

Pleasure, Affection, and Love Among Black Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM) versus MSM of Other Races: Countering Dehumanizing Stereotypes via Cross-Race Comparisons of Reported Sexual Experience at Last Sexual Event

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Abstract Black men have historically been stereotyped as hedonistic, aggressive, and animalistic in their sexual interactions. This study sought to describe pleasure, affection, and love experienced by Black men who have sex with men (MSM) during their last male-partnered sexual event and to examine differences relative to White, Latino, and Asian MSM. A total of 21,696 (793 Black, 18,905 White, 1,451 Latino, and 547 Asian) U.S. men ages 18–87 ($M_{Age} = 39$) were recruited from social/sexual networking sites targeting MSM in 2010–2011. Participants reported multiple dimensions of sexual experience (pleasure, affection, and love) occurring at their last male-partnered sexual event, partner relationship, and sociodemographic characteristics. Across relationship categories, a sizeable percentage of Black MSM reported pleasure (72–87 % orgasmed, 57–82 % experienced high subjective pleasure) and affection (70–91 % kissed, 47–90 % cuddled). Love was primarily reported for events involving main partners (felt love for partner: 96 %; felt loved by partner: 97 %; verbalized love to partner: 89 %). Latent

class analysis with MSM of all races, adjusting for partner relationship and sociodemographic characteristics, revealed three distinct profiles of sexual experience: affection and love (Class 1); affection in the absence of love (Class 2); and neither affection nor love (Class 3). Pleasure was probable across profiles. Some racial differences in profile probability were present, but no overall pattern emerged. Contrary to Black male stereotypes, Black MSM commonly reported pleasure, affection, and love at their last male-partnered sexual event and did not show a meaningful pattern of difference from other-race MSM in their likelihood of experiencing all three.

Keywords Black · Gay · MSM · Stereotypes · Sex · Pleasure · Affection · Love

Introduction

The importance of pleasure, affection, and love to sexual experience and well-being has received increasing recognition in scientific literature (Fortenberry, 2013; Hull, 2008; Rosenberger, Reece, Novak, & Mayer, 2011; Tolman, Striepe, & Harmon, 2003). However, such positive dimensions of sexuality have largely been neglected in public health research with men who have sex with men (MSM) and Black MSM in particular. In the era of HIV/AIDS, priority has seemingly been placed instead on sexual risk-taking and disease. Extant research on the sexual behavior of Black MSM relative to MSM of other races has provided clear evidence to contradict stereotypes of sexual promiscuity and irresponsibility attached to this group (see Millett et al., 2012 for meta-analysis). However, historical stereotypes of Black men as hedonistic, aggressive, and animalistic (Collins, 2005; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981; Lydston, 1893), implying the presence of

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pleasure in the absence of affection and love in their sexual interactions, have yet to be directly investigated and discredited among Black MSM. To address this gap in the literature, the current study sought to describe Black MSM's reported experiences of pleasure, affection, and love during their last male-partnered sexual event and to examine differences in Black MSM's patterns of sexual experience during the event as compared to their White, Latino, and Asian counterparts.

Sexual Stereotypes of Black MSM

Overview of Stereotypes

Scholarly analyses of Black sexual politics and Black masculinities have highlighted the highly racialized and gendered nature of cultural representations of Black men's sexuality (Collins, 2005; McCune, 2014). In the U.S., Black men's sexuality has historically been stereotyped as being predatory and uncontrolled, in line with myths about Black men being "savage beasts" and "rapists" to discourage interracial marriage and maintain White supremacy in the post-slavery era (Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981). These myths were perpetuated by a medical culture in which Black men were regarded as having a *furor sexualis* equivalent to that of bulls and elephants (Lydston, 1893) and considered genetically prone to perpetrate rape and acquire sexually transmitted infections on account of their alleged promiscuity and incapacity to self-inhibit their sexual impulses (Lombardo & Dorr, 2006; Lydston, 1893). Implied in these bestial portrayals is a hedonistic drive for pleasure paired with a lack of warmth, tenderness, and emotional intimacy with sexual partners. The historical stereotype of the emotionally devoid, unaffectionate Black man has been illustrated in heterosexual pornography, where Black men are shown as performing fewer acts of affection (e.g., kissing, caressing) as compared to White men (Cowan & Campbell, 1994). Although the myth of the Black male rapist has subsided over time (hooks, 1981), sexual stereotypes of Black men that are marked by aggression and physicality continue to be present in dominant U.S. culture (Collins, 2005; Valentine, 2008).

Dehumanizing stereotypes of Black men were originally grounded in the unfounded conceptualization of Black people as lesser than White people and more proximal to apes and monkeys on the evolutionary spectrum; therefore, their sexual behavior was considered to be driven by primitive and reproductive instincts and assumed to be heterosexual. The resultant stereotypes have revolved around Black male *heterosexuality* and potentially contributed to misguided beliefs about other sexual orientations being unnatural or even impossible among Black men (Collins, 2005). However, *within* the MSM community, where non-heterosexuality is indeed recognized to exist (at least at the behavioral level),

similar dehumanizing stereotypes have been documented (Bowleg, 2013; Paul, Ayala, & Choi, 2010; Ro, Ayala, Paul, & Choi, 2013; Wilson et al., 2009). MSM of other races have characterized sex with Black men as "rough" and "animalistic" (Wilson et al., 2009), consistent with Black MSM's reports of being treated as a "sexual object" or "Mandingo fantasy" (Paul et al., 2010; Ro et al., 2013). Even Black men themselves have endorsed stereotypes related to bodily rhythm, aggression, and prowess in describing members of their own group (Wilson et al., 2009), again emphasizing physicality rather than emotionality as a defining feature.

In both the stereotypes perceived by Black MSM and expectations of Black male partners articulated by Black MSM and MSM of other races, a hypermasculine imperative is present, dictating dominance, assumption of a "thug"like or macho role, and avoidance of feminine behaviors (Han, Rutledge, Bond, Lauby, & LaPollo, 2014; Malebranche, Fields, Bryant, & Harper, 2009; Wilson et al., 2009). Consistent with animalistic stereotypes of Black sexuality (Collins, 2005), some Black MSM have considered heterosexuality to be an implicit component of Black masculinity and reported experiencing pressure to have a female partner and conceal their same-sex behavior (Operario, Smith, & Kegeles, 2008). Others have indicated that defiance of masculine/feminine gender role norms in self-presentation drives social disapproval to a greater extent than sexual activity with other men; these men have reported being relatively open about their preference for male partners, but vocalized contempt for overt displays of effeminate behavior, associating such behavior with White gayness (Han et al., 2014). Affection or emotional expressiveness, which has traditionally been associated with femininity (Balswick & Peek, 1971), may be considered a violation of masculine social prescriptions and therefore avoided. In keeping with the unemotional, hypermasculine stereotype of the Black man, the operator of a website featuring webcasts of idealized masculine Black MSM (referred to as "thugs") engaging in sex spoke to norms about affection as follows: "Thugs don't really kiss...Gay people kiss" (Rick Dickson, as quoted in Denizet-Lewis, 2003).

In addition to aggression, physicality, hypermasculinity, and emotional detachment, other themes present in the sexual stereotypes confronted by Black MSM within and beyond the MSM community revolve around sexual excess, dysregulation, and disease, themes which have been compounded by the group's increasingly disproportionate HIV burden and corresponding assumptions about sexual behavior (Bowleg et al., 2011; Ford, Whetten, Hall, Kaufman, & Thrasher, 2007; Saleh & Operario, 2009). While MSM across the racial spectrum may confront stigma associating male-male sexual activity with promiscuity and disease (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009; Herek, Widaman, & Capitanio, 2005), media portrayals of the "down low" ("DL") MSM sexual

subculture¹ (e.g., Denizet-Lewis, 2003; King, 2004) have contributed to the stereotyping of Black MSM's sexuality as especially irresponsible and virulent (Ford et al., 2007; Saleh & Operario, 2009). These accounts commonly present Black MSM as selfish participants in high-risk, secretive sexual activity with other men to the detriment of passive and unsuspecting Black female partners (McCune, 2014; Tapia, McCune, & Brody, 2009). Accordingly, Black MSM, particularly those who also have sex with women, have been regarded as sexually out of control and accountable for the spread of HIV even by other Black men (Bowleg et al., 2011).

Implications of Sexual Stereotypes for Sexual Experience

Sexual script theory offers a framework for understanding the potential impact of stereotypes on Black MSM's sexual experience. As a multi-level social constructionist theory that is sensitive to current and historical oppressions faced by this group, sexual script theory has been specifically identified as having promising applications for empirical research with Black men (Lewis & Kertzner, 2003) and has been utilized in recent sexual health research with both Black heterosexual men (e.g., Bowleg et al., 2013) and Black MSM (e.g., Wilson et al., 2009); it has also been employed as a guiding conceptual framework with non-Black and racially diverse groups of MSM (e.g., Parsons et al., 2004; Whittier & Melendez, 2004). According to this perspective, sexual behavior is guided by sexual scripts, which refer to schemata about how a sexual event ought to transpire in terms of with whom the encounter ought to be (or desired to be) shared, the occurrence and ordering of specific behaviors, the respective roles and reactions expressed by participants, and the meanings associated with such behaviors (Castenada & Burns-Glover, 2004; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). In their exposition of the sexual scripting process, Simon and Gagnon (1984, 1986) described script development at three levels: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts. *Cultural scenarios* refer to socially transmitted and collectively understood instructional guidelines. They encompass cultural norms and values pertaining to sexual behavior and are communicated and reinforced through the media and other social institutions (Bowleg et al., 2013; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). *Interpersonal scripts* reflect an individual's

application of cultural scenarios to behavior within a particular interpersonal context, including necessary adaptations based on the identity he or she assumes and partner expectations he or she perceives; such scripts facilitate fluidity in the sexual interaction. *Intrapsychic scripts* represent an individual's internal experience and organization of sexual desires (Simon & Gagnon, 1986).

From a sexual scripting perspective, sexual experience is fundamentally a social process, such that even an individual's understanding of his or her private fantasies and desires is shaped by social meaning (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Sexual script theory suggests that stereotypes or "associations and beliefs about the characteristics and attributes of a group and its members that shape how people think about and respond to that group" (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010, p. 3) permeate sexual scripts at multiple levels and influence the stereotyped individual's experience and expression of his or her sexuality. An individual's internalization of sexual scripts (and assimilation of institutionalized stereotypes) has been theorized to occur via modeling, rehearsal of scripted behaviors, behavioral reinforcement, and other social learning mechanisms (Weis, 1998). Empirical research revealing the integration of stereotypical content into self-representations (e.g., Internet home pages; Stokes, 2007) and prospectively linking remote modeling of sexual stereotypes (e.g., watching rap music videos) with stereotype-consistent behavior (e.g., sex with multiple partners; Wingood et al., 2003) among Black female adolescents lend credence to this theory. Further, qualitative research with Black MSM supports the notion that stereotype-consistent conduct is positively reinforced whereas stereotype-inconsistent behavior may be limiting. For example, in the context of discussing stereotypes of Black men as being tops (assuming the insertive role in male–male sexual partnerships) and having large penises, one Black man described perceiving a higher yield in messages received from potential male partners—i.e., being rewarded with sexual attention and opportunity—when his online chat profile advertised him in a stereotype-consistent manner ("big-dick Black top") than when he expressed his true (stereotype-inconsistent) preference to be the receptive partner (Wilson et al., 2009).

While qualitative and within-group analyses allow for nuanced insights about the nature and prevalence of a stereotypical attribute among the group of stereotyped individuals, quantitative, between-group comparisons offer an opportunity to broadly examine whether the stereotypical attribute is indeed more prevalent in the group to which it is ascribed as compared to other groups. A large body of evidence contradicting sexual stereotypes related to sexual excess and irresponsibility has amassed in recent years, collectively indicating that Black MSM report using condoms equally or more consistently, limit their number of male partners, and engage in similar or higher rates of other preventive activities (e.g., HIV testing, pre- or post-exposure

¹ Unlike the narrow and stigmatizing representations of DL in popular media, the DL can also be conceptualized as an adaptive and liberating identity or lifestyle: The DL "has always acted as an imaginative and physical space where blacks create, produce, and pronounce their own meaning outside of surveillance" (McCune, 2014, p. 8) and for Black MSM may offer a "positionality" from which they are able to understand their sexuality and navigate sexual experiences with other men (McCune, 2014). Some Black men do not see the DL as an effort to conceal their sexual behavior with men but rather an opportunity for self-definition as MSM outside of what they perceive to be White conceptions of gayness and associated feminine stereotypes (Han et al., 2014).

prophylaxis) relative to MSM of other racial groups (Millett et al., 2012). While such findings may debunk risk-related sexual stereotypes faced by Black MSM, behavioral evidence supporting or refuting sexual stereotypes related to pleasure, affection, and love—constructs that can be considered more positive dimensions of sexual experience—is lacking, thus rendering their validity uncertain.

Positive Dimensions of Sexual Experience and Black MSM

Defining Pleasure, Affection, and Love

Pleasure, affection, and love have been identified as integral components of sexuality, serving as behavioral motivation, sought-after ideals, bases for positive evaluations of sexual relationships, and correlates of sexual health and other forms of well-being (Bourne et al., 2013; Floyd et al., 2009; Jurgenson, Espinosa, & Alvarez, 2005; Meston & Buss, 2007). These constructs are often highly interrelated conceptually and empirically. For example, physical affection can be conceived of as behavior that is an expression of love and intended to arouse feelings of love (Gulledge, Gulledge, & Stahmann, 2003). Although most literature on positive dimensions of sexuality is derived from heterosexual samples, a high degree of similarity has been found between heterosexual and non-heterosexual individuals in conceptualizing optimal sexuality (Kleinplatz, Menard, Paradis, Campbell, & Dalgleish, 2013), suggesting that pleasure, affection, and love may be important dimensions of sexual experience irrespective of sexual orientation.

Pleasure refers to “the positive physical and subjective sensation and emotional experience resulting from stimulation of the genitals, breasts, and other erogenous zones” (Garza-Mercer, 2006, p. 107). Pleasure may be determined by both physiological processes (e.g., blood flow) and cognitive activities (e.g., perception) and is a key component of sexual and overall well-being (Hull, 2008). Pleasure and orgasm are among the factors rated most highly by men as reasons for engaging in sex (Meston & Buss, 2007).

Affection or *affectionate communication* refers to a range of expressive behaviors that contribute to the formation, maintenance, and quality of human relationships (Floyd, 2002). Within the context of sexual and/or romantic relationships, affection can include kissing on the lips, cuddling, hand-holding, and other physically intimate acts (Gulledge et al., 2003). Previous research has tied both expression and receipt of affection to physical, psychological, and interpersonal well-being (Burke & Young, 2012; Floyd, 2002; Floyd et al., 2009; Floyd, Hesse, & Haynes, 2007; Gulledge et al., 2003); for instance, kissing has been associated with a reduction in total serum cholesterol, decreased perceived

stress, and improvement in relationship satisfaction (Floyd et al., 2009).

Love is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that can encompass emotions, motivational drives, and cognitions experienced relative to another person within a relationship context (Sternberg, 1986). According to Sternberg’s triangular theory of love, core components of love include intimacy (feelings of closeness/bondedness), passion (drives leading to romance, physical attraction, and sex), and decision/commitment (decision that one loves the other and commitment to maintain that love); the relative strengths of these components determine the nature of love experienced. Love or components thereof have been linked to both pleasure and affection (Rosenberger, Herbenick, Novak, & Reece, 2014) and have been cited as reasons for engaging in sex (Meston & Buss, 2007) as well as factors affecting the quality of sexual experience (Jurgenson et al., 2005; Kleinplatz & Menard, 2007).

Black MSM Stereotypes Related to Pleasure, Affection, and Love: (Lack of) Empirical Evidence

As described above, the sexuality of Black men has historically been stereotyped as hedonistic, emotionally detached, and aggressive. To the extent that these stereotypes infuse sexual scripts guiding male–male sexual behavior, sexual script theory would predict that the sexual experiences of Black MSM are characterized by pleasure in the absence of love and affection—in other words, that the socially prescribed sexual experience of Black MSM would translate into the actual sexual experience of Black MSM. However, behavioral evidence for or against such stereotypes is lacking. Research on positive dimensions of sexuality among MSM is generally sparse, though recent advances have been made in understanding such dimensions as they relate to sexual practices and/or vary according to partner factors (e.g., Balan, Carballo-Dieguez, Ventuneac, & Remien, 2009; Bauermeister, Carballo-Dieguez, Ventuneac, & Dolezal, 2009; Bauermeister, Ventuneac, Pingel, & Parsons, 2012; Calabrese, Reisen, Zea, Poppen, & Bianchi, 2012; Dodge et al., 2013; Schnarrs et al., 2012). However, extant descriptive quantitative research on positive dimensions of sexuality typically characterizes diverse MSM as a unified group rather than stratifying and reporting differences by race. One notable exception is Rosenberger et al.’s (2014) report of love experienced by gay and bisexual men based on a subset of the larger study sample from which the data presented in the current study were drawn: Approximately one-fourth of Black MSM loved their partner and perceived their sexual partner to love them at the time of their last male-partnered sexual event, which was similar but slightly less than rates reported by MSM of other races (significance unreported). While existing insights about experiences of positive dimensions of sexuality among MSM in

general and Black MSM in particular are valuable, unanswered questions remain with regard to the prevalence of other positive dimensions of sexual experience among Black MSM and differences relative to MSM of other races.

An additional shortcoming of existing research on positive dimensions of sexual experience is that the multidimensionality inherent in sexual experience is usually lost due to the analytic approach employed. Typically, each dimension (e.g., affection) and even the individual variables by which each is operationalized (e.g., kissing, cuddling) are investigated separately as singular constructs in regression models despite their potential co-occurrence during a sexual event. This approach sheds little light on the overall patterns of sexual experience, or combinations of pleasure, affection, and love, that are reported by participants. Latent class analysis is a method of investigating unobserved population heterogeneity (Lubke & Muthen, 2005), clustering participants according to their responses across a set of manifest (observed) categorical variables, which together represent a single, underlying categorical variable, as opposed to using pre-determined criteria (Lubke & Muthen, 2005; Magidson & Vermunt, 2004). Increasing uptake and utility of latent class analysis can be seen in recently published HIV/sexual risk literature (e.g., Mackesy-Amity et al., 2014; Noor, Ross, Lai, & Risser, 2014; Vasilenko, Kugler, Butera, & Lanza, 2014), in which this analytic approach has allowed for the delineation of low-risk and high-risk patterns of behavior. To our knowledge, latent class analysis has not previously been employed to examine positive dimensions of sexual experience. In the current study, this approach enabled the elucidation of distinct profiles of sexual experience in terms of pleasure, affection, and love at last sexual event, including the simultaneous occurrence or absence of these dimensions.

Study Objectives and Hypotheses

In light of existing stereotypes of Black men as hedonistic, aggressive, and animalistic—implying the presence of pleasure in the absence of affection and love—the current study was an event-level investigation of Black MSM's actual experiences of pleasure, affection, and love in comparison to MSM of other races. Thus, the purpose of the study was twofold: First, we sought to describe Black MSM's actual experiences of pleasure, affection, and love during their last male-partnered sexual event, including frequency of orgasm, kissing, cuddling, and other indicators. Second, we sought to compare patterns of such experiences across racial groups (Black, White, Latino, and Asian) to determine whether Black MSM were more likely to show stereotypical patterns such as pleasure in the absence of affection and/or love. For this second step, we conducted a latent class analysis to distinguish the predominant profiles of event-level sexual experience (i.e., latent class combinations of pleasure,

affection, and love) reported by the full sample of MSM and then compared Black MSM to other racial groups in terms of profile probability. Consistent with trends in the sexual risk literature that contradict stereotypes of Black MSM pertaining to sexual excess and irresponsibility, we expected that our data would not support stereotypes of Black men lacking affection and emotional intimacy in their sexual encounters with other men. Specifically, we hypothesized that Black MSM would not significantly differ from their other-race counterparts in their likelihood of membership to profiles characterized by affection and/or love.

Method

Participants and Procedure

This study was conducted as part of a larger study on sexual attitudes and behavior in partnership with an operator of Internet websites for men who seek social and/or sexual interactions with other men. All study procedures were approved by a university-affiliated institutional review board prior to their inception. An electronic email recruitment message was distributed to all members of two of the company's largest websites² who were active within the previous 90 days and resided in the U.S. The email provided a brief description of the study and included a link to the study website. Individuals who visited the study website were able to read a detailed description of the study and consent form, which explicitly stated that no identifying information would be collected, results would only be reported in aggregate, and participants were free to withdraw from participation at any time during the study. Those who consented to participate in the study were directed to an anonymous online survey, which included all measures described below and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. A total of 169,136 men opened the recruitment email and 55,452 men (32.8 %) visited the study website, of whom 32,831 (59.2 %) consented to and subsequently participated in the survey. All data were collected between October 2010 and February 2011. For inclusion within the current substudy, participants needed to (a) self-identify as male, (b) self-identify as Black, White, Latino, or Asian, (c) be 18 years of age or older, and (d) report their last dyadic sexual event to have involved a male partner, to have been non-transactional, and to have taken place within the past year.³

² Website names were intentionally withheld to protect the privacy of sites and site users.

³ A 1-year cutoff for occurrence of last sexual event has commonly been employed for event-level, survey-based sexuality studies with MSM (e.g., Calabrese, Rosenberger, Schick, Novak, & Reece, 2013; Grov, Hirshfield, Remien, Humberstone, & Chiasson, 2013; Pines et al., 2014; Sandfort, Yi, Knox, & Reddy, 2013).

Measures

Sociodemographic and Relationship Characteristics

Participants self-reported sociodemographic characteristics based on single-item measures, which were coded as follows: race/ethnicity ([1] Black (Black/African American) vs. [2] White vs. [3] Latino (Latino/Hispanic) vs. [4] Asian (Asian/Pacific Islander)); age (years); education ([1] high school or less vs. [2] some college or associate degree vs. [3] bachelor's degree vs. [4] master's degree or higher vs. [0] other); sexual orientation ([1] homosexual/gay vs. [2] bisexual vs. [3] heterosexual/straight vs. [4] unsure/questioning vs. [0] other); geographic setting ([1] city/surrounding suburb vs. [2] small town not very close to a city vs. [3] rural area), and partner relationship ([1] main partner, i.e., "spouse," "domestic partner," "boyfriend," or "significant other" vs. [2] casual partner, i.e., "someone I was casually dating/hanging out with" or "friend" vs. [3] new partner, i.e., "someone I just met.")

Sexual Experience at Most Recent Male-Partnered Sexual Event

Participants completed items pertaining to multiple dimensions of their sexual experience during their most recent male-partnered sexual event. These items functioned as predictors of latent class membership.

Pleasure

Participants reported whether they orgasmed ("During this most recent sex act, did you have an orgasm?"), coded as [1] yes vs. [0] no, with "not sure" responses (reported by 1.1 % of sample) treated as missing data. They also rated subjective pleasure ("How pleasurable was this most recent sexual act?") on a 5-point scale ranging from "not at all pleasurable" to "extremely pleasurable." Subjective pleasure was coded as [1] experienced high subjective pleasure (rated as "quite a bit" or "extremely" pleasurable) vs. [0] did not experience high subjective pleasure (rated as "not at all," "a little," or "moderately" pleasurable).

Affection

Consistent with past research among men of unspecified sexual orientation suggesting that men favor cuddling and kissing over other forms of physical affection (e.g., hugging, massaging, caressing, and holding hands; Gullede et al., 2003), these two behaviors were assessed as indicators of affection in the current study. Participants indicated whether they kissed ("I kissed my sexual partner on the mouth") and cuddled ("My partner and I held each other romantically [cuddled]") as part of a longer list of activities for which they

were asked to "check all that apply." Responses were coded as [1] yes vs. [0] no.

Love

Participants reported whether they felt love for their partner ("Did you love this sexual partner at the time you engaged in this sexual act?"), felt loved by their partner ("Do you think that this sexual partner loved you at the time you engaged in this sexual act?"), and verbalized their love to their partner ("Had you EVER told this sexual partner that you loved them prior to engaging in this sexual act?"). Responses were coded as [1] yes vs. [0] no, with "unsure" responses treated as missing data. (Of the total sample, 10.4 % of participants were unsure if they felt love for their partner, 12.5 % were unsure if they felt loved by their partner, and 1.0 % were unsure if they verbalized love to their partner).

Data Analysis

All analyses were conducted using SPSS and R statistical software (SPSS Inc., 2010; The R Foundation for Statistical Computing Platform, 2013). For inferential analyses, education was dichotomized as [1] a bachelor's degree or higher vs. [0] less than a bachelor's degree, sexual orientation was dichotomized as [1] homosexual/gay vs. [0] not homosexual/gay, and geographic setting was dichotomized as [1] city/suburb vs. [0] small town/rural. Significant differences in the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample by race/ethnicity were assessed through analysis of variance (ANOVA) for age and separate unadjusted logistic regressions for education, sexual orientation, and geographic setting. Differences in partner relationship—(a) main partner vs. other and (b) new partner vs. other—between Black MSM and other race/ethnicity groups were tested using logistic regressions, adjusting for sociodemographic characteristics.

Subsetting the sample to Black MSM only, frequency statistics were calculated for all dimensions of sexual experience, stratifying by partner relationship, and logistic regressions were used to identify differences between relationship categories ((a) main partner vs. casual partner, (b) main partner vs. new partner, and (c) casual partner vs. new partner) per dimension of sexual experience, adjusting for sociodemographic characteristics.

Finally, using the full sample, latent class regression modeling adjusting for sociodemographic characteristics and partner relationship was performed to elucidate sexual experience profiles and identify race-based differences. As described within the introduction, we selected this method of data analysis to capture the multidimensionality of sexual experience, clustering participants according to their responses across the set of seven sexual experience measures and describing the sexual profiles (i.e., latent classes) that emerged as opposed to

considering each measure in isolation. Two-class, three-class, four-class, and five-class solutions were explored using the poLCA R software package (Linzer & Lewis, 2011). Given the presence of rare classes in the four- and five-class solutions, which are symptomatic of overly complex models (Schafer & Kang, 2013), solutions with a higher number of classes were not explored. The maximum number of iterations through which the estimation algorithm cycled was set to 5000, and 100 repetitions of model estimation were performed for each solution to identify a global (rather than local) maximum of the log-likelihood function (Linzer & Lewis, 2011). Statistics used to evaluate model fit included the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC). For both of these indicators, a lower value indicated better fit. Once the final model was established, predicted latent class membership across the full sample was determined by modal posterior probabilities, and differences in the likelihood of class membership between Black MSM and each of the other race/ethnicity groups were evaluated.

Results

Sample Characteristics

Of the 32,831 individuals who responded to the survey, 70.0 % met criteria for inclusion within the current substudy. Approximately 5.6 % of participants who met inclusion criteria did not complete all sexual experience items and were excluded from analyses. The final sample ($n = 21,696$) included 3.7 % Black MSM, 87.1 % White MSM, 6.7 % Latino MSM, and 2.5 % Asian MSM, aged 18–87 years ($M_{\text{Age}} = 39.00$, $SD = 12.55$). Additional sociodemographic information and partner relationship characteristics are presented in Table 1, stratified by race/ethnicity.

All sociodemographic characteristics varied significantly by race/ethnicity. ANOVA results indicated that Black MSM were significantly younger than White MSM and significantly older than Latino and Asian MSM, $F(3, 21,692) = 227.618$, $p < .001$. Logistic regressions revealed that Black participants were less likely to have a bachelor's degree than White MSM, $OR = 1.35$, 95 % CI [1.17–1.56], $p < .001$, and Asian MSM, $OR = 2.72$, 95 % CI [2.14–3.45], $p < .001$, but not significantly more or less likely than Latino MSM, $p = .271$. Black participants were less likely to identify as homosexual/gay than White MSM, $OR = 1.34$, 95 % CI [1.12–1.61], $p = .001$, and Asian MSM, $OR = 1.34$, 95 % CI [1.00–1.80], $p = .049$, but not significantly more or less likely than Latino MSM, $p = .055$. Additionally, Black participants were more likely than White MSM to reside in a city/suburb rather than a small town or rural area, $OR = 0.42$, 95 % CI [0.33–0.54], $p < .001$, but not significantly more or less likely than Latino MSM, $p = .654$, and Asian MSM, $p = .190$.

Participants' relationship to their sexual partner at their last sexual event also varied significantly by race/ethnicity. Adjusting for age, education, sexual orientation, and geographic setting, Black men were less likely to experience their most recent sexual event with a main partner than White MSM, $AOR = 1.47$, 95 % CI [1.22–1.77], $p < .001$, Latino MSM, $AOR = 1.49$, 95 % CI [1.2–1.86], $p < .001$, and Asian MSM, $AOR = 1.32$, 95 % CI [1.00–1.74], $p = .047$. They were no more or less likely to report experiencing their last event with a new partner than White MSM, $p = .115$, Latino MSM, $p = .741$, or Asian MSM, $p = .434$.

Black MSM's Sexual Experience

Table 2 displays the percentage of Black MSM who reported each dimension of sexual experience measured at last sexual event, stratified by relationship to the partner with whom the event was experienced. Pleasure and affection were commonly reported across partner relationship categories, particularly with main partners. Love was predominantly reported by men whose last sexual event was experienced with a main partner.

Relative to Black MSM whose last male-partnered sexual event involved a casual or new partner, those who experienced the event with a main partner were significantly more likely to have orgasmed, reported high subjective pleasure, kissed, cuddled, felt love for their partner, felt loved by their partner, and/or verbalized love to their partner (all p -values $< .05$). Relative to Black MSM whose last male-partnered sexual event involved a new partner, those who experienced the event with a casual partner were more likely to have reported high subjective pleasure, cuddled, felt love for their partner, felt loved by their partner, and verbalized love to their partner (all p -values $< .05$) but were no more or less likely to have orgasmed, $p = .145$, or kissed, $p = .135$.

Sexual Experience Profiles and Differences by Race

Latent class analysis seeks to determine the smallest number of latent classes needed to adequately account for the associations among manifest variables (Magidson & Vermunt, 2004). Inspection of the fit statistics (AIC and BIC) for each of the 2-, 3-, 4-, and 5-class models of sexual experience tested suggested that fit of the 3-class model was better than that of the 2-class model, and that fit continued to improve incrementally with an increasing number of classes (see Table 3). Although the 5-class model was favored by these statistics, the three-class model was selected because (a) the predicted probability of membership to one of the classes in the four-class model and two of the classes in the five-class model was less than .05, suggesting the corresponding sexual experience profiles to be relatively rare among participants; and (b) the

Table 1 Sociodemographic and partner relationship characteristics of participants by race/ethnicity

Characteristic	Race/ethnicity									
	Total sample (<i>N</i> = 21,696)		Black (<i>n</i> = 793)		White (<i>n</i> = 18,905)		Latino (<i>n</i> = 1,451)		Asian (<i>n</i> = 547)	
	%	(<i>n</i>)	%	(<i>n</i>)	%	(<i>n</i>)	%	(<i>n</i>)	%	(<i>n</i>)
Age***										
18–19	2.5	(534)	4.5	(36)	2.2	(418)	4.4	(64)	2.9	(16)
20–29	26.7	(5,786)	34.2	(271)	24.8	(4,696)	39.8	(577)	44.2	(242)
30–39	21.3	(4,616)	23.8	(189)	20.4	(3,851)	28.0	(407)	30.9	(169)
40–49	27.6	(5,980)	25.9	(205)	28.5	(5,381)	21.1	(306)	16.1	(88)
50–59	16.7	(3,629)	10.1	(80)	18.2	(3,437)	5.6	(81)	5.7	(31)
60+	5.3	(1,151)	1.5	(12)	5.9	(1,122)	1.1	(16)	0.2	(1)
Level of education****										
High school degree or lower	9.7	(2,075)	9.6	(75)	9.4	(1,762)	14.5	(208)	5.6	(30)
Some college or associate degree	32.4	(6,960)	39.3	(308)	32.1	(6,012)	36.9	(530)	20.5	(110)
Bachelor's degree	33.0	(7,107)	32.1	(251)	33.1	(6,206)	29.9	(430)	41.0	(220)
Master's degree or higher	25.0	(5,368)	19	(149)	25.5	(4,773)	18.7	(269)	33.0	(177)
Sexual orientation****										
Homosexual/gay	85.3	(18,376)	81.1	(640)	85.5	(16,053)	84.8	(1,219)	85.5	(464)
Bisexual	13.5	(2,907)	17.5	(138)	13.4	(2,508)	13.8	(199)	11.4	(62)
Heterosexual/straight	0.2	(46)	0.4	(3)	0.2	(38)	0.3	(4)	0.2	(1)
Unsure/questioning	1.0	(217)	1.0	(8)	0.9	(177)	1.1	(16)	2.9	(16)
Geographic setting****										
City/suburb	83.4	(18,087)	91.7	(725)	82.2	(15,531)	91.1	(1,320)	93.6	(511)
Small town	11.2	(2,437)	5.9	(47)	11.9	(2,254)	7.4	(107)	5.3	(29)
Rural Area	5.3	(1,152)	2.4	(19)	5.8	(1,105)	1.5	(22)	1.1	(6)
Partner relationship****										
Main partner	24.7	(5,358)	18.3	(145)	25.0	(4,720)	25.3	(367)	23.0	(126)
Casual partner	38.3	(8,312)	42.6	(338)	38.4	(7,261)	35.6	(516)	36.0	(197)
New partner	37.0	(8,026)	39.1	(310)	36.6	(6,924)	39.1	(568)	41.0	(224)

Statistical comparisons between Black MSM and MSM of other racial/ethnic backgrounds were conducted using ANOVA for age; unadjusted logistic regressions for level of education, sexual orientation, and geographic setting; and logistic regression adjusting for all sociodemographic characteristics for relationship to most recent sexual partner

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

^a Excludes data reported as “other” or missing (<1 %)

^b Refers to participants' relationship to the person with whom they experienced their last male-partnered sexual event; Main partner includes “boyfriend,” “significant other,” “spouse,” and “domestic partner”; casual partner includes “someone I was casually dating/hanging out with” and “friend”; new partner includes “someone I just met.”

three-class solution provided conceptually distinct profiles of sexual experience that differentiated two of the three dimensions of sexuality (affection and love), whereas classes in the four- and five-class solutions differed in less conceptually meaningful ways.

The sexual experience profiles associated with the three-class model are displayed in Table 4. The first profile (Class 1: Affection/Love) is characterized by the presence of both affection and love; the second (Class 2: Affection/No Love) is characterized by affection in the absence of love; and the third (Class 3: No Affection/No Love) is characterized by the absence of both affection and love. Pleasure, as indicated by orgasm and subjective rating, was probable for all three

classes, particularly Classes 1 and 2. Predicted class membership across the full sample was 31.5, 45.2, and 23.3 %, respectively, indicating that the majority of participants (76.7 %) were likely to have experienced pleasure and affection during their last sexual event, and a sizeable minority (31.5 %) was likely to have experienced love as well.

Overall, Black MSM's membership across the three classes was similar in many respects to MSM of other races, with significant differences emerging relative to White and Asian MSM, but not Latino MSM (see Table 5). In comparison to White MSM, Black MSM were similarly likely to experience both affection and love (Class 1) vs. affection in

Table 2 Sexual experiences reported by Black MSM ($n = 793$) at last male-partnered sexual event by relationship to partner

	All Black MSM		Partner relationship					
			Main partner		Casual partner		New partner	
	%	(<i>n</i>)	%	(<i>n</i>)	%	(<i>n</i>)	%	(<i>n</i>)
Orgasmed ^a	76.9	(599)	86.5	(122) _x	77.3	(255) _y	72.1	(222) _y
Highly pleased ^b	66.1	(524)	82.1	(119) _x	67.5	(228) _y	57.1	(177) _z
Kissed	76.0	(603)	91.0	(132) _x	75.1	(254) _y	70.0	(217) _y
Cuddled	61.5	(488)	89.7	(130) _x	63.0	(213) _y	46.8	(145) _z
Felt love for partner ^a	27.5	(198)	95.6	(129) _x	20.9	(60) _y	3.0	(9) _z
Felt loved by partner ^a	27.8	(192)	97.0	(129) _x	20.7	(55) _y	2.7	(8) _z
Verbalized love to partner ^a	23.6	(186)	88.9	(128) _x	14.9	(50) _y	2.6	(8) _z

Values denoted with a different letter within a given horizontal row significantly differed from one another ($p < .05$) based on logistic regression analyses adjusting for sociodemographic characteristics (age, education, sexual orientation, and geographic setting); participants who neglected to report 1+ sociodemographic characteristic(s) were excluded from regression analyses

^a Excludes participants who endorsed “unsure” or “not sure” response option

^b Represents participants who rated their most recent male-partnered sexual event as “quite a bit” or “extremely” pleasurable

Table 3 Fit statistics for latent class analysis models of sexual experience with two to five latent classes ($n = 18,011$)

Number of classes	Number of parameters	Residual degrees of freedom	Maximum log-likelihood	AIC	BIC
2	24	103	-46401.13	92850.25	93037.42
3	41	86	-44122.65	88327.27	88647.02
4	58	69	-43571.27	87258.54	87710.87
5	75	52	-43287.91	86725.82	87310.73

For AIC and BIC, lower values suggest better fit. Participants who neglected to report 1+ sociodemographic characteristic(s) and/or endorsed “unsure”/“not sure” response option for orgasm or love items were excluded from analyses

AIC Akaike Information Criterion; BIC Bayesian Information Criterion

the absence of love (Class 2), with a non-significant trend toward being more likely to experience both affection and love ($p = .063$); similarly likely to experience both affection and love (Class 1) vs. neither affection nor love (Class 3); and more likely to experience neither affection nor love (Class 3) vs. affection in the absence of love (Class 2). In comparison to Asian MSM, Black MSM were similarly likely to experience both affection and love (Class 1) vs. affection in the absence of love (Class 2); more likely to experience neither affection nor love (Class 3) vs. both affection and love (Class 1); and more likely to experience neither affection nor love (Class 3) vs. affection in the absence of love (Class 2). Although there were no significant differences in probability of class membership relative to Latino MSM, a non-significant trend suggested that Black MSM were more likely than Latino

Table 4 Item-response probabilities for three sexual experience profiles reported by MSM ($n = 18,011$) at last male-partnered sexual event

Dimension	Sexual experience (manifest) variable	Sexual experience profile (Class)		
		Class 1: Affection/love ($\sim n = 5,668$) ^a	Class 2: Affection/no love ($\sim n = 8,148$) ^a	Class 3: No affection/no love ($\sim n = 4,195$) ^a
		ρ	ρ	ρ
Pleasure	Orgasmed	0.90	0.84	0.71
	Highly pleased (subjective rating)	0.87	0.72	0.54
Affection	Kissed	0.91	0.98	0.25
	Cuddled	0.89	0.78	0.09
Love	Felt love for partner	0.99	0.01	0.01
	Felt loved by partner	0.99	0.02	0.01
	Verbalized love to partner	0.93	0.02	0.02

Participants who neglected to report 1+ sociodemographic characteristic(s) and/or endorsed “unsure”/“not sure” response option for orgasm or love items were excluded from analyses

^a Approximate class membership ($\sim n$) calculated based on modal posterior probabilities

Table 5 Racial/ethnic differences in sexual experience reported by MSM ($n = 18,011$) at last male-partnered sexual event

	Sexual experience profile comparisons								
	Affection/love (Class 1) vs. affection/no love (Class 2)			Affection/love (Class 1) vs. no affection/no love (Class 3)			Affection/no love (Class 2) vs. no affection/no love (Class 3)		
	95 % CI			95 % CI			95 % CI		
AOR ^a	LL	UL	AOR ^a	LL	UL	AOR ^a	LL	UL	
Race/ethnicity									
Black (reference)									
White	0.73	0.52	1.02	0.99	0.70	1.41	1.36**	1.08	4.89
Latino	1.19	0.79	1.79	1.49	0.97	2.31	1.26	0.94	4.69
Asian	1.41	0.87	2.30	2.24**	1.28	3.92	1.59*	1.07	7.28

Participants who neglected to report 1+ sociodemographic characteristic(s) and/or endorsed “unsure”/“not sure” response option for orgasm or love items were excluded from analyses

^a Odds ratios adjusted for sociodemographic characteristics (age, education, sexual orientation, and geographic setting) and partner relationship

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

MSM to experience neither affection nor love (Class 3) vs. both affection and love (Class 1; $p = .070$).

Discussion

Results of this study indicate that pleasure and affection were commonly experienced by Black MSM at their last male-partnered sexual event irrespective of their relationship to the partner with whom they shared the event, and that this was especially the case when the partner was a main partner. Further, the vast majority of Black MSM who experienced their last sexual event with a main partner felt love for, perceived love from, and verbalized love to that partner.

Three profiles of sexual experience at last sexual event emerged, with the first characterized by both affection and love, the second characterized by affection in the absence of love, and the third characterized by the absence of both affection and love. Pleasure was likely across profiles. Black MSM's last sexual event was more likely to be characterized by the absence of affection and love vs. (a) the presence of both when compared to Asian MSM and (b) the presence of affection in the absence of love when compared to Asian and White MSM. However, no pervasive pattern of differences between Black MSM and MSM of other races emerged with respect to the probability of reporting one profile vs. another. Collectively, these findings contradict stereotypes of Black men's sexuality as being devoid of affection and emotion and support our hypothesis, indicating more similarity than difference in Black MSM's experience of

affection and love during their last male-partnered sexual event relative to MSM of other races.

To the extent that sexual stereotypes are embedded within sexual scripts dictating sexual experience, sexual script theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986) would have predicted greater consistency between the sexual stereotypes ascribed to Black MSM and the sexual behaviors reported by Black MSM in our study. The finding that affection (relative to all partner types) and love (relative to main partners) were commonly reported suggests that historical stereotypes related to pleasure, affection, and love were not being internalized and applied to interpersonal scripts with male partners among these men. Animalistic stereotypes of Black male sexuality have often been presented in the context of (hyper)heterosexuality (Collins, 2005); therefore, it is possible that they are more influential in the sexual scripts that Black men enact with female partners. Given that (a) Black MSM have been regarded as an impossibility (according to the Black=heterosexual paradigm) in dominant society, (b) many Black MSM may be motivated to conceal their sexual orientation due to messaging within the Black community, and (c) until recently, Black MSM have been relatively invisible in mainstream and gay popular culture (Collins, 2005; Teunis, 2007), a singular, well-defined and collectively understood sexual script (“cultural scenario”) around pleasure, affection, and love may not exist for Black MSM. Thus, Black MSM may perceive fewer constraints in their construction and enactment of interpersonal scripts with male partners. That said, qualitative research on sexual expectations reported by MSM of other races as well as perceived by Black MSM suggest that stereotypes of sexual aggression and objectification occur in MSM culture and can guide sexual roles and determine sexual opportunities for Black MSM (Paul et al., 2010; Teunis, 2007; Wilson et al., 2009). Consequently, our findings may reflect Black MSM's resilience and agency in the face of dehumanizing cultural scenarios, (which is supported by all Black participants' transgression of social prohibitions around Black same-sex activity in order to be eligible for the study), and/or their perception and internalization of alternative, positive scenarios. Further work is needed to understand the nature and salience of sexual stereotypes and scripts perceived by Black MSM and their impact on pleasure, affection, love, and other dimensions of sexual experience, including underlying psychological processes that may be at play.

The sexual profiles, or latent classes, that emerged from our data illustrate the predominant patterns of pleasure, affection, and love experienced by our sample of MSM, including the presence/absence and co-occurrence of these three positive dimensions of sexual experience. Affection and love varied in their presence/absence and co-occurrence, whereas pleasure was probable even when both were absent. The most prevalent class of participants (45 %) was likely to have experienced

affection during their last male-partnered sexual event but was unlikely to have felt love for, felt loved by, or have expressed love to the partner involved. The remainder of participants was divided between being likely to experience both affection and love (32 %) or neither affection nor love (23 %).

Affection and love are often conceived of as interrelated phenomena, with kissing on the lips and cuddling/holding judged to be the forms of affectionate that are most expressive of love when considered relative to other intimate acts such as caressing/stroking, hand-holding, and massage (Gulledge et al., 2003). However, our findings indicate that affectionate behaviors such as kissing and cuddling were commonly enacted outside of the context of a loving relationship as well, suggesting that affection may not *always* be an expression of love. In some cases, affectionate behaviors such as kissing and cuddling may function as a means of personalizing the encounter (Reback & Larkins, 2010), establishing a sense of intimacy even in the absence of a deep emotional connection that participants might label as “love.” Consistent with this notion, a qualitative study with non-gay-identified Black MSM found that spontaneous, anonymous sex was sometimes motivated by feelings of loneliness and desire for affection and interpersonal connection, whereas development of an emotional bond with a partner over time (love) could be perceived as problematic (Operario et al., 2008).

Future research is needed to understand the few differences in latent class membership that did emerge: For sexual events occurring outside of a loving relationship, Black MSM were less likely to experience affection as compared to White MSM and Asian MSM. Thus, although no overall trend emerged, it is possible that during casual/recreational sex in particular, Black male stereotypes proscribing affectionate behavior could be operational. Such differences might reflect an attempt to depersonalize a sexual partner or avoid emotional attachment (Reback & Larkins, 2010). These and other potential psychological factors require further exploration.

While the current study focused exclusively on positive dimensions of sexual experience among male–male sexual partnerships, another direction for future research might be to explore differences in patterns of pleasure, affection, and love with partners identified as male vs. those identified as female or of another gender among MSM who engage in sex with these other types of partners as well. Traditional heterosexual scripts prescribing physical affection as a precursor to sex (Edgar & Fitzpatrick, 1993), for example, may make the emergence of a profile marked by pleasure in the absence of affection and love less probable with female partners.

There are several limitations to the current study. First, the representativeness of our findings relative to other Black MSM and the wider MSM community is uncertain. Regarding generalizability to other Black MSM, the survey was intended to capture a racially diverse range of MSM to allow for racial

comparisons to be made, and therefore, recruitment took place via two social/sexual networking sites advertised for MSM broadly rather than sites specifically targeting Black MSM (e.g., BGCLive.com). Sexual norms and experiences among Black MSM who utilize other sites or who do not engage in online social/sexual networking may differ from those described here. Additionally, the latent class analysis was performed on the total sample, of which Black MSM comprised only 4 %; thus, the identified profiles of sexual experience reflect a primarily non-Black sample. The small percentage of Black MSM in our sample relative to population estimates of Black MSM (e.g., 9 % of all U.S. MSM; Lieb et al., 2011) and of Black men more generally (e.g., 13–14 % of all U.S. men, depending on inclusion of multiracial Black men; United States Census Bureau, 2014) is consistent with past reports of disproportionately low enrollment of Black MSM in Internet-based, MSM-targeted sexual health research (Sullivan et al., 2011). Previous comparison of Internet- and field-based recruitment strategies among MSM who use drugs has suggested that the former may yield a relatively higher proportion of White MSM even when Internet-based recruitment includes racially targeted sites (Parsons, Vial, Starks, & Golub, 2013). Also, relative to their White counterparts, Black men have been documented as being less likely to click through online banner advertisements recruiting MSM for survey research, and those who have sex with men only have been found to be less likely to complete a survey once initiated (Sullivan et al., 2011).

Regarding generalizability to other members of the MSM community, the extent to which the identified sexual profiles and reported racial similarities would prevail in male–male sexual interactions among MSM who do not participate in online social/sexual networking sites to meet other men is unknown. We did not specifically inquire about whether participants met their last male sexual partner (about whom they responded) online. However, only 37 % reported their last male partner to be a “new” partner, suggesting that the majority reported on a sexual experience other than a first-time encounter with a partner met online. The generalizability of our findings to men who are heterosexually identified, only engage in transactional (but not recreational) sexual activity with other man, and/or do not self-identify with one of the four race/ethnicity groups examined, is also unclear. For instance, whereas the vast majority of Black men in our sample identified as gay or bisexual and affection was commonly reported, research with a *heterosexually* identified, predominantly Black MSM sample has highlighted some men’s intentional abstinence from kissing, cuddling, and other intimate acts when engaging in sex with men as a means of depersonalizing their partner and maintaining both their sense of masculinity and their heterosexual identity (Reback & Larkins, 2010). There have been several large-scale, nationally representative surveys of sexual behavior

conducted in the U.S. in recent years (e.g., National Survey of Family Growth; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002; National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior; Indiana University Center for Sexual Health Promotion, 2010), but sexual minority populations are typically underrepresented and positive dimensions of sexual experience such as kissing, cuddling, and expression of love generally are not captured. Therefore, the prevalence of these positive dimensions of sexual experience in the broader population of MSM—in either male–male or male–female dyads—is uncertain, as is their prevalence in male–female dyads among men who only have sex with women.

Second, grouping participants according to an established set of race/ethnicity categories is inherently insensitive to the heterogeneity of men within those categories. Previous research has highlighted substantial diversity in the sexual identities and activities reported by Black MSM (Ford et al., 2007). Therefore, our findings should not be assumed to represent or apply to all. Furthermore, categorization as Black was based on the racial/ethnic group label that participants selected from a pre-determined list. We did not inquire about dimensions of racial identity that could vary among men who selected the Black/African American label and could have differentially impacted their sexual experience, such as racial centrality (relevance of race to one's general self-perception), salience (relevance of one's race during the particular sexual event queried), regard (affective/evaluative judgment of one's race), or ideology (perspective on one's race in the context of broader society; Lewis & Kertzner, 2003; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998).

Third, the race of the participants' male partners during their last sexual event is unknown. Although Black MSM may be more likely to partner with other Black men as opposed to men of other races (Berry, Raymond, & McFarland, 2007; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2013), it is possible that experiences of pleasure, affection, and love varied by partner race. Previous research has suggested that Black men's pleasure may be undervalued during interactions with White partners, with a dynamic of White privilege/Black subservience prevailing. Black men have reported being expected to assume the insertive role and “do all the work” in service of their White partner, as well as encountering race-related verbal abuse and mistreatment in the less common instances that they do assume the receptive role (Teunis, 2007). Furthermore, some Black MSM have previously expressed feeling a deeper sense of connection and intimacy with other Black men (Wilson et al., 2009). Thus, the prioritization of Black men's pleasure may be higher, and the salience of (and adherence to) racial stereotypes may be lower in racially concordant vs. discordant sexual interactions.

Finally, reported results constitute secondary data analysis. The original research questions driving the larger study via which data were collected did not involve Black male sexuality

and stereotypes. Therefore, the overarching study was approached from a universalistic framework rather than a sociocultural framework that was specific to Black men or Black MSM and sensitive to their unique racialized and gendered experiences. Accordingly, our operationalization of pleasure, affection, and love was restricted to available measures.

In contrast to dehumanizing stereotypes of Black men grounded in historical myths of biological inferiority and sexual violence, pleasure, affection, and love were prevalent among this large sample of Black MSM and patterns of positive sexual experience were largely on par with MSM of other races. The current study provides behavioral evidence to help refute unfounded Black male stereotypes among Black MSM. However, further research is warranted to understand how exposure to and internalization of such stereotypes may nonetheless influence behavioral and emotional aspects of sexual experience. Identification of psychological mechanisms and effective buffers can inform interventions aimed at maximizing the sexual well-being of Black MSM, which should target not only disease and dysfunction, but also pleasure, affection, love, and other positive dimensions of sexual experience.

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