long-standing stacked deck against Black males in employment that begins at the application process. Scholars have found that job applicants with Black-sounding names received significantly fewer job callbacks than Whites, with the larger racial gap among Black males than Black females (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Additionally, compared to Whites, Black professionals in management positions see fewer job leads and job information that would be crucial in the labor market (McDonald, Lin, & Ao, 2009). As evident in this study, even African American men, who "play by the rules" of society, still face mundane extreme environmental stress. One could refine Mincy's statement to, there is something very wrong and troubling going on with society's treatment of Black men at all levels of education.

Theoretically, the findings support the paradox that African American men face everyday when they walk into the classroom or boardroom and experience racial climates that are replete with gendered racism, blocked opportunities, and mundane, extreme, environmental stress. As African American men attain higher levels of education and break through traditionally White occupations and spaces, they are still challenging and encountering stereotypes regarding Black male inferiority. Many of these stereotypes are regarding whether they possess a thug or "ghetto-centered" mentality or not, whether they violent, and whether they truly merit a position that is the result of hard work. For instance, these men have to constantly prove to others that they belong in higher educational settings despite being admitted based on the same academic admissions criterion as everyone else, with the exception being if they are a student-athlete. The detrimental effects of racism was demonstrated in a study of 40 African American college

students in which perceived racism predicted an increased level of blood pressure (Hill, Kobayashi, & Hughes, 2007). Therefore, the implications not only relate to the health of African American men and women, but also to their educational attainment. Implicitly and explicitly, the social conditions in higher levels of education are discouraging African American male participation and completion by creating an unwelcoming and stressful educational environment. Without addressing these taxing educational settings, a college degree is becoming increasingly out of reach simply because the environment is unsettling and not because of a lack of preparation or higher cost. This article has not addressed the colossal financial barrier to a higher education that African American men and other students face in times of decreasing state financial support. However, this is a serious issue for many aspiring postsecondary students.

Unlike previous studies on racial microaggressions in education that used a qualitative approach, these authors were able to get to racial microaggressions and MEES with a large national sample by employing advanced quantitative methods. This methodological approach opens up new opportunities for the study of racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue as it relates to the education and health of African American men and other members of historically underrepresented groups.

LIMITATIONS

Future scholarship is encouraged to analyze larger samples of African American men regarding racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue using advanced quantitative or mixed methods. Unfortunately, the authors were unable to investigate how a collective Black identity may mitigate the negative effects of racial microaggressions and MEES. Furthermore, studies of Black women are equally as important to get at the unique ways they deal with Black misogynistic microaggressions and how these conditions produce racial battle fatigue. Finally, maintaining high levels of hope is an important factor in lowering stress. It would be interesting to ascertain the level of hope among Black males as it relates to academic achievement, age, and racial battle fatigue.

CONCLUSION

As already extrapolated from previous research and demonstrated by this study, African American men face hurdles that impact their sense of belonging and health in U. S. society and its educational institutions. A way to address the concerns highlighted in this study is for all educational institutions to play a role in the re-education and re-socialization of the perpetrators of racial stereotypes, whether intentional or not, that lead to racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue. African American men are facing an educational contradiction, which not only affects their well-being, but also the welfare of educational institutions and these men's ability to fully contribute as productive citizens. African American men, as well as all People of Color, must have a competent theoretical understanding of racism, racial microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue in order to dilute their crippling effects on the individual, family, and in the work place. The authors agree with and extend Pierce's (1988) charge; our major concern in the 21st century must be to reduce mortality and morbidity which result from living for generations under unrelenting racial enmity and duress.

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